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**“COMPYLIT IN LATIN”:
ALLAN RAMSAY AND SCOTO-LATINITY
IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

Ralph McLean

In *The Ever Green* (1724), Allan Ramsay (1684-1758) included an ancient poem, originally compiled in Latin in 1300, and translated into Scots in 1524, on the iconic Scottish freedom fighter Sir William Wallace. Only he did no such thing. Instead what Ramsay did was to create his own epic of mediaeval Scotland, where Wallace appears in a dream to the poet and offers a series of predications which appear to reference the Wars of Independence, but which can equally be read as commentary on the Jacobite situation in Ramsay’s lifetime. “The Vision” is Ramsay at his best, offering something fresh and new, but clothed in the old and familiar. It is speculated in “The Life of Allan Ramsay,” thought to be written by his son, the painter Allan Ramsay, that Ramsay senior’s decision to locate this poem in the Scottish Latin tradition may have been for his own amusement for drawing out “profound remarks of learned critics and antiquaries.”¹ It could also be Ramsay blurring the edges of what constituted literary tradition in the country, playing with Scotland’s literary and linguistic past in order to create a hybrid for the eighteenth-century reading public.

Sensitive to his own lack of skill in Latin, Ramsay nonetheless infused his Scottish poetry with imitations of the poet Horace, to demonstrate how the voice of an ancient Roman could speak with a Scottish accent. However, this was not the herald of a new golden age of Scoto-Latinity. Despite Ramsay’s close association with two of the most prominent Latinists of his day, Archibald Pitcairne (1652-1713) and Thomas Ruddiman (1674-1757), Latin, once the premier form of poetic expression and the language of educational discourse, was slowly eroding. Nonetheless, Ramsay’s understanding of the classical world and his love of Horace were echoed throughout the century by Scottish poets such as

¹ Burns Martin, John W. Oliver, Alexander M. Kinghorn, and Alexander Law, eds., *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons for the Scottish Text Society, 1945-1974), 4:73 (cited below as *Works*).

Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) and Alexander Geddes (1737-1802), while Ramsay's own poetry could serve as inspiration for men such as Alexander Fraser Tytler (1747-1813) who translated his original Scots verse into Latin.

Pitcairne, Ruddiman and the decline of Latin in Scotland

Ramsay never had the opportunity to attend university. After his departure from Leadhills he moved to Edinburgh where he eventually became an apprentice wigmaker. Even if Ramsay had gone to university, there is no guarantee that it would have led to a solid understanding and skill in Latin. In the early decades of eighteenth-century Scotland, Latin began to lose its lustre as the undisputed medium of education and learning. At the University of Glasgow, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), appointed professor of moral philosophy in 1729, moved away from Latin to lecture in English. Hutcheson's decision was not a reflection of his ability with Latin; as one of his students James Wodrow noted, "he wrote and spoke, at least we thought so, better in Latin than in English."² Rather, it may have been required because the students were struggling to follow lectures in Latin. Indeed, lecturing in Latin could even be to the benefit of the lecturer. In 1726, when John Simson, Glasgow's professor of divinity, was accused of teaching Arminianism in his classes, Simson's defence was that his students' testimony as to what he said was unreliable because he had lectured in Latin.³ Hutcheson's decision marked a steady decline of Latin as the premier language of learning at the University. In the previous century students who did not speak Latin within the college boundaries had been fined, and repeated transgressions of this rule were deemed serious enough for expulsion.⁴

Meanwhile, at the University of Aberdeen, George Turnbull (1698-1748), who had been influenced by the new style of philosophy taught at Glasgow by Hutcheson, also began to lecture in English. As with Hutcheson, this was not a reflection on Turnbull's own grasp of the classics, but rather was part of a wider programme which stipulated that the best way to educate an individual was to encourage both ancient and modern learning. Turnbull shared Ramsay's love of Horace and believed that the Latin poet's works were examples of rational and useful criticism.

² James Wodrow to the Earl of Buchan, 28 May 1808, Glasgow, Mitchell Library, Baillie MS 32225.

³ For the students' evidence in the Simson case see: Anne Skoczylas, *Mr Simson's Knotty Case: Divinity, Politics, and Due Process in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 269-80.

⁴ James Coutts, *A History of the University of Glasgow from its foundation in 1451 to 1909* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1909), 22.

