

***Trainspotting* in Montreal: The Dramatic Version**

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The Context

In January 1998 the Théâtre de Quat'Sous, a long-established repertory company in Montreal which specialises in translations of contemporary plays, presented a French translation of Harry Gibson's dramatic adaptation of Irvine Welsh's novel, *Trainspotting*. When Pierre Bernard, artistic director of the Quat'Sous, invited me to collaborate on this version with Montreal playwright and director Wajdi Mouawad, it was the realisation of something I had long hoped for, but which required the fame of *Trainspotting* to allow. Until I undertook this project, my translation work had been done entirely with Bill Findlay in translating Quebec plays, for the most part the works of Michel Tremblay, from working-class Montreal French, or *joual*, into the equivalent Scots. Bernard had seen a production of *Trainspotting* in Glasgow and had loved what he had seen though he had not understood, as he put it, 'une dixième' of the Scots text. Yet that ten per cent was enough to make him want to stage the play.

By a happy connection to the Scots Tremblays, Bernard had become interested in Scottish theatre through meeting Michael Boyd, then artistic director of the Tron Theatre, who had staged the first Scots Tremblays in 1989 and 1990. So the project to translate Harry Gibson's adaptation of Irvine Welsh's novel into Montreal French would probably not have come about if the Tron had not staged *The Guid Sisters*, the Scots version which Bill Findlay and I had done of Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*. It was not through Michael Boyd, however, that Pierre Bernard found me, but through Linda Gaboriau, the pre-eminent translator of Quebec drama into English. Pierre had asked her if there was anyone in Montreal who could read the Scots text - for he could not - and was relieved when there was and pleased to discover that that person had experience as a theatre translator. So he hired me to work with Wajdi Mouawad, whom he described as 'un vrai homme de théâtre'.

Wajdi Mouawad, at twenty-eight, had already established himself as one of the stars of his generation in Montreal theatre. He has written and produced several plays of his own as well as working as a director and actor. *Trainspotting*, which he directed for the Quat'Sous, was his first translation (his second was our co-translation of Enda Walsh's *Disco Pigs*, produced at the Théâtre de Poche in Brussels in January 1999). At the same time as we were working on Gibson's adaptation in the summer of 1997, Mouawad was in the process of adapting *Don Quixote* for the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Montreal's leading French repertory theatre. He would sit across from me as we were having intense discussions on the nature of the art of translation, in other words, trying to figure out which *joual* word for a frequently used obscenity would be most appropriate for a particular instance in *Trainspotting* and wave his hand over his laptop and dream of the meeting in there of Francis Begbie and Don Quichotte himself. For Mouawad is perfectly placed to render both standard French as a suitable voice for Cervantes' characters and to recreate into *joual* the language of Welsh's Scots speakers. He was born in Beirut, fleeing with his family from the

war there when he was six. Then, after eight years in Paris, he moved to Montreal in his mid-teens. So, he is fluent in the French of both sides of the Atlantic, and beyond.

Whenever I have spoken to people in Scotland about the Montreal version of *Trainspotting*, the question I have been asked more than any other is: "What's the French for *likesay*?" with particular reference to this word which in Scotland is identified with working-class Edinburgh and nowhere else. The question is an interesting one because it underscores the perception of *Trainspotting* as a work deeply rooted in one particular place, namely Edinburgh. It also implies a scepticism, I think, that such a work can be translated at all and still retain its essential identity. Bill Findlay and I, of course, have learned from ample experience that Michel Tremblay's works, inextricably identified with their place, class, and time, can be expressed as Quebec plays through the medium of Scots vernacular. There seemed no reason to me to suggest that this Quebec-Scots translation was a one-way street. I welcomed the chance to see whether this was true.

