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*Roger Craik*

## Sir Thomas Urquhart's Translation of Rabelais

"The finest translation ever made from one language into another."<sup>1</sup> This is how Charles Whibley acclaimed the 1653 translation of the first two books of François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Whibley's is the highest accolade possible, of course, but it should not be forgotten that the 1653 translation was the first of Rabelais into English and that over the following three centuries it led generations of English-speaking readers to Rabelais, and still dwarfs later translations. Its creator was Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty (1611-60) and, as his title proclaims, he was a Scot.

Few can have epitomized the saying "fier comme un écossais" as Sir Thomas Urquhart did, or so idiosyncratically. From his birth in 1611 in Cromarty in the far north of Scotland to his death in 1660 in the Scottish community in Middleburg in Holland, he was steeped in Scottishness; he was proud of Scotland (especially its past), he was proud to be a Scot, and, most of all, he was tremendously proud of himself, not so say vain. Innocent of modesty, Urquhart was never given to keeping silent about his own talents, which were indeed considerable even if they were not as widely recognized as Urquhart himself would have wished. He relished presenting himself both as a scholar and a man of action, a pattern which had its beginnings in a precocious childhood in Cromarty which saw him busying himself on rainy days with "optical secrets, mysteries of natural Philosophie, reasons for the variety of Colours, the finding out of the Longitude, the squaring of a circle, and wayes to accomplish

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Whibley, *Studies in Frankness* (London, 1898), p. 255.

all Trigonometrical calculations by sines, without tangents,"<sup>2</sup> and in brighter weather with the outdoor pursuits of horsemanship and fowling. In 1622, at age eleven (which at that time was by no means early), he attended the nearest university, Aberdeen, a city which he claims "for honest, good fashion and learning...surpasseth...all other Cities and townes of Scotland" (*Logo*, 6:33). After that he seems to have traveled on the Continent, partly pursuing his studies—he appears to have learned Spanish, French and Italian—and partly defending Scotland's honor and his own by duelling. Back in Scotland he took up arms for the Royalists against the Covenanters in 1639, and when the Covenanters rallied and recaptured Aberdeen, he returned (as he reports) not ignominiously but with a flourish "in the view of six hundred...of enemies." He made this claim (and many others) in his first venture into literature, "Apollo and the Muses" (?1640), a folio volume of 1,103 epigrams remarkable for their bawdiness, quirky terminology and lack of poetic merit.<sup>3</sup> Many of these epigrams, involving real and fictitious Scots, are obscene. Prudence for once getting the better of enthusiasm, Urquhart did not have these published but instead reached print for the first time with *Epigrams Divine and Moral* (1641), a collection of dull commonplaces expressed in halting, sluggish, prosaic verse. Soon Urquhart was back in his native Cromarty, being beset by the creditors of his spendthrift father and working on *The Trissotetras* (1645), an aide-mémoire to trigonometry written in a prose so stiffened by gigantic neologisms as to be virtually incomprehensible. Just as *Epigrams Divine and Moral* had done, it sank without trace, thus dashing Urquhart's hopes of his being recognized as another Napier, the Scottish inventor of logarithms. Next, Urquhart left Scotland with the Royalist army which shortly afterwards was routed by Cromwell at Worcester in 1651. An eccentric soldier, he was carrying with him (he explains with characteristic detail) "Manuscripts in folio, to the quantity of six-score & eight quires and a half, divided into Six hundred forty and two Quinternions and upward"<sup>4</sup> which he hoped to have published on his arrival in London and at a stroke make his literary reputation and free himself from his debts in Cromarty. What these manuscripts amounted to we shall never know (Urquhart's own claims of course cannot be trusted), for the Roundhead soldiers burst into his quarters in Worcester and scattered them to the winds. Taken captive and imprisoned first in the Tower and then in Windsor Castle, Urquhart felt their loss keenly, but he felt it even more keenly when Parliament declared that his estates in Cromarty would be forfeited unless he could prove

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<sup>2</sup>Sir Thomas Urquhart, *Logopandecteisio* (London, 1653), II, 36. There are six sections in this book. Henceforth *Logo*.

<sup>3</sup>This manuscript volume is in the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

<sup>4</sup>Sir Thomas Urquhart, *Ekskubalauron* (London, 1652), p. 2.

that he possessed "merits and services" which would induce Parliament to restore them to him.

This condition gave rise to the most frenzied phase of Urquhart's turbulent life. Knowing well that his two published books would not satisfy Parliament, he over the next three years produced no fewer than four books. Although each has its own topic, it has its place in Urquhart's larger scheme of self-presentation designed to spring him from his prison cell: he wanted to draw Cromwell's attention to himself as a Scot of ancient lineage and intellectual brilliance but one who has been the victim of ill-fortune, has suffered the theft of manuscripts which would have immeasurably benefited mankind, and who is defenseless at the hands of his creditors who prevent him from carrying out his ambitions. In *Pantochronocanon* (1652) he draws up a genealogy of the Urquhart family stretching via the imprisoned Sir Thomas all the way back to Adam. The more ambitious *Ekskubalauron*, written the same year, has Urquhart praising Scottish scholars and soldiers of the previous century and singling out for special praise James ("The Admirable") Crichton, expert in languages and martial arts, before he moves on to present himself as a worthy representative of that tradition, even though it has been stifled by rapacious creditors and Presbyterians. As a measure of his own potential he lists guidelines for a universal language, the lexicon of which he promises to divulge on being freed. In *Logopandecteisison* (1653) he repeats the bargain and works himself into a rage over Scotland's humiliation and his own.