In the preface to his *Three Dissertations* (1740), Turnbull concluded that learning to speak Latin, divorced from history and philosophy, was inadequate, and he aimed to move away from rudimentary instruction in the mechanics of the language. Turnbull saw classical language as the gateway to classical learning, so that students could become

very well acquainted with Antiquity and History, with ancient Philosophy, with Mankind; and with all that true and solid Criticism which deduces all its Maxims and Rules from Human Nature and the Knowledge of the World.⁵

Early eighteenth-century Scots were at something of a crossroads when it came to using Latin as the primary means of literary expression. Much later, looking back on the growth of the early club culture in Scotland, an anonymous author in *Hogg's Instructor* detected the reorientation of Scots from classical to English models of excellence, citing the Rankenian Club, of which Turnbull had been a member, as one of the primary agents in this change:

At one period of our history, our learned countrymen, who carried the passion for the study of classic learning of antiquity to excess preferred the Latin tongue to their own as the medium of communicating their thoughts to the press.... But a taste for the acquisition of a classic English style was now beginning to appear; and, though feeble at first, and far from being widely diffused, it was, in the middle of the century, to become a passion similar to that which existed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for the requisition of skill in the Latin tongue.⁶

The idea that English, or indeed Scots, could act as the most appropriate means of asserting Scottish literary pride would have been anathema to the staunch Scoto-Latinists with whom Ramsay was socially familiar. Archibald Pitcairne, who, like Ramsay, was a member of another important club in early eighteenth-century Scotland, the Easy Club, was a skilled Latinist who had little interest in promoting either English or Scots. In order to support and bolster the Scoto-Latinist tradition, Pitcairne's own poems were important cultural artifacts used to reinforce this form of literary identity. His Latin work was read, admired, and translated into English by poets such as John Dryden and Matthew Prior. Pitcairne was certainly aware of such response, writing to John Mackenzie: In 2 days I'll send in print to yow Mr Priors Imitation of my Gualterus Dannistouns ad amicos, in English, which he bids me print with the Latin.⁷ Nonetheless,

⁵ George Turnbull, *Three Dissertations* (London: R. Dodsley, 1740), xix.

⁶ *Hogg's Instructor*, 8 (1852), 44.

⁷ Archibald Pitcairne to Mr John Mackenzie, 26 February 1711, in W.T. Johnson, ed., *The Best of Our Owne: The Letters of Archibald Pitcairne 1652-1713* (Edinburgh: Saorsa Books, 1979), 66.

as Murray Pittock notes, Pitcairne's Latin elegy on Mistress Henderson, at whose tavern a group known as the Greppa gathered, served as inspiration for Ramsay's own "Elegy on Maggy Johnston."⁸ Certainly Ramsay owed a debt to Pitcairne for his influence and association and one of Ramsay's earliest published works, if not the earliest, was an elegy for the elder Jacobite, which among other things referenced Pitcairne's defence of the Latinate culture in Scotland.⁹ This traffic could also go two ways. While Ramsay could take from high culture to represent the lower orders of society, so he could also take from the lower forms of literature such as chapbooks and broadsides and render common names such as Edinburgh and Scotland into classical forms such as "Edina" and "Fergusia."¹⁰

In addition to his membership of the Easy Club (1712-1715) where he became their poet laureate, Ramsay was later accepted into the Royal Company of Archers as an honorary bard where he could continue to write club poetry.¹¹ As one of the bards Ramsay was expected to contribute to the poems published by the Company in 1726 entitled *Poems in English and Latin on the Archers and Royal Company of Archers*. The volume mainly concerned itself with celebrations for members of the Archers, as well as lyrics to be sung at club events, but it demonstrates that the two languages were still being used simultaneously in poetry collections although the emerging generation of poets were starting to write in English. Among Ramsay's English contributions is a short piece on his pride at being admitted into the Company, and a jaunty song entitled "The Archers March."¹² Also included in the collection are Latin works by Pitcairne dedicated to the publisher Robert Freebairn whose skills extended to winning archery competitions (*ibid.*, 72). As might well be expected from a collection containing Pitcairne's works, the Latin poetry is replete with strong Jacobite sensibilities.¹³

Thomas Ruddiman, who shared Pitcairne's Jacobite views, and whom Pitcairne encouraged to come to Edinburgh, worked at the Faculty of Advocates Library for fifty years where he held the role of Under-Keeper,

⁸ Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48.

⁹ F. W. Freeman and Alexander Law, "Allan Ramsay's First Published Poem: the poem to the memory of Dr. Archibald Pitcairne," *Bibliothek*, 9 (1979): 153-60.

¹⁰ Murray Pittock, "Allan Ramsay and the Decolonisation of Genre," *Review of English Studies*, 58 (2007): 317-337 (318).

¹¹ Corey Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Eighteenth-century Scottish Club Poetry* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 94.

¹² *Poems in English and Latin, on the Archers, and Royal-Company of Archers* (Edinburgh, 1726), 47, 48.