Coincidentally, both Tremblay and Welsh have spoken of their characters in very much the same way. Welsh was quoted in the Montreal weekly arts tabloid *Voir* as saying, 'I wanted to give voice to those nobody listens to'.¹ Similarly, Tremblay has spoken about his motivation in writing about his people in their own language, a people he describes as being silenced through generations. These two writers then have been fully conscious of their social mission, as it were, in realising on stage and in fiction - Tremblay is also an accomplished novelist - the world of an inaudible, invisible people. Of course, when such people speak, they do so in the vernacular. And when such works are translated, surely another vernacular is the vehicle best suited to convey the fabric and texture of the original. The problem with vernacular language is that it is so intrinsically connected to its own place that some kind of dislocation or transference into the world of the target language is seen by some to be inevitable. I have come to the conclusion that the degree to which this is true is very much in the ear and eye of the beholder. A Montreal audience sitting through *Trainspotting* at the Quat'Sous will not be self-consciously aware of the fact that these Scottish youths are speaking in a language which identifies them as Québécois. They speak language, not a language, and as such it should be true to their age and class. Of course, a visitor from Toulouse or Ouagadougou or the *haute bourgeoisie* of a Montreal suburb such as Outremont will not understand the language in its immediacy, but will hear rather a deformed variety of French, which they will identify, if they identify it at all, as something entirely of lower-class Montreal. For these members of the audience, the play will be more Québécois than Scots. One commentator has noted how working class Scots and the equivalent Montreal French seem linguistically to be 'long lost twins'.² As such, these languages should be interchangeable, given an indigenous audience of the appropriate class and disposition, and should allow for a translation with the minimum of dislocation of the text out of its original milieu. It is obviously not quite as simple as that and there are a number of problems that translators must face and tactics that they must devise and employ in order to allow this to happen. The particular nature of this work will very much be determined by the specific worlds of both the original and target languages.

Edinburgh and Montreal - Transposition of Place

There are enough parallels between the Edinburgh world of *Trainspotting* and Montreal, however, to allow for easy transference of Welsh's world into the language of Montreal junkies. Montreal shares with Edinburgh a serious problem of substance abuse. Raymond Bernatchez, in his review of the Quat'Sous's production of *Trainspotting* in the Montreal daily *La Presse*, quotes a heroin addict in Gilles Bibeau and Marc Perreault's sociological study of Montreal heroin addicts, '*Dérives montréalais . . . À travers des itinéraires de toxicomanies dans le quartier Hochelaga-Maisonneuve*'.³ He then goes on, 'Welsh shows us that the same thing is happening in Edinburgh in Scotland. Thus live young people in all the great cities of the world. The characters of *Trainspotting* speak the same way and say substantially (pardon the pun) the same thing [as their Montreal counterparts]'.⁴ The Quat'Sous, in their programme book for the production, published an article entitled 'Montréal, capitale de l'héroïne' in which they pointed out that the city has one of the highest rates of heroin use in the western world with an estimated 20,000 users.

There are other parallels between Welsh's characters and the drug scene of Montreal that provide the cultural 'fit' between the two cities. The question about *likesay* that I have been asked so often indicates a sense of dialect identification with a specific class in a specific city. From that point of view, *joual* seems a perfect medium for translation of working-class Edinburgh Scots because it is a language unique to its place. This language is a rich amalgam of ancient pronunciation, corrupted forms, abundant anglicisms, idiosyncratic idioms, and lively expletives and as such offers the text a medium of expression which shares a great deal with Welsh's language. Additionally, the fact that francophone Montreal is a largely Roman Catholic city provides an important element in the common ground of the two texts, not only because of such Catholic-specific scenes in the play as Alison's rosary of lament, but also because swearing in *joual* is almost entirely based on words drawn from the Mass and as such would be ridiculous in the mouths of *joual*-speaking Protestant Scots. It also allowed for one of Wajdi's most stunning stage pictures as he presented the scene when Tommy shoots up in his penis as a kind of latter-day Pieta. So a number of cultural elements conspire to create a shared world between francophone Montreal and Welsh's Edinburgh. These cultural or social parallels, it seems to me, are essential if theatre translations, or at least those of plays written in the vernacular, are going to be able to live in the theatre. Quebec and Scotland offer this kind of compatibility.