But at the same time as he was dashing off these tempestuous cumber-somely-titled volumes, Urquhart was working on his translation of the first two books of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.<sup>5</sup> It is important to emphasize at once that although the translation is a masterpiece in its own right, it is also of a piece with his pride in Scotland and in himself. For all that Urquhart plainly relished Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* for its own qualities, his translation is offered as proof of the promises made by implication or in print in his three previous books: this is a display of the talents of a brilliant representative of a distinguished nation.

Of the last period of Urquhart's life little is known. He was indeed released from prison and rather than returning once more to Cromarty he preferred to spend his remaining years in the Scottish community at Middleburg in Holland until his death in 1660.

Literary history has dealt curiously, not to say uneasily, with Urquhart. His Rabelais translation is considered the last example of the great translation of the Renaissance but at the same time it has received next to no critical at-

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<sup>5</sup>*La Vie tres-horrifique du grand Gargantua, père de Pantagruel, composée par M. Alcofribas* (Lyons, 1542); henceforth *Garg.*; and *Pantagruel, Roy des Dipsodes restitué à son naturel, avec ses faictz & prouesses espouventables: composez par feu M. Alcofribas abstracteur de quinte essence* (Lyons, 1542). Henceforth *Pant.*

tention. This as it were strangled acclaim borders on dismissal; quite simply, Urquhart has not received his due.

The very fact that Urquhart translated Rabelais means that he has always been overshadowed by him. However inspired they may have been, translators have never been able to liberate themselves from the stigma of inferiority or subordination to the original, and translation is unique among the arts insofar as, due to the semantic differences between languages, it denies the possibility of complete success. Across the centuries, commentators and translators themselves have voiced these gloomy reservations. For example, during the Renaissance, at the very end of which Urquhart was writing, the "art" of translation had no shortage of detractors, among them Nicholas Haywood who in his Preface to his version of *Etropius* (1564) resignedly advised those unable to read the original language to "content them selves to wade only in the troubled streames of Translators: for they are not able to attayne to the well sprynge it self."<sup>6</sup> Elizabethan translators, even though they joyed in the freshness of language and were freed by Cicero and Horace's warnings not to translate *verbum pro verbo*, did not believe that it lay in their power to capture the spirit of the original, nor did they place their confidence in the merit of their versions but in the value of the original work.

Even though Urquhart's translation flies exhilaratingly in the face of this background of lowered expectations and pessimism, its reputation has nonetheless been curbed. Not only that, but critics, perhaps put off by his extravagant personality, have relegated him to the status of antiquary and eccentric, while paying cursory lip service to the translation. More damagingly still, Sir Thomas Urquhart, the quintessential *fier écossais*, has been silently absorbed into the history of English rather than Scottish literature, possibly because it was in London that he received his knighthood, published all his books, and was imprisoned, and possibly because he wrote in English rather than in Scots. Accordingly, my concern here is to rescue the 1653 translation of Rabelais from over three centuries of critical neglect, and to establish Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty as a figure of whom Scotland can be justly proud.

It is an irony that none of Urquhart's other books, in which he never tires of rehearsing his personal circumstances, furnishes as clear an insight into his personality as his translation of Rabelais does. His energy and colossal self-confidence, qualities which happily outweighed any qualms he might have had about translating so risqué a writer as Rabelais during the Puritan period, are evident as early in the book as the title page where he acknowledges himself with his initials, S.T.U.C., sure of their being recognized. Next, before translating a word of Rabelais, he is swift to compliment himself on having completed the translation when so many previous efforts had split on the rock of

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted by Theo Hermans, *The Manipulation of Literature* (New York, 1985), p. 114.

Rabelais' thorny vocabulary.<sup>7</sup> The "Pentateuch of Rabelais," he notes with self-satisfaction, is:

so difficult to be turned into any other speech, that many prime spirits in most of the Nations of Europe, since the year 1573 (which was fourscore yeares ago) after having attempted it, were constrained (with no small regret) to give it over, as a thing impossible to be done.<sup>8</sup>

What Urquhart deliberately omits to mention, however, is that he succeeded where his predecessors came to grief because unlike them he had at his disposal Randle Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611), a volume towering over all previous French-to-English dictionaries and, invaluable for Urquhart, translating all but 1,000 of the words that Rabelais invented. Urquhart, whose French was not expert, had Cotgrave to hand all the time that he was translating. Therefore, it we ourselves sit with the 1542 revised editions of Rabelais and with Cotgrave's *Dictionarie* we can place ourselves in Urquhart's mind in the mid-seventeenth century in the very process of translation.

Like all translators, Urquhart is naturally guided by the context and by his own common sense when selecting the most appropriate meaning or meanings from Cotgrave's many strings of synonyms. Often he does so quite simply, either by copying out all of a short entry or the first couple of terms. Urquhart, though, is no mere transcriber of Cotgrave; he is quick to remold or even overrule Cotgrave as he sees fit, as when, for instance, he indulges his relish of alliteration. The hearty drinker of the "Prologue" to *Pantagruel* defends his anecdotes by swearing the "ce ne sont pas fariboles," a word which Cotgrave pleasingly translates as "Trifles, nifles, flim-flams, why-whawes, discourses, fond tatling, tales of a tub, or of a roasted horse." Urquhart's rendering of Rabelais' phrase as "these are no flimflam stores, nor tales of a tub" not only shows him attracted by the alliteration of the two terms he chooses, but also concerned, by adding "stories," to emphasize the idea of truths rather than fictions, and so to give these particular flimflams a sharper definition. Or he may be less precise and more enthusiastic, departing from Cotgrave's exact sense with a robust carelessness that is entirely Rabelaisian. For the "soupes de

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<sup>7</sup>For details of earlier attempts to translate Rabelais, see Huntington Brown, *Rabelais in English Literature* (New York, 1967), pp. 31-70.