¹³ J. Sharpe, ed., *The Archer's Register: A year-book of facts for 1876-1877* (Shrewsbury: Adnitt & Naunton, 1877), 147.

then Keeper, while remaining an active scholar. For Ruddiman, Latin could still act as a foundation stone for Scottish literary expression, and as Douglas Duncan notes,

He grew up to accept without question the assumption of the Scottish humanists that Latin should be the basis of the national culture and that Scotland's achievements in that tongue entitled her to a proud place in the literary world.¹⁴

Although Ruddiman was no great poet himself, he composed Latin poetry in his youth in the style of Ovid, some of which was addressed to his old schoolmaster George Morison.¹⁵ However, part of the problem that Ruddiman had in releasing his muse was his strict adherence to grammar; grammar always won out when in conflict with style or aesthetic value. For Ruddiman, grammar was the gateway to higher knowledge and true learning. Ironically, with the decline of Latin in Scotland, Ruddiman's literary reputation is most closely associated with his achievements in Scots, namely his role in editing Gavin Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* (1710), which he published under Robert Freebairn's imprint, and as the publisher in his own right of the *Poems* of Allan Ramsay. In fact, recognition for his work on the *Aeneid* could be seen as bittersweet for Ruddiman, because his motivation was not to celebrate the use of the vernacular but rather to showcase the humanist learning and the skill of Douglas in being able to translate accurately from the original.

Ruddiman's relationship with Ramsay appears on face value to show a strong bond between author and publisher. Robert Crawford has gone as far as to suggest that Ruddiman's role as an editor, and later publisher, served a dual role in continuing the prestige of the Scottish Latinists, while also encouraging the younger generation of writers in Scots such as Ramsay.¹⁶ From 1721 until 1743 all of the Scottish editions of Ramsay's works were printed by Ruddiman at which point an edition of *The Gentle Shepherd* was printed by the Foulis press at Glasgow. However, much like his attitude towards literature itself Ruddiman prized accuracy above aesthetics in his published output. As a result the finished works were in several instances inelegant. For example, only superficial improvements were made to the six editions of *The Gentle Shepherd* which appeared between 1725 and 1734.¹⁷ The 1728 edition had a number of

¹⁴ Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 12-13.

¹⁵ Thomas Ruddiman, "Thomae Ruddimanni ad Georgium Morisonum, AM., praeceptorem suum... epistola anno 1696 metricè conscripta," NLS MS.773, f.64.

¹⁶ Robert Crawford, "Introduction," in Robert Crawford, ed., *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁷ Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman*, 79.

inconsistencies, so much so that a manuscript addition was added to a printed copy stating: “This edition has too many capitals at the beginning of words and is, in many respects, inelegantly printed.”¹⁸ It would seem that while Ramsay and Ruddiman had a working relationship that brought them commercial success, it did not manifest itself in the production of the books themselves as works of art. The rather wretched state of Edinburgh printing also appears to have been on the mind of Archibald Pitcairne in the final months of his life. As Kelsey Jackson Williams has observed, the broadsides of his printed poems were of superior quality to the standard fare of the time, as evidenced in Ruddiman’s Accounts.¹⁹ In recording the costs for printing poems (for Robert Freebairn), the accounts suggest Pitcairne’s poems had to go through the process a number of times, indicating frustration with the finished product.²⁰

Ramsay’s *Poems* and the influence of Horace

Ramsay’s literary endeavours have until relatively recently been viewed as the staking out of a separate Scottish linguistic territory from the threat of English expansionism. Ramsay’s impassioned celebration of the vernacular was a call to reclaim the native voice as a viable and vital means of cultural and national expression. However, Jeff Strabone has suggested that Ramsay’s target was not solely the English language, but rather the “dual hegemony of English and Latin.”²¹ Robert Crawford has cautioned against viewing Ramsay’s attitude to his poetry as a dichotomy between Scots and English, noting that Ramsay cites “the *Scots* and *English* tongue” as if it was a single linguistic entity.²² This is reinforced by Kenneth Simpson who states that “Ramsay writes as a Scot, in Britain, to Britain.”²³ Ramsay himself was well aware of the greater diversity and opportunity that an understanding of Scots and English could bring to artistic expression and championed the qualities of Scots:

the Pronunciation is liquid and sonorous, and much fuller than the English, of which we are Masters, by being taught it in our Schools,

¹⁸ Allan Ramsay, *The Gentle Shepherd* (Edinburgh: Thomas Ruddiman, 1728), NLS Adv.MS.23.5.15.

¹⁹ Kelsey Jackson Williams, “The Poet in the Print Shop,” accessed 15 July 2020, <https://kelseyjacksonwilliams.com/2017/08/09/the-poet-in-the-print-shop/>.

²⁰ Thomas Ruddiman, “Accounts, notes of contracts, etc., of Thomas Ruddiman,” NLS MS.763, f.47v.