The setting of *Trainspotting* caused no difficulties for the Montreal audience. The film, of course, already had a kind of cult status and drew young people into the Quat'Sous in unprecedented numbers. The Quat'Sous is a small theatre, situated two blocks from the Boulevard Saint-Laurent, known as the Main, which despite the inevitable gentrification of the nineties, is still also Montreal's boulevard of broken dreams. It is the haunt of the 'squeegee' kids who are hooked on heroin and offer to clean your windscreen for a few coins. These kids wanted to see the play on offer around the corner and, in Mouawad's *mise-en-scène*, there was no attempt to distance the play from the world immediately beyond the doors of the theatre. It would become clear later in the evening that this play was set in a city in another country. The production would by then have established that this other country was not that different from the world of Montreal, thus establishing the relevance of the play for the audience and refuting the claim made by some that it is a voyeuristic excursion into the world of drug abuse rather than a critique of social values. In Mouawad's production, the play began with Mark opening a door on the backstage wall and

coming in from the real outside, stepping out of Montreal into a Muirhouse where people spoke *joual*, not quite the *joual* of Montreal for Wajdi Mouawad and I had purposely added foreign elements to the language, but *joual* nevertheless. The play ran from the middle of January to the beginning of March, the very hardest time of Montreal's hard winter. In fact, it opened just after the great 1998 icestorm - the most costly natural disaster in Canadian history - and while much of the city and the surrounding territory remained for days and even weeks without electricity. It was out of that world that Mark Renton stepped on to the stage at the Quat'Sous. The set evoked an abandoned industrial building or railway station in which Mark leaned against a rusting column and began to recall various episodes of his past.

Gibson's adaptation of the novel consists of a series of scenes taken from Mark's life and does not attempt to encompass the novel, which is in any case episodically structured. The script is for four actors with multiple roles to be played by all the performers except the actor who plays Mark. Thus the essential conceit of Gibson's adaptation is to present all the characters other than Mark as a projection of his memory. The narrative style of the play provides the work with two kinds of language. It is of course principally written in the Scots of working-class Edinburgh youth, but because of Mark's narration there is also the presence of a more standard language which works in a sort of counterpoint to the language out of which most of the play is made. The justification for this can be found in the fact that Mark is a university drop-out. Readers of the novel, for example, may remember that he has read Kierkegaard. Later in the play, Alison also adopts a more standard, and rather elevated language which operates in stark contrast to the final demotic scenes in the abandoned railway station at Leith. Through these passages the novelist and playwright have distanced the characters from their own lives. There is a retrospective analysis going on which allows the audience to see the action of the play as essentially remembered by Mark, who refers to himself at one point as a storyteller.

Registers and Varieties of *Joual* and Scots

Mark's vocabulary in the narrative sections of the play reflects a dependence on Latinate vocabulary that is largely abandoned in the rougher give-and-take of dialogue he engages in with the other characters. The problem of Mark's two voices was unsettling to both Wajdi Mouawad and Pierre Bernard, for the use of this more formal register seems not to be entirely consistent. For example, there are passages in the dialogue where Mark's elevated language could not be translated literally despite the fact that the words used in the original Scots were French cognates. When Mark describes Laura McEwan to Tommy as '[a] girl wi an awesome sexual reputation'⁵, in the *joual* version the phrase had to be domesticated and vulgarised into 'Parait qu'c't'une crise de cochonne c'te fille-là!'⁶ In other words, in *joual*, Laura McEwan is bluntly described as 'a helluva pig'. Similarly, when Mark describes Tommy's girlfriend Lizzie McIntosh as a '[s]hag extraordinaire',⁷ the French word itself cannot survive in the French translation and is rendered in a similar way to the other example as 'une ostie d'cochonne'.⁸ *Joual*, even more than Scots in this case, refused any kind of elevated diction except when the intention was ironic. Thus when Mark mockingly says of Lizzie, 'The pure viscousness [sic] ay hur expression - / - will corrode her beauty before it's [sic] time . . .',⁹ *joual* can handle this diction because of an underlying irony and renders the line as '[l]a méchanceté d'son visage . . . / . . . Rongera sa beauté avant l'temps. .

.'.¹⁰ Elsewhere in the narrative passages, it turned out that French cognates could be translated literally, though Wajdi Mouawad required convincing by David Boutin, the native-born Montrealer who played Mark, that this was in fact the case. When Mark describes Sick Boy and Swanney, after Sick Boy has shot up, as 'like lovers in a post-coital embrace',¹¹ Wajdi's first instinct was to familiarise the phrase as 'comme deux chums après l'amour'.¹² I was not convinced by this rendering and so, as we did in all such questions, we took the problem to the cast. In this case, David felt that the literal translation, 'comme deux amants dans une étreinte post-coitale'¹³ not only sat well in the narrative passage, but allowed for a clarification of the two levels of Mark's language.