<sup>8</sup>Urquhart may have known of Fischart's extremely digressive translation into German, *Affenteurliche vnd Vngeheurliche Geschichtschrift vom Leben Rhaten vnd Thalen vor langen weilen vollenwolbeschraiten, Helden vnd Herren Grandgusier, Gargantoa vnd Pantagruel* (Strasbourg, 1575), or of his earlier Rabelaisian almanac *Aller Pracktik Grossmütter* (1572) which is nearer to the date Urquhart gives.

prime" (*Garg.*, Ch. 21) gorged by the young unruly Gargantua, Cotgrave's entry includes two separate recipes:

SOUPE DE PRIME: Monasticall Browesse; cheese and bread put into pottage; or chopped Parsley strewed or layed together with the fat of the Beefe-pot, on the bread.

Disregarding the distinction and hurling together Cotgrave's words and ingredients, Urquhart serves Gargantua with the far more nourishing meal of "sippet brewis, made up of the fat of the beef-pot, laid upon bread, cheese, and chop't parsley strewed together."<sup>9</sup>

A far more challenging task for Urquhart was to translate the titles of the books in St. Victor's Library in Paris, listed in Chapter 7 of *Pantagruel*, for most of these volumes are clumsily named in a mixture of Latin and French which must have seemed almost as baffling to Urquhart as it does to us today. Because these titles are basically French with Latin suffixes, rather than basically Latin with French suffixes, Urquhart has to translate the significant components of the words rather than just their endings; he tries to employ the same number of words as Rabelais to maintain syllabic balance and, above all, to preserve the meaning:

*Rabelais*: Barbouilamenta Scoti (*Pant.*, Ch. 7)

*Urquhart*: *Smutchudlamenta Scoti*<sup>10</sup>

*Cotgrave*: BARBOUILLER. To iumble, confound, huddle, or mingle ill favourably; also to blot, spot, smut, besmeare; bedash all over.

Urquhart's unselfconsciousness in pressing together the two senses of the verb—the tiny syllable "*ud*" is taken from Cotgrave's "huddle"—conveniently obscures his care to include both meanings and to keep a balance. On other occasions, though, considerations of meaning outweigh those of syllabic equality or number of words:

*Rabelais*: de pelendis mascarendisque cardinalium mulis (*Pant.*, Ch. 7)

*Urquhart*: *De peelandis aut unskinnandis blurrandisque Cardinalium mulis* (2R, Ch. 7, p. 39).

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<sup>9</sup>*The First Book of the Works of Mr. Francis Rabelais* (London, 1653), p. 90. Henceforth 1R.

<sup>10</sup>*The Second Book of the Works of Mr. Francis Rabelais* (London, 1653), p. 39. Henceforth 2R.

*Cotgrave*: PELER: To bauld, or pull the haire off; also to pill, pare, barke, unrinde, unskinne.

MASCARER: To blot, soyle, blurre, sullie, disfigure.

Urquhart chooses "pill" because of its closeness to "peler," and easily anglicizes "pelendis," judging that while the second conjugation in Latin is more suited to French (as the "-er" ending suggests the second conjugation ending "-ere"), the first conjugation is more compatible with English. Yet when he looks along *Cotgrave's* entry he finds himself unable to ignore the claims of "unskinne," a word which quite reasonably strikes him as appropriate to the cardinals' mules. The linking of the two invented gerunds by "aut," incidentally, demonstrates Urquhart's ease with the spirit of this chapter of *Rabelais*.

I hope that this discussion does not give the impression that it was easy for Urquhart to locate unfamiliar words by looking them up in the *Dictionarie*. On the contrary, the many differences in spelling between *Rabelais* and *Cotgrave* often force him to scour *Cotgrave's* pages in search of a particular word. Sometimes his quests are aided by *Cotgrave's* meticulous cross-references; *Rabelais's* spelling may be given accompanied by a direction to a variant against which the English terms are given. But often *Cotgrave* does not list a word as *Rabelais* spells it, and in these cases Urquhart's determination is truly remarkable. When he comes to the word "orripilation" (*Pant.*, Ch. 13), he naturally searches for that form in *Cotgrave* but is unable to find it. In a nearby column in the relevant area, he comes across the word spelled with one "r"; "ORIPILATION. ● Rab. Looke HORRIPILATION." Following this instruction he discovers, some forty pages further back, the correct entry; "HORRIPILATION. A suddaine quaking, yerning, shuddering, shivering, or quivering; also, a growing rough with hair." Characteristically, both senses are incorporated into the translation, which reads "the sudden quaking, shivering, and hoariness" (2*R*, Ch. 13, p. 20).

That particular quest was easier than many because an alternative spelling is on the same page as the desired one, and Urquhart is soon following *Cotgrave's* directions. But there are times when there is no such help and then Urquhart, convinced that the required term is in *Cotgrave*, hunts painstakingly through the *Dictionarie*. Does he laboriously look through all the entries under a certain letter until he hits on the right one, or does he select "likely" areas? He uses both methods. His alighting on "veautroit" for *Rabelais's* "vaultroit," and on "gabregeux" for *Rabelais's* "gaubregeux" suggests that homophony is his guide (*Garg.*, Chs. 11, 25). On the other hand it might be fanciful to argue that his arrival at "Racletorets" comes from his own pronunciation of *Rabelais's* "ragletorelz" to yield a "c" sound which indicates the correct area of *Cotgrave*. Here it is more probable that he doggedly sifts through all the words beginning with "ra" until he comes to the correct entry.