²¹ Jeff Strabone, *Poetry and British nationalism in the bardic eighteenth century: imaged antiquities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 100.

²² Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 105.

²³ Kenneth Simpson, “Poetic Genre and National Identity: Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 30 (1998): 31-42 (34).

and daily reading it; which being added to our own native Words, of eminent Significancy, makes our Tongue by far the completest.²⁴

Likewise, Ramsay's attitudes to Scots poetry and Latin poetry ought to be viewed in the light of an inclusive fusion of styles and expression rather than as the assertion of one form over another. For example, Ramsay's imitations of Horace are illustrative of the marriage of vernacular literature with classical ideals that marshal the Roman satiric tradition in order to combat modern corruption, and in the words of John MacQueen they provide "the same function in relation to the ethics and customs of Scottish society."²⁵ Ramsay did not make such lofty claims for the imitations directly, but tempered his readership's expectations of what they could achieve:

I have only snatched at his Thought and Method in gross, and dress'd them up in Scots, without confining my self to no more or no less; so that these are only to be reckoned a following of his Manner (*Poems*, viii).

One needs to be precise about what Ramsay hoped to achieve through his engagement with Horace's poems. It is clear that they are not merely translations and Ramsay acknowledged his limitations in being able to access Horace's works in their original language. Instead, Ramsay was more interested in capturing the spirit of the originals but transforming them into contemporary eighteenth-century settings that would elicit a feeling of familiarity in his readership. This is most notable in the rendering of the Roman landscape into the Scottish landscape, and in particular the Edinburgh locale. In Ode 1.9 for example, Ramsay is able to take the mountain Soracte (now Soratte), in the vicinity of Rome, and replace it with a vista of the Pentland hills. As Stuart Gillespie has demonstrated, following his discovery of a previously unknown Horatian imitation, Ramsay's imitations won admiration for their felicity and inventiveness.²⁶

Earlier in the preface Ramsay famously acknowledged "that I understand Horace but faintly in the Original, and yet can feast on his beautiful Thoughts dress'd in British" (*Poems*, vi). It is not known for certain from which edition of Horace that Ramsay worked. However, Alexander Kinghorn has speculated that his knowledge of Horace may have come from English translations of André Dacier's French version

²⁴ Allan Ramsay, *Poems* (Edinburgh: Thomas Ruddiman, 1721), vii (cited below in text as *Poems*).

²⁵ John MacQueen, *The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature: Volume One Progress and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), 103.

²⁶ Stuart Gillespie, "'Horace's Letter of Invitation': A Newly Discovered Horatian Imitation by Allan Ramsay," *Scottish Literary Review*, 10 (2018): 159-168 (159).

(*Works*, 4:110). This would appear to be a fair conjecture given the evidence in the manuscript of the “Life of Allan Ramsay,” which offers further insights into the extent of his linguistic abilities:

He had made himself very much master of the French language, and his imitations of the Fables of La Motte are excellent. He lamented his deficiency in the Latin; of which, however, he had pickt up so much, as by the help of Dacier, to catch the spirit of the Odes of Horace; which, even by this twilight, he, above all writings, admired; and, supplying, by congenial fancy, what he wanted in erudition, has imitated some of them with a truly Horatian felicity (*Works*, 4:73)

Ramsay may well have been attacked for his lack of a deep knowledge of Latin and its grammatical complexity, however, he was clearly comfortable enough with the Latin originals to incorporate part of them into his later writings. For example, on 4 March 1740, Ramsay wrote to the English physician Dr Richard Mead, thanking him for supporting his son Allan’s artistic plans, and for his professional help in preserving his daughter “from the danger that threatened her,” and as a token of his gratitude Ramsay sent Mead two volumes of his Scots poetry, signing off with an edited quotation of Horace’s Ode 4.8:

Donarem tripodas, praemia fortium
Graiorum
sed non hoc mihi vis...
gaudes, carminibus, carmina possumus
donare... (*Works*, 4:218-219).

Clearly Ramsay knew enough about the poem in Latin to select pertinent lines, where Horace writes that he does not have the skill to present the recipient with gifts of Olympian tripods (often won by Homeric heroes in games), but nor would the recipient want them, as song and music is his desire which, Horace, and by extension, Ramsay can provide to his benefactor through his literary talents.

Ramsay’s literary talent was not appreciated by all who read his imitations. In response to the publication of his *Poems* in 1721 an anonymous critic took Ramsay to task for daring to presume that he could convey the spirit of Horace in Scots.