This resistance of *joual* to its Romance origins is nowhere more evident than in its embrace of anglicisms. Purists, of course, see this intrusion of English words into the dialect as a sign of the degradation of French in Quebec, which so often sees itself as an island of French under attack in a sea of English. I am not making any claims for *joual* other than as a vibrant dialect that lives on its own momentum. An examination of the use of anglicisms in *joual* reveals a wholesale co-opting of the English terminology so that English words are fully integrated into the grammar of French and as such have to obey its laws as to conjugation, gender, and agreement. The vocabulary of drugs, of course, is almost entirely derived from English. Thus 'to shoot up' becomes the *joual* verb 'shooter'¹⁴ and 'to cook up' is 'faire un shoot', 'Ah'm clean fae now oan'¹⁵ becomes 'astheur chu clean',¹⁶ and 'drop-oot university junkies'¹⁷ is rendered as 'les junkies drop-out de l'université'.¹⁸ However, the incorporation of English goes far beyond the world of drugs. For example, the line, 'thuv loads ay things tae worry about'¹⁹ becomes 't'es loadé d'problèmes'²⁰ 'pure freaky'²¹ is rendered as 'super freaquante'²² in which even the spelling is gallicised, and 'a loaday shite'²³ is 'un paquet d'bullshit'.²⁴ Of course, these examples render modern slang into *joual* in a way similar to its incorporation in Welsh's Scots. The tradition of using anglicisms is well established in *joual* and may offer examples of the way in which dialect develops its vocabulary. A good example to demonstrate this phenomenon is the expression 'faire sa smatte',²⁵ encountered frequently in Tremblay, that in *Trainspotting* is our translation of Begbie's phrase 'getting lippy'.²⁶ This expression is derived from the English word 'smart' in the sense of impudence or boldness and is the common parlance in *joual* for this idea. The English adjective, however, has become a feminine noun in French and the pronunciation altered to match the soundscape of the dialect. *Joual* is in a constant state of flux, and this fluidity of course has parallels with the nature of modern working-class Scots.

This linguistic instability in *joual* offered Mouawad and me the means to experiment with the language of the play. The use of English in some ways can be said to be the distinguishing characteristic of *joual* and allowed us the means to emphasise the foreign setting of the play to the audience. When Mark and Simon 'Sick Boy' Williamson arrive at Johnny Swan's flat in a state of desperation, Johnny says, 'Ahaww! Ah've goat wan Sick Boy here an another sick boy there an that makes two sick fuckin boeys!'.²⁷ In the *joual* version, this line becomes, 'Ahaww! Y'a un sick boy là, y'a un autre sick boy icitte, ça fait deux hostis d'sick boys'.²⁸ *Joual* has the capacity to carry this line in a way that standard French would prohibit. In the same vein of using the dialect itself to distance the play from the world of the target language, we also ventured to coin our own terms and introduce these into the Scots *joual* in the hope that, by so doing, we could emphasise the otherness of its Edinburgh identity to the Montreal audience. For example, although we usually translated the