The defective editions in which Cotgrave read Rabelais account for many errors on the lexicographer's part, and there are times when Cotgrave's misunderstandings pass into the translation. In these instances Urquhart cannot be held responsible since he can hardly be expected to improve on Cotgrave, whose *Dictionarie* is fuller than any of its predecessors and whose French is manifestly superior to Urquhart's. When faced with an unfamiliar word which Cotgrave does not give, Urquhart creditably provides a translation which makes some sense, despite imprecision. A less determined and more self-critical translator would probably have been discouraged and would have abandoned his task, but Urquhart is a stranger to self-criticism.

He himself, though, is responsible for most of the translation's inaccuracies. Interestingly, the traps into which he falls do far more than confirm how difficult an author Rabelais is to translate (and thus underline Urquhart's achievement in completing his task); they reveal a great deal of Urquhart's temperament and moods while at work.

Many oversights stem from inattentiveness. In full flight of translation Urquhart gives hardly a thought to the word "duc" in this line of the "Antidoted Franfreluches"; "avec son duc tendoit a la pipee" (*Garg.*, Ch. 2) and dashes down "Duck" (*IR*, Ch. 2, p. 15), ignoring the *Dictionarie* where he would have found the term correctly explained as "the great Owle, tearmed, a Horne-owle." The context (the use of the "duc" to catch birds) should warn Urquhart, by no means an ignorant man, against this interpretation. This shortcoming suggests haste and lack of revision, both well-known Urquhartian traits in his earlier works but unmentioned in connection with his composition of Rabelais. Thoughtlessness, too, causes him to translate "Voire" (*Garg.*, Ch. 5) as "yea forsooth Sir" (*IR*, Ch. 5, p. 24) in a conversation which is plainly between women, and it is also to blame for two misreadings of correct translations in the *Dictionarie*. When Urquhart looks up the "troys cens hostardes" gorged by Gargantua (*Garg.*, Ch. 37), he misreads the correct translation, "bustards" as "buzzards" (*IR*, Ch. 37, p. 168). While neither this error nor his reading of Cotgrave's "helve" ("emmancher") as "halve" (*2R*, Ch. 27, p. 174) mars our overall understanding of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, both fail to convey Rabelais' meaning.

Of Urquhart's mistakes the most interesting are those in his commerce with Cotgrave alone since they illustrate the ways in which he holds a term in his mind before and during his reference to the *Dictionarie*. The large variety of inaccuracies within the same pattern of error again points to speed of composition. Often giving Rabelais the merest glance, Urquhart may visualize a word wrongly even before he looks it up in Cotgrave. For "Ratepenade" (*Pant.*, Ch. 7) Cotgrave correctly gives "A Bat, Rearemouse, or Flickermouse," with a helpful direction to an alternative meaning, "The high-sided periwigs, or wires of haire, worne thertofore by Gentlewomen," but Urquhart does not even read this entry because he reads "ratepenade" as "rapenade" and accordingly searches a different area of the *Dictionarie*. Here, unsurprisingly, he cannot

find "rapenade," but allows "RAPEMENT. A rasping, hard scraping" to suffice. Consequently "le Ratepenade des cardinaux" of 1542 becomes "The rasping and hard-scraping of the Cardinals" (2R, Ch. 7, p. 39) of 1653. And it is the same kind of faulty visualization that has Urquhart perceiving "les petarades des bullistes" (*Pant.*, Ch. 7) as "les petarrades des balistes." Following the wrong path with some determination, he writes "The Crackarades of balists or stone-throwing Engines" (2R, Ch. 7, p. 40). In another part of the *Dictionarie*, unseen by Urquhart, Cotgrave has the entry "BULLISTE. A writer, or maker, of Bulls." All these careless misconstructions (and there are many more) show that when Urquhart searches Cotgrave he does so with the required word in his mind's eye rather than with his copy of Rabelais open to allow a close comparison of spellings. These avoidable errors also prove that Urquhart did not revise. Yet paradoxically the very rapidity which accounts for so many errors actually disguises them. Because the world of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is so fantastic and bizarre, and because Urquhart's translation is so gloriously unembarrassed, Urquhart's few shortcomings are camouflaged. He never leaves gaps, and always provides plausible explanations.

On the other hand, a deliberately striking feature of Urquhart's *Rabelais* is his inclusion of what appear to be Rabelais' own words, that is, Greek, French dialect and Rabelaisian words.<sup>11</sup> Far from being duplications of words used by Rabelais, these are new English words derived from and frequently identical to those in Rabelais. Where necessary they have English inflections but these, applied to nouns and adjectives, are the same as the French and hence are unobtrusive. Above all, they have English senses and are embedded in English prose:

*Rabelais:* il y a dix huyt iours que ie suis a matagroboliser ceste belle harange. (*Garg.*, Ch. 19)

*Urquhart:* I have been these eighteen dayes in *metagrobolising* this brave speech. (*IR*, Ch. 19, p. 83)

*Rabelais:* Et si personne les blasme de soy faire rataconniculer. (*Garg.*, Ch. 3)

*Urquhart:* If any blame them for this their *rataconniculation* and reiterated lechery. (*IR*, Ch. 3, p. 21)

*Rabelais:* Les maroufles le regardoient (*Garg.*, Ch. 34)

*Urquhart:* The *maroufle* Rogues looked upon him (*IR*, Ch. 34, p. 157)

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<sup>11</sup>This section draws on but takes issue with Lazare Sainéan's article "Les Interprètes de Rabelais en Angleterre et en Allemagne," *Revue des Etudes Rabelaisiennes*, 7 (1909), 137-258.