D—d brazen Face, how could you hope
To imitate *Horatian* Strain,
A Labour too refin’d for *Pope*,
A Task which puzzl’d *Prior*’s Pen.”²⁷

²⁷ Anon, *A Satyr upon Allan Ramsay, Occasioned upon a report of his translating Horace* (*Works*, 4:297). Roger Greaves notes that Ramsay’s Horatian odes were lampooned in an English broadsheet, and that Ramsay’s defence was a direct

Although this is a pointed attack on Ramsay, Alexander Pope and Matthew Prior are also singled out for criticism, suggesting that it is not merely the poor quality of Ramsay's imitation in the eyes of the critic, but rather that he has engaged with Horace at all. The attack becomes more personal as it progresses, sneering at Ramsay's profession, and stating that he should stick to it

Since Nature made thee only fit,
For Wigs, and not for Verse by G—d (*ibid.*).

This can also be read as an overt attack on Ramsay's classical credentials, as he would have had to spend time learning a trade and earning money, rather than be able to devote himself to the more leisurely pursuits of learning the classics. There is a further edge to this criticism as Horace himself, thanks to generous patrons recognising and rewarding his literary talent, had escaped from the Roman metropolis to the serenity of a quiet life on a country farm. The critic finally dismisses Ramsay by proclaiming that he ought not to have desecrated the memory of superior talents.

Touch not the Ashes laid to rest;
Let *Horace* sleep, his Labours spare (*ibid.*).

Ramsay's preface had acknowledged that his imitations of Horace might well "raise a Nest of Wasps," but he hoped that he had done enough to "blunt their Stings" (*Poems*, vi). However, he was clearly stung by this attack and launched his own impassioned defence of the imitations while poetically reiterating his aims for them and his methodology.

Translation be the Pedants task
it is beneath me to Translate
but in fair Rays I like to Bask
and shining patterns Imitate (*Works*, 3:282).

This is about as succinct as Ramsay could make his manifesto of Horatian imitation, which in his preface was presented gently and almost coyly, but is here roared back at his critic. As for the suggestion that he should let Horace sleep, Ramsay was equally unequivocal:

I'll Rouze the Prophet who forsook
far back in the Augustan days
that I should sing o'er Dale & Law
his notes in Calidonian Lays (*ibid.*, 3:283).

Ramsay's fire and indignation hardly match the serenity of the Horatian ideal, but they demonstrate clearly that he considered his imitations an

response to this attack: Roger Greaves, "'Thigging a fable fra a Frenchman': Allan Ramsay's Imitation's of La Fontaine and La Motte," *Translations and Literature*, 8 (1999): 183.

important element of his literary project and would defend them against outside attacks that, in focussing on the narrow issue of the accuracy of the literal translation, missed what Ramsay was doing.

The Horatian tradition

Ramsay was not alone in the early decades of the eighteenth century in attempting to bring the poetry of Horace to a modern audience. The Roman poet was also used as the inspiration for a series of imitations by Alexander Pope (1688-1744), who, like Ramsay, relied on translations of the works to serve as his base texts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Pope drew criticism from Samuel Johnson whose rigid classicist outlook prevented him from viewing imitation as anything other than a disconnect between the Latin originals and imperfect English equivalents. For Johnson, rather than adding to literary expression, the clash between “Roman images and English manners” would lead to an “irreconcilable dissimilitude” and as a result the work would be “generally uncouth and party-coloured; neither original nor translated, neither ancient nor modern.”²⁸ Johnson’s main concern was that imitations could not give enjoyment or pleasure to the common reader as they would miss the spirit of the original, which could only be appreciated by men of learning who understood the variants of, and parallels to, the originals. Johnson was far more effusive in his praise for Pope’s translation of the *Iliad* which he described as “a performance which no age or nation could pretend to equal.” (*ibid.*, 100). Pope’s desire for all his classical works was to not to create like-for-like translations to showcase his grasp of grammar and syntax, but rather to encapsulate the feel and character of life in the eighteenth century.²⁹

In his poem *Of Verbal Criticism: An Epistle to Mr. Pope* (1733), David Mallet championed Pope’s literary abilities against critical pedantry derived exclusively from books and grammatical rules:

’Tis thine, O POPE, who chuse the better part,
To tell how false, how vain the *Scholiast’s* Art,
Which nor to taste, nor genius has pretence,
And if ’tis learning, is not common sense.³⁰

Mallet was reiterating what Pope had said years before when he came to translate the *Iliad*, which was that he preferred the authority of one true

²⁸ Peter Peterson, ed., *Johnson’s Life of Pope* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 107.

²⁹ On the ways Pope translated ancient Rome into 18th century England, cf. James W. Tupper, “A Study of Pope’s *Imitations of Horace*,” *PMLA*, 15 (1900): 181-215.