expression 'cookin up' as 'faire un shoot', in a couple of instances we translated it literally and in so doing invented an idiom for *joual*: 'Alison wis cookin' ²⁹ becomes 'a'cuisinait'. ³⁰ Elsewhere in Alison's restaurant monologue, she describes herself: 'Ah'm smack-bang in the middle ay a heavy period n ah'm feelin that scraped out n drained wey'. ³¹ In *joual* this line is: 'Ch't'en plein dans ma semaine. Chu drainée. Chu déjutéé.'. ³² Here the word 'déjutéé', literally 'unjuiced' was coined by Julie Beauchemin, the actor who played Alison, and eagerly accepted by all the performers as a new *joual* participle. The most interesting example of this experimentation with the dialect as a way of relocating the text in its original setting came out of our consideration of Mark's speech: 'Then ah went tae take a shoat. It took us ages tae find a good vein. Ma boys don't live as close tae the surface as maist people's'. ³³ The literal translation of 'Ma boys' is of course 'mes garçons', but as a term for veins, which is a feminine noun in French, *joual* could not accommodate the masculine noun 'garçons'. Despite the fact that such a term is not used in *joual*, we opted for 'filles', i.e. girls, as a kind of literal 'cross-gender' invented idiom, particularly because the French words for the drug 'heroin' and 'heroine', the feminine form of hero, are the same. In the passage that follows, Mark goes on to say that heroin is better than sex and so the translation of 'ma boys' as 'mes filles' seemed to enhance the metaphor of the original Scots passage: 'Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fucking miles off the place. Ma dry cracking bones are soothed and liquefied by ma beautiful heroine's tender caresses'. ³⁴ To what extent these instances of invented *joual* were noticed as such by the Montreal audience, we do not know, but Marie Labrecque, reviewing the production for *Voir*, commented: 'The words, translated with rhythmic and filthy effectiveness . . . jostle and crash into each other. Not always intelligible (like the film, in Edinburgh slang - [*patois édimbourgeois*]), but compelling'. ³⁵

Translation of Cultural Reference

The principal means of locating the translation in Edinburgh comes, of course, through the abundance of particular references to Scottish life, the majority of which we were able to keep in the *joual* version. References to the Edinburgh Festival, the train to London via Berwick and Darlington, and various places in Edinburgh such as Princes Street, the Meadows, and the Castle indicate clearly the setting of the play in the Scottish capital. Throughout the text there are constant reminders that we are not in Montreal. References to money - 'fifty measly fuckin pence' becomes 'Cinquante pence tabarnak' ³⁶ - to British Rail, to the troubles in Northern Ireland, the Union Jack draped over Billy Renton's coffin, the playing of 'Amazing Grace' on the bagpipes, Begbie's reference to his language as 'the Queen's fuckin English', ³⁷ the multiplicity of such elements firmly fixes the setting of the play in Edinburgh. All of these elements would be familiar to the Montreal audience, which would share for the most part the attitude of Welsh's characters towards them. One can see, for example, how an underlying mistrust of things English, though the word is used differently in Montreal and Edinburgh, also allowed the Scottish play to fit into its Quebec voice. Alison, in her long monologue in the restaurant, refers to 'English settlers', ³⁸ which in its Québécois form, 'Criss d'Anglais', ³⁹ is a phrase utterly familiar to all Quebecers. In this context, we translated the description of the Army Welfare Officer's accent - 'choppers hingin oot tae dry' ⁴⁰ as 'son criss d'accent British', ⁴¹ employing the word British in an attitude that would sit easily with that of Welsh's Muirhouse Catholic Scots.

We were also able to keep many references to specifics of Edinburgh life that would be meaningless to a Montreal audience. The actors themselves relished some of the obscure references particularly those that were most difficult to integrate into the sound system of *joual*: for example, Mark's references to the football team Porty Thistle ⁴² and 'l'bar à Rutherglen' ⁴³ and Tommy's catalogue of Edinburgh schools - 'Ch't'allé à Augie's, St-Auguston [sic], tsé là, pis Craighy, Craighoyston [sic], tsé là'. ⁴⁴ Most of the Scottish names, in fact, caused no difficulty in the *joual* soundscape. In only two instances we had to make changes. Alison's baby Dawn had to become Dawna as the Montreal audience would either not understand the monosyllable as a name or hear it as that of a boy, the shortened form of Donald. Morag Henderson became Alex Henderson, as in Alexis or Alexandra, in order for her first name to rhyme with the translation of Jam Rag, which became 'face de Kotex'. ⁴⁵ This use of Kotex, the brand name which is in generic use in *joual* for sanitary towels, was an instance of us breaking our own rules and introducing a culturally specific item that is, perhaps, less familiar or, at least, not generically used in Scotland. But the rhyme was achieved and was irresistible, and the rationale for its inclusion is simply that it is the word in common use, like Hoover, for example, in Scotland. Elsewhere, I argued against references in Mouawad's first draft that located the text in Quebec through the introduction of Québécois material. For example, his first version of the phrase 'chips in a paper', was 'd'la poutine d'un casseau' ⁴⁶ referring to a local Quebec specialty consisting of chips covered in cheese curds and gravy. In the final version, this phrase is rendered less colourfully, but more faithfully to the original milieu of the play, as 'des frites d'un casseau'. ⁴⁷ Similarly, references to metric measures could be avoided as Quebec's legacy as part of the British Empire allowed for the literal translation of imperial measures without recourse to metric. This shared history of Scotland and Quebec is perhaps an important element in the common experience of the two places that allows these vernacular translations to work.