Urquhart's italicizing all his coinages shows him more concerned to advertise his linguistic inventiveness than to echo Rabelais' words and thus permit the translation to retain the flavor of the original. For Urquhart, translating Rabelais seemed a fine opportunity to parade his own versatility. The translation is always strongest when the translator, for whatever reason, adopts a Rabelaisian manner such as his expansion of synonyms and lists. By devising new words Urquhart does unintentional homage to his master, and even betters him. Rabelais brought into his work Latin and Greek-based expressions which he transformed into French by means of French suffixes; this is a small act of translation in itself. For his part Urquhart goes further still, molding into English Rabelais' coinages (thus conserving their flavor) and zestfully creating his own at will. Not only does he repeat his own habit of forming words from Greek and Latin but he also breaks new ground by creating English words from French bases. Every word in Rabelais affords the egoistical Urquhart an opportunity for innovation.

These neologisms' closeness to the French words from which they are formed allows Urquhart many a chance to display his own ingenuity. He makes his coinages particularly conspicuous by accompanying them with Cotgrave's entries framed into definitions:

*Panurge* gave *Pantagruel* to eat some devillish drugs, compounded of *Lithotripton* (which is a stone-dissolving ingredient,) *nephrocatticon* (that purgeth the reines) the marmalade of Quinces, (called *Codiniac*) a confection of *Cantharides*, (which are green flies breeding on the tops of olive-trees) and other kindes of diuretick or pisse-producing simples (2R, Ch. 28, p. 182).

Generally, since the movement of translation (and of Cotgrave's *Dictionarie*) is from French to English, Urquhart's invented term stands at the head of a list: "torcheculs, arsewisps, tail-napkins" (1R, Ch. 13, p. 66); "lougurous or man-eating wolves" (1R, Ch. 8, p. 42); "the bedondaine or belly-tabret" (1R, Ch. 20, p. 86); and "*Dronos*, that is, so many knocks, thumps, raps, dints, thwacks, and bangs" (1R, Ch. 27, p. 128). These synonyms not only draw attention to the Urquhartian coinage by defining it but also serve as English translations of the seemingly French word which they follow, and by these means the act of translation is suggested by, and preserved in, the translation itself. But from time to time Urquhart will invert the pattern so as to allow the new term to complement its preceding commonplace equivalents with a flourish of erudite, self-regarding emphasis, redolent of the original French: "but hearken joltheades, you viedazes" (1R, "The Authors Prologue"); "I never saw any have a better countenance in his hanging and *pendilatory* swagging" (1R, Ch. 42, p. 189); "a little powder of projection, otherways called *doribus*" (2R, "The Authors Prologue").

Urquhart's coinages which expand on Rabelais' own neologisms are particularly successful. In Rabelais, Latin and French clash, and Greek becomes

French while remaining recognizably Greek, while in Urquhart the elegance, poise and ostentation of Latinate diction are countered by dismissive snarls of Anglo-Saxon English. Rabelais' Greek-based nonce-words emerge in Urquhart as Greek-based nonce words, unmarred by translation. Many of Rabelais' elaborate coinages, composed of compressed syllables taken from many words, appear in 1653 as Rabelaisian, French and English all at once. The obvious translation of Rabelais' "robidilardique" as "*Robidilardick*" (IR, Ch. 3, p. 20) retains all the comic ingenuity of the original, while Urquhart's English suffix echoes that of the French. When Urquhart understands the tone of a passage in Rabelais (and he does not always do so) he succeeds in retaining the intentional harmonies and discords of the original while adding impulsively his own Anglo-Gallicisms:

Would to God I knew the shop, wherein are forged these divisions, and factious combinations, that I might bring them to light in the confraternities of my parish. Beleeve me for a truth, that the place wherein the people gathered together, were thus sulfured, hopurymated, moiled and bepist, was called *Nesle*, where then was, (but now is no more) the Oracle of *Leucotia*: There was the case proposed, and the inconvenience shewed of the transporting of the bells: After they had *ergoted pro* and *con*, they concluded in *Baralipton*, that they should send the eldest and most sufficient of the facultie unto *Gargantua*. (IR, Ch. 17, p. 79)

All translation, of course, is interpretation, but with the role of the interpreter played down, of necessity. Urquhart, though, goes beyond obtrusive word-coinages and daringly does what no other translator does, namely include the words of the original and thus become interpreter *par excellence*. Purists might cavil at these liberties and condemn them as unrabelaisian, but surely Rabelais would have enjoyed Urquhart as much as Urquhart plainly enjoys Rabelais. It is more than Urquhart can bear for the reader to miss Rabelais' puns because they are untranslatable:

*Non* and a *corslet* for *non dur habit*, (otherwise *non durabit*, it shall not last) *un lit sanc ciel*, that is, a bed without a testern, for *un licensie*, a graduated person, as Batchelour in Divinity, or utter Barrester at law. (IR, Ch. 9, p. 45)

a literal inversion between a woman, *folle a la messe*, and *molle a la fesse*; that is, *foolish at the Masse*, and of a *pliant buttock*. (2R, Ch. 16., p. 114)

whereupon he said in French, *Que grand tu as et souple le gousier*, that is to say, *How great and nimble a throat thou hast*. (IR, Ch. 7, p. 34)

we are wash't in sport, a sport turly to laught at, in *French Par ris*, for which that city hath been ever since called *Paris*. (IR, Ch. 17, p. 77)

Whatever one thinks of these extravagances, one cannot help liking Urquhart. He is one of literature's great enthusiasts, perhaps the very greatest.