³⁰ David Mallet, *Of Verbal Criticism: An Epistle to Mr. Pope* (London: Lawton Gilliver, 1733), 4.

poet above that of twenty critics or commentators.³¹ Pope admired the poetry of Ramsay and shared his Scottish counterpart's recognition of the importance of native language to speak to and reach the populace at large. In his *Imitations of Horace*, though criticizing national partiality for archaisms, Pope specifically referenced the Scottish poetic tradition and the pride that people had in their native tongue: English readers venerated Chaucer and Spenser, but "A Scot will fight for Christ's Kirk o' the Green."³²

While they lived in Edinburgh, Mallet and his near-contemporary James Thomson composed imitations both of Horace and Virgil, among the emerging clubs and societies in the old town.³³ Thomson's "Of a Country Life" was published anonymously in James M'Euen's *Edinburgh Miscellany* (1720) along with several imitations of Horace's Odes composed by James Arbuckle (d.1742).³⁴ Arbuckle, a student at the University of Glasgow when the volume was published, enjoyed a correspondence with Ramsay where they exchanged mutually appreciative letters on each other's talents. Arbuckle translated sixteen Odes to Ramsay's ten, and Richard Holmes has speculated that the translation of so many in such a short space of time indicates the possibility that the two may have considered a miscellany of Scottish Horatian works.³⁵ A key difference between them, however, was their approach to the translations. Arbuckle opted for a closer and more literal translation into English, whereas Ramsay's versions held true to his designation of them as imitations and also employed Scots to a far greater degree. Nonetheless, Arbuckle was supportive of this looser form of translation and defended the value of this approach as well as Ramsay's use of Scots.³⁶

Robert Fergusson would also blend the classical and modern worlds in his poetry. Fergusson's educational background exposed him to Latin to a

³¹ Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 195.

³² Alexander Pope, "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace," l. 40, in John Butt, ed., *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (London: Methuen, 1963), 637.

³³ Roger L. Emerson, "Reading in Universities," in Stephen W. Brown & Warren McDougall, eds, *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 318.

³⁴ *Edinburgh Miscellany* (Edinburgh: James M'Euen, 1720), 193.

³⁵ Richard Holmes, "'Bagpipes no Musick': Allan Ramsay, James Arbuckle, and the Significance of the 'Scots' Poetic Revival," in Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd, eds., *Literature and Union: Scottish Texts, British Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 61-68 (66).

³⁶ Richard Holmes, ed., *James Arbuckle: Selected Works* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 73.

greater extent than Ramsay, and his four years at the High School in Edinburgh would have seen him learn Latin and read such staples as Virgil, Horace and Livy. At St Andrews he also maintained a connection to the classics, although, according to the younger Thomas Ruddiman, “Virgil and Horace were the only Latin authors he would ever look at while he was at the University.”³⁷ Fergusson’s appreciation for Horace manifested itself in his own efforts to blend the classical world of the ancient Roman with the sensibilities of eighteenth-century Scotland. He rendered Horace’s “*Carpe diem*,” in Ode 1.11, into Scots as

The day looks gash, toot aff your horn,
Nor care yae strae about the morn.³⁸ (*ibid.*, 194).

Jerry O’Brien comments that Fergusson mixes Scots colloquial expressions with the lofty ambition of Horace’s exhortation in a way that creates a welcome tension between the two.³⁹

At the end of the eighteenth century Alexander Geddes would defend Scots by specifically linking it to the classical languages as a means of expressing ideas and concepts as closer to the original, and for him, Scots was an asset when translating from Greek. To illustrate his point he borrowed a line from Pope’s translation of the *Iliad*,

Now here, now there, the giddy ships are born;
And all the ratt’ling shrouds in fragments torn,

and stated that a Scots translation was more suited to retaining the spirit of the original:

Headlong the ships are driv’n! Thick thuds of wind
In threes and fours the soughand sails rescind.⁴⁰

The “gh” sound pronounced gutturally, Geddes argued, yields a truer impression of the original and celebrates the distinctive features of Scots speech. Geddes’s promotion and defence of Scots was certainly not commonplace in the eighteenth century, and more typical is the attitude of Adam Smith who remarked in his lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres that the harsh and uncouth gutturals that had prevailed in the language had now almost entirely been laid aside.⁴¹ Ramsay and his work remained

³⁷ Alexander Grosart, *Robert Fergusson* (Famous Scots] (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier), 53.

³⁸ Matthew P. McDiarmid, ed., *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons for the Scottish Text Society, 1954-1956), 2:223.

³⁹ Jerry O’Brien, “The Sonsie Muse: The Satiric Use of Neoclassical Diction in the Poems of Robert Fergusson,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 19 (1984): 166.

⁴⁰ Alexander Geddes, “Dissertation on the Scoto-Saxon Dialect,” *Transactions of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries* (Aberdeen, 1792), 420.