Sheer *joie de vivre*, the fact of being Sir Thomas Urquhart translating Rabelais, accounts for his writing “I am (said *Gymnast*) a poor devil (*pauvre diable*)” (*IR*, Ch. 34, p. 157) when there was no need whatsoever to break into French. And when Urquhart observes that the Limosin Scholar’s breeches were “round streat caniond greys, having in the seat piece like a keelings taile; and therefore in *French* called *de chausses, a queue de merlus*” (*2R*, Ch. 6, p. 33), we can be sure that in Urquhart’s view Cotgrave’s definitions are much too colorful to omit:

MERLUS, OR MERLUZ. A mellwell, or Keeling, a kinde of small Cod whereof Stockfish is made.

CHAUSSES A QUEUË DE MERLUS. Round breeches with strait canions; having in the seat a piece like a fishes taile; and worne by old men, scholars, and such like niggardlie, or needie, persons.

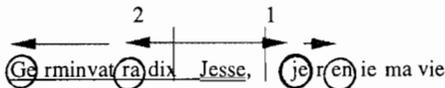
But more astonishing even than this is Urquhart’s baffling translation of Friar John’s oaths:

*Rabelais*: Diavol! Il n’y a plus de moust: germinavit radix Jesse. Je renye ma vie, je meurs de soif. (*Garg.*, Ch. 39)

*Urquhart*: Diavolo, is there no more must? no more sweet wine? Germinavit radix Jesse, je renie ma vie, j’enrage de soif; I renounce my life, I rage for thirst. (*IR*, Ch. 39, p. 177)

Why should Urquhart copy out “Je renie ma vie” and then translate it? And where does the phrase “j’enrage de soif” come from, for it is not anything Rabelais wrote? Why, in keeping with his idiosyncratic method, does Urquhart not simply copy out and translate “je meurs de soif”?

The explanation concerns a configuration of letters which Urquhart discerns in what he has already written. He notes that the phrase “*Germinavit radix Jesse, je renie*” can be divided into two, with “*Jesse*” as the central point. The verb “j’enrage” is formed by outward movements from “*Jesse*” first towards the right, then to the left, taking in the first syllable of each word. Urquhart now sees the phrase thus; the relevant syllables are ringed, the fulcrum is marked by a rectangle, and arrows denote the order of movement:



Even though the result is not perfect, due to the stray “r” or “renie,” I am sure that this is how this puzzling translation came about. From his universal language’s “wonderful facility...in the making of anagrams” (*Logo*, I, 18) we

know that Urquhart is interested in juggling with letters, and his explanation of the complicated terms used in his *Trissotetras* shows how partial he is to abbreviating words by lopping off their first syllables:

*Ab.* in the Resolvers signifieth *abstraction...Enod.enodandas...*

*Fin. Res.* final resolvers. (*Triss.*, pp. 12-13)

Moreover, he can also combine initial syllables and initial letters of separate words to form an utterable and self-defining notation:

*B. or Ba.* the true base...To. the Radius or total Sine...

*Torb.* the basiradius on the right. (*Triss.*, pp. 12-13)

Urquhart is being very calm here, but while translating Friar John's oaths he was in a state of such frenzied excitement, induced by the gusto of the scene, that he actually *saw* "j'enrage" before him in a flash.

The more of Urquhart's translation one reads, the more aware one becomes of Urquhart as translator: his unflagging exuberance makes reading Rabelais an exhilarating experience. Nowhere is he more himself and at the same time more Rabelaisian than when he exerts himself over Rabelais' lists, such as the endearments which Gargantua's governesses lavish on the young giant's penis:

Lune la nommoit ma petite dille, laultre ma pine, laultre ma branche de coural, laultre mon bondon, mon bouchon, mon vibrequin, mon poussouer, ma teriere, ma pendilloche, mon rude esbat roidde et bas, mon dressour, ma petite andouille vermeille, mon petit couille bredouille. (*Garg.*, Ch. 11)

Urquhart expands these thirteen synonyms to thirty-eight:

One of them would call it her little dille, her staff of love, her quillety, her faucetin, her dandilollie: another her peen, her jolly kyle, her bableret, her membretoon, her quickset Imp: another again, her branch of coral, her female adamant, her placket-racket, her cyprian scepter, her jewel for Ladies: and some of the other women would give it these names, my bunguetee, my stopple too, my busherusher, my gallant wimble, my pretty boarer, my coney-borow ferret, my little piercer, my augretine, my dangling hangers, down right to it, stiffe and stout, in & to, my pusher, dresser, pouting stick, my hony pipe, my pretty pillicock, linkie pinkie, futilletie, my lustie andouille, and crimson chitterlin my little couille bredouille, my pretty rogue, and so forth ... (*IR*, Ch. 11, p. 56)

In his sensible discussion of this passage Richard Boston notes that Urquhart “follows the spirit rather than the letter.”<sup>12</sup> He does not mention, though, that Urquhart is heavily reliant on Cotgrave here, or that Urquhart’s method of “following the spirit” is through a combination of inspired adaptation of Cotgrave, his own inventions, and his own delicate response to the original’s literary qualities. Here are the definitions Urquhart uses:

DILLE.	The Quille, or Fawcet of a Hogshhead, &c.
PINE.	A bung, or stopple.
BOUCHON.	A stopple; also, a wispe of straw, &c; also the bush of a tavernne. or alehouse.
VIBREQUIN.	A wimble.
TERIERE.	An Augur.
TERRIER.	The hoile, berrie, or earth of a Connie, or Fox.
TERRIERE.	A Terrier, or Augur.
PENDILOCHES.	Jugs, danglings, or things that hang danglely.
ESBAT.	Sport, pastime, play, recreation; delight, pleasure, dalliance, jeasting, recreation.
DRESSOUIR.	A setting yron, or poating stick, for ruffe bands; a standing thing.
ANDOUILLE.	A linke, or chitterling.
COUILLE.	A mans yard; also (but less properly) a cod, ballocke, or testicle.
MA PETITE.	My pretty rougue, my little
BREDOUILLE.	knave (a tearme used much by the nurses of <i>France</i> ).