⁴¹ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 15.

conspicuously absent from Smith's literary exemplars in his lectures as he preferred to use English examples to illustrate his points.

As a poet comfortable writing in Scots, English and Latin, Geddes possessed a high degree of linguistic versatility. In 1779 he brought out his own translation of Horace's poems, the full title indicating with crystal clarity how his translations were to be received: *Select satires of Horace, translated into English verse, and, for the most part, adapted to the present times and manners*. In his preface Geddes elaborated on his approach to the satires:

In translating, I have followed a medium between a close literal version and a loose paraphrase. I have not wittingly omitted any of Horace's thoughts; but I have clothed them, as well as I could, in a modern dress. I wished it to be the Roman's soul transfused into a British body.⁴²

Geddes's words echo the manifesto of Ramsay, whose metaphor of British dress closely links to Geddes's modern dress and British body. Although Geddes noted that he was not keen to import contemporary names for fear of causing offence to individuals, he nevertheless changed them where he thought it would do honour to them (*ibid.*, 5). For instance, he substituted James Beattie, professor of moral philosophy at Aberdeen, in place of Horace's patron and supporter Gaius Maecenas, to whom the first satire is dedicated and addressed (*ibid.*, 7). Ramsay had also previously swapped out Maecenas for a contemporary, but whereas Geddes chose his friend Beattie, Ramsay sought the patronage of William, Earl of Dalhousie, overtly stating the potential relationship:

Setting great *Horace* in my View,
He to *Mecenas* [sic], I to you (*Poems*, 337).

Geddes's volume was a personal success, as its publication brought him £100, drew the praise of Samuel Johnson for his work in the Latinist tradition, and in 1780 helped him secure from Aberdeen the degree of LLD.⁴³

The Latin output of Alexander Geddes would prove to be something of a last hurrah for the Scottish Latin tradition. At the beginning of the 1700s Thomas Ruddiman had remained convinced that Scoto-Latinity ought to be the foundation-stone of the nation's literary identity. He would have despaired that as the end of the century approached he was held up as one of the last great exemplars of the discipline. In 1773, James Boswell mused on the predicament of Scottish Latin that only through the work of Ruddiman would "a knowledge of the Roman language ... be preserved in

⁴² Alexander Geddes, *Select Satires of Horace* (London: T. Cadell, 1779), 4.

⁴³ Gerard Carruthers, "Alexander Geddes," *ODNB* (2004), accessed 15 July 2020: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10485>.

Scotland, if it can be preserved at all—or revived.”⁴⁴ Although a robust knowledge of the classics was still fundamental to eighteenth-century Scottish writers, fewer of them read the classical texts confidently in their original language. Geddes offered hope that the flame had not yet become extinguished, but the blazing light that once shone throughout Europe was beginning to dim.

Scots poetry translated into Latin

So far we have looked at the Latin tradition in terms of how Scots engaged with classical works, but this was not a one-way street. While poets such as Ramsay and Pope took inspiration from the classics in order to refit them in eighteenth-century dress, others were translating or adapting Scots poems into Latin. Such Scots-to-Latin translation was not part of a sustained programme to show Scoto-Latinity thriving along the lines of the poetic nationalism envisaged by Ruddiman and Pitcairne. It seems mostly to have been produced in idle hours for the pleasure of personal achievement. An example is a manuscript Latin translation of *Tam o' Shanter* held at the National Library of Scotland.⁴⁵ A published example is John Skinner's Latin translation of “Christis Kirk on the Green” (1772), about which Skinner wrote to Robert Burns in 1787:

It is as old a thing as I remember, my fondness for “Chryste-Kirk on the Green”, which I had by heart ere I was twelve years of age, and which, some years ago, I attempted to turn into Latin verse.⁴⁶

Ramsay too was the subject for those who translated Scots works into Latin. A late example of this longstanding tradition is noted in a Victorian Ramsay reprint, which records passages from Ramsay were assigned to the students of Trinity College, Dublin for translation into Greek or Latin verse.⁴⁷ The Ramsay editor, Alexander Fraser Tytler, a Scottish lawyer, in due course a judge, and Edinburgh's professor of civil and universal history, was also greatly interested in translation studies, publishing an *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1791). Perhaps surprisingly, while Tytler's *Essay* quoted from many translations of Horace, he made no reference those of Allan Ramsay. Tytler cited Archibald Pitcairne's Latin poetry admiringly, but argued that Pitcairne's love for Horatian Latin could lead him to use it improperly, particularly in his translations of Psalms,

⁴⁴ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books* (London: Penguin, 2007), 367.

⁴⁵ “Tam o' Shanter by Robert Burns translated into Latin,” NLS MS.898.

⁴⁶ James Currie, ed., *Works of Robert Burns*, 4 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800), II: 127-131.

⁴⁷ *The Poems of Allan Ramsay* (Paisley: A. Gardner, 1877), p. [iii].

which became infested with language and allusions relating to Pagan mythology.⁴⁸

While Tytler may not have referenced Ramsay's Horatian imitations in his *Essay*, he blended Ramsay's poems with Latin in another surprising way. In his commonplace book held at the National Library of Scotland Tytler kept frequent notes and anecdotes concerning the great and the good of the Scottish Enlightenment, but he also made several translations into Latin of Scots poetical works, including a version of "Lucky Spence's Last Advice."⁴⁹ Perhaps the most striking thing about Tytler's version to a reader unfamiliar with the Latin, is that he has retained the "Standard Habbie" verse form employed in Ramsay's original. This verse form was used in Robert Sempill of Beltrees's poem "The Life and Death of Habbie Simson, the Piper of Kilbarchan" consisting of six lines rhyming "aaabab", with tetrameter lines for the "a" rhymes and dimeters for the "b" rhymes. Ramsay adopted it for his own works and it continued to prove popular with both Fergusson and Burns. Ramsay wrote "Lucky Spence" around 1718 on the death of a brothel-keeper near Holyroodhouse, where the soon-to-be-deceased Spence dispensed her advice to her young charges.

Tytler's translation sticks accurately to the core of the poem's action, with line-by-line literalism. For example, where Ramsay speaks of "black Ey'd Bess and mim Mou'd Meg," Tytler changes their names to Nigella and Chloris. Nigella is chosen as it means black, echoing in one word the black eyes of Bess. Ramsay in his footnotes to the poem states that "mim Mou'd" expresses an affected modesty and also a preciseness about the mouth (*Poems*, 34). Chloris takes the place of Meg here, which could be an allusion to the name of the nymph associated with spring and new growth, but it could also be an allusion to a character from Horace's Ode 3.15 where Chloris is a lady whose lust and sexual appetite are deemed to be unseemly in a married woman of advancing years. This dual interpretation in one name therefore captures both the modesty and bawdy that is referenced in Ramsay's poem.

The hangman, who is willing to whip those who do not perform their tasks, is rendered in such broad Scots that Ramsay provides an explanatory footnote. Tytler translates Ramsay's

Vild Hangy's Taz ye'r Riggings saft
Makes black and blae

into Latin as

Flagellum carnifex trementum

⁴⁸ Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1797), 254.

⁴⁹ "Commonplace book of Alexander Fraser Tytler," c.1778-1802, NLS Acc.11737/5, ff. 107-08.

In dorsa nuda,

so capturing the quivering whip of the executioner on the back of the victim. Ramsay's "Riggings" can mean a person's back, but can also relate to the ridge of a roof. Tytler similarly attempts to capture this double meaning by the use of "*dorsa*" which can mean back, but also refers to the slope of a hill or a ridge. Tytler's expression for the hangman "*Flagellum carnifex*" has a further religious connotation as the phrase "*carnifex et flagellum Ecclesiae Anglicanae*" (hangman and torturer of the English Church) was used to describe Reginald Pole, Mary Tudor's executioner, who burned those who produced translations of scripture.⁵⁰ The brutality of this religious allusion links back to a previous stanza where Ramsay portrays the hypocrisy of Church members who present an image of sanctity and righteousness while happily using the services of the brothels. There is an inversion of the translation process here, with the punishment grimly expressed in the vernacular juxtaposed against Tytler's leisure of translating the vernacular into Latin.

Tytler's Latin translation of Ramsay's Scottish work places him in a niche group of scholars, rather than at the heart of the Scottish literary tradition, and this piece and others, such as his Latin translations of the poems of William Shenstone and James Beattie, were probably never written to be released to the world. In the eighteenth-century, Latin may have been slowly retreating as the language of instruction in the Scottish Universities; however, it still performed a role as a means of literary expression and enjoyment for Scots. Even as the nineteenth-century approached, Scottish schools kept the flame of Latin lit, and the practice of translating vernacular works into Latin demonstrated the connection between the modern and the ancient. Allan Ramsay, through his Scots poetry, helped to maintain this link to the classical past, by presenting the works of classical authors to new and growing audiences in Scotland in a language which was accessible and understandable. From the unforgiving grammarian's perspective Ramsay may well have understood Horace's Latin but faintly, but his ability to capture the spirit of his Roman counterpart demonstrated that Ramsay knew and understood Horace well enough.

National Library of Scotland

⁵⁰ John Powell Ward, *The Spell of the Song: Letters, Meaning, and English Poetry* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 137-38.