With these entries before him or here, the reader can follow Urquhart’s *modus operandi*, which is to fashion diminutives from Cotgrave’s entries so as to echo the voices and attitudes of Gargantua’s admiring governesses. By adopting a variety of suffices he catches the rhyme and rhythm of baby-talk in the terms “quillety,” “faucetin,” “bableret,” “membretoon,” “bunguetee,” “linkie pinkie.”

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<sup>12</sup>*The Admirable Urquhart: Selected Writings* (London, 1975), p. 12.

Furthermore, he delights in pouring into his translation as many of Cotgrave's meanings as he deems appropriate; in particular, relish of Cotgrave's rhyme "hang danglely" inspires "dangling hangers" (with the plural giving a slight hint of testicles). Even Urquhart's errors enhance the writing. The marvelous "busherusher," with its twin suggestions of childish language and sexual activity, is prompted by "the bush of a taverne," but this is not the correct sense. Another error is "coney-borow ferret," for Urquhart's eye mistakenly fell on this definition while seeking that of "terriere." This technical flaw does not matter. From Chapter 8 we remember that Gargantua's member is "bien longue et bien ample," and certainly capable of the depth of penetration with which Urquhart now invests it.

There is less to be said about the French-based coinages here, which effectively recall the original French, than about Urquhart's additions. Many of these, in the following example, reveal an unrecognized aspect of Urquhart's *Rabelais*: the way that he enriches his version by quietly adding details remembered from an earlier stage. For instance, the adjectives "gallant," "hony" and "lustie," which are apparently apt but gratuitous, are all drawn from a previous description of Gargantua's penis as

tousiours gualante, succulente, resudante, tousiours verdoyante, tousiours fleuris-  
sante, tousiours fructifiante, plene dhumeurs, plene de fleurs, plene de fruitz plene  
de toutes delices. (*Garg.*, Ch. 8)

This insistence on young, energetic, sappy life inspires Urquhart's addition "quickset Imp," meaning a young shoot set in the earth to take root and grow there. And an earlier episode, too, explains "futilletie," which seems unconnected to the list. I am sure this word comes for Cotgrave's "FUSTE. Any staffe, stake, stocke, stumpe, trunke, or log," which Urquhart would have encountered in his search for the meaning of the phrase "de haulte fustaye." Since this expression occurs only in the "Prologue" to *Pantagruel* and since the word "fuste" does not figure in *Gargantua*, it is certain that Urquhart translated *Pantagruel* first. (It is highly improbable that he was acquainted with this most unusual word through his own knowledge of French.) Reading Urquhart we assume that he began with *Gargantua*, but the other order is more natural since the single volume (1542) used by Urquhart contains first the earlier work, *Pantagruel*, and then *Gargantua*.

But how could Urquhart be so plainly dependent on Cotgrave and at the same time so fluent in his translation? Surely, if he were regularly interrupting his writing to discover the meaning of unfamiliar words, his *Rabelais* would be a halting affair, smelling of the oil lamp, rather than untrammelled gesture that it is. I am certain that Urquhart wrote down all the definitions before he translated, thus availing himself of a "pool of words" from which to draw while writing. In one sense, dictionary labor and creative writing become two separate acts, but in another sense Urquhart must have been mentally limbering up

to translate during the time he was writing down Cotgrave's entries. This copying out is an important stage of the translation process, a time when Urquhart's pen and brain were active and when sentences were forming in his mind.

The few critics—and there have been very few—who have concerned themselves with Urquhart's *Rabelais* have dwelt on its idiosyncratic aspects and ignored its power as literature. Here, by way of illustration, are Rabelais' and Urquhart's sketches of Panurge:

A une foys il assembloit troys ou quatre bons rustres, les faisoit boire comme Templiers sur le soir, apres les menoit au dessoubz de sainte Genevieve ou aupres du colliege de Navarre, et a lheure que le guet montoit par la: ce que il cognoissoit en mettant son espee sur le pave et laureille aupres, et lors quil oyoit son espee bransler: cestoit signe infallible que le guet estoit pres: a lheure doncques luy et ses compaignons prenoyent un tombereau, et luy bailloyent le bransle le ruant de grande force contre la vallee, et ainsi mettoyent tout le pauvre guet par terre comme porcs, puis fuyoyent de laultre couste, car en moins de deux iours il sceut toutes les rues, ruelles et traverses de paris comme son Deus det. A laultre foys faisoit en quelque belle place par ou ledict guet devoit passer une trainee de pouldre de canon, et a lheure que passoit mettoit le feu dedans, et puis prenoit son passetemps a veoir la bonne grace quil avoyent en fuyant pensans que le feu saint Antoine les tint aux jambes. Et au regard des pauvres maistres e ars, il les persecutoit sur tout aultres, quand il reconroit quelcun dentre eulx par la rue, iamais ne falloit de leur faire quelque mal, maintenant leur mettant un estronc dedans leurs chaperons au bourlet, maintenant leur attachant de petites queues de regnard, ou des aureilles de lievre par derriere, ou quelque aultre mal. (*Pant.*, Ch. 16)

At one time he assembled three or four especial good hacksters and roaring boyes, made them in the evening drink like *Templers*, afterwards led them till they came under St. *Genevieve*, or about the Colledge of *Navarre*, and at the houre that the watch was coming up that way, which he knew by putting his sword upon the pavement, and his eare by it, and when he heard his sword shake, it was an infallible signe that the watch was near at that instant: then he and his companions took a tumbrel or dung-cart, and gave it the brangle, hurling it with all their force down the hill, and so overthrew all the poor watchmen like pigs, and then ran away upon the other side; for in less than two dayes, he knew all the streets, lanes and turnings in *Paris*, as well as his *Deus det*.

At another time he made in some fair place, where the said watch was to passe, a traine of gun-powder, and, at the very instant, that they went along, set fire to it, and then made himself sport to see what good grace they had in running away, thinking that St. *Antonie*'s fire had caught them by the legs. As for the poor Masters of Arts, he did persecute them above all others: when he encountered with any of them upon the street, he would not never faile to put some trick or other upon them, sometimes putting a bit off a fried turd in their graduate hoods: at other times pinning on little fox-tailes, or hares-ears behind them, or some such other roguish prank. (*2R*, Ch. 16, pp. 111-12)

All translations, however, are not of equal worth. Here, for comparison, is part of J. M. Cohen's account of the same episode:

At one time he collected three or four good yokels, made them drink like Templars all the evening, and afterwards took them under the walls of Sainte-Genevieve, or to a spot near the College of Navarre just when the watch was coming that way—and to discover the moment, he rested his sword on the pavement and put his ear to it. For when he heard his sword quiver it was an infallible sign that the watch was at hand. At that moment, then, he and his companions took a dung cart and pushed it off, so that it rushed with all its force down the hill and knocked all the watch over like so many pigs. Then he and his yokels ran away in the other direction. For in less than two days he knew all the streets, lanes, and alleys in Paris as well as he knew his grace.<sup>13</sup>

Although by no means poor, this is no match for Urquhart. Cohen's translation of "rustres" by "three or four good yokels" pales beside Urquhart's richly Elizabethan and sturdily masculine modification, "three or four especial good hacksters and roaring boyes," with the word "especial" telling us that Panurge has selected the best accomplices available. The apparently curious placing of Urquhart's "in the evening" is thematically warrantable, for he wishes to suggest definite time, a particular occasion, and he also strives to prevent the phrase from being too closely linked with "*Templers*" (as if drinking specifically in the evening was one of their habits). Cohen's "all the evening" is not exactly what Rabelais means. As we proceed in the passage, we realize that the modern edition's "took them under the walls" is colorless and unevocative by comparison with the 1653 version's "afterwards led them till they came under St. Genevieve," with its twin suggestions of the passage of time and of a company of determined men. Cohen's "took them" lacks the implications of distance and of Panurge's careful leadership. Similarly, "at the hour that they were due" cannot rival Urquhart's superb translation "at that very instant, that they went along," which allows us the briefest of glimpses of the unsuspecting watch just before the trick is played on them. The comma (which is Urquhart's own, not Rabelais') brilliantly enacts the tension of the fraction of a second before the crack of the first explosion. "Along" recalls the shape of the "traîne of gun powder" and anticipates the detonations which follow the watch in their flight. And lastly, whereas Cohen simply repeats three times the word "watch," Urquhart deviates with "watchmen," thus humanizing the watch in order to add even greater point to the simile "like pigs."

The task of translating Rabelais, then, focuses Urquhart's energetic optimism on a work of literature which is itself suited to Urquhart's temperament. Only in this translation and in none of his other works do Urquhart's gigantic nonce-words, lists and digressions flourish, and this is because Rabelais him-

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<sup>13</sup>J. M. Cohen, trans. *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (London, 1978), pp. 222-23.

self joyously indulges in the same traits. Only here, too, when transmuting the great art of Rabelais into memorable English, does Urquhart's idiosyncratic prose achieve its potential, even if sometimes at the expense of Rabelais' terser accents. Urquhart worked on Rabelais in a state of sustained rapture, with virtually every paragraph of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* sending him scurrying to Cotgrave's fascinating *Dictionarie* from which he selected and then wrote down the best synonyms. Then, his excitement and interest at high pitch, he delightedly composed his translation, viewing it both as a creative work which involved no sacrifice of originality—it reads with the swing and confidence of an original work and betrays none of the unease one often senses in translation—and as a display of all his interests simultaneously.

Enthusiasm, empathy and chance thus contribute to the success of Rabelais, but they do not account for its brilliance. That quality is Urquhart's alone. The twelve years preceding the translation had yielded a cluster of self-centered peculiar books blemished by stylistic excesses and gratuitous meanderings, but the act of translation brought out in Urquhart a self-discipline and decorum of which he was incapable elsewhere. The untranslated pages of Rabelais in front of him, the character of Rabelais' writing, and the definitions of Cotgrave allow Urquhart's enthusiasms to thrive, and, at the same time, crucially harness them; here he is not free to follow his whims. Far from being inhibiting, the harnessing is fruitful since at no cost to his individuality and high spirits it concentrates his energies on the matter and flow of Rabelais' sentences, his vocabulary, and Cotgrave's definitions. Only in his *Rabelais* does Urquhart display an intense sensitivity for language, an ear for the beauty and balance of the sentence, and an alertness to the subtlest distinctions in meaning. In his *Rabelais*, too, and in none of his other works, we are sensible of a masterful control of enthusiasms to produce a narrative of language working at full stretch. All these, the qualities of great literature, he achieved in the magnificent and unsurpassable translation which ensures his immortality, and of which Scotland should be proud.

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