There were, of course, a few culturally specific references that could not be included in the *joual* version the loss or transformation of which in no way lessened the particularity of the setting. We dropped the names of shops such as Presto's, British Home Stores, and B&Q, replacing them with French words for grocery, department store, and sand paper. FTSE became 'les marchés boursiers'; ⁴⁸ Rinstead mouth pastilles were transformed into Listerine ⁴⁹ as a product which is sold in both Edinburgh and Montreal, and *News at Ten* the 'téléjournal de 10 heures', ⁵⁰ and the announcer who read the news did so in a European French accent. Of the reading material that Mark takes into his room as he prepares to kick his habit, we retained *Scottish Football Today*, but changed *Viz* into *Playboy* and *The Punter* into *Mad Magazine*, using titles that would not jar the text out of Edinburgh, but would also be familiar to the Montreal audience. In the same spirit, 'cans ay Export' ⁵¹ became 'cannettes de McEwan', ⁵² the brand of Scottish beer best known in Quebec. The bookie where Mark goes for the infamous toilet scene was transformed into an arcade, familiar enough in Edinburgh, because bookies just do not exist in Montreal and any attempt to explain what they are would get in the way of dramatic immediacy. References to drink also had to be modified for a city where the concept of off-licence is simply unknown. And trying to explain mince, that specialty of working-class Scottish cuisine, to a Montreal audience would have been greeted with incomprehension so 'mince 'n' totties' ⁵³ had to be made into a meat loaf - 'pain d'viande'. ⁵⁴ In other words every detail mentioned in the text had to be evaluated in light of the cultural context of the target language, but also with the

determination not to lose anything specific to Edinburgh life that could be integrated into *joual*, which proved extraordinarily hospitable to most such allusions.

Conventions of Idiom and Obscenity

The same care had to be taken with the translation of idioms, with three possible outcomes: finding an equivalent idiom, allowing a literal translation the sense of which would be clear, or rendering the idiomatic expression into more literal French. 'Yir ootay yir face' ⁵⁵ was rendered in an equivalent idiom, 't'es gelé comme une balle', ⁵⁶ 'ash-white' ⁵⁷ as 'bleu-cendre', ⁵⁸ and 'moosey-faced' ⁵⁹ as 'faces de boeufs'. ⁶⁰ An idiom like 'cut glass accent' ⁶¹ could be translated literally even though no such idiom exists in *joual*. There was no idiom in common use for 'She's got a tongue like a sailor', ⁶² which became the literal 'A s'met en tabarnac'. ⁶³ As for 'You'd shag the crack of dawn if it had hairs on it!', ⁶⁴ something was no doubt lost in translation, if not in vulgarity, in the *joual* rendering, 'Tu fourrais l'soleil si y'avait une touffe': ⁶⁵ Oddly enough, the hairy donut of the next line could be translated literally as 'un beigne poilu'. ⁶⁶ Of course, *Trainspotting* is rich in such language, it is one of the elements that made it such an interesting project to translate, but *joual* was in virtually every case a match for Welsh's language even if individual lexical items such as *gadde*, *barry*, *radge*, and *likesay*, like the two instances of rhyming slang - 'on ur Jack Jones' ⁶⁷ for 'on our own' and 'Ah'm . . . Lee Marvin' for 'I'm starvin' ⁶⁸ - disappeared in the fray. Jokes based on wordplay required rewriting, of course, and a feature like internal rhyme, used occasionally by Welsh for comic effect, could not always be duplicated at precisely the same moment in the text. Generally speaking, Welsh's richly colourful similes, however, could be accommodated with only minor alterations. For example, only the kind of saw had to be changed in 'crushed in a vice and set about wi a blunt hacksaw' ⁶⁹ becoming 'squeezés par un étau pis attaqués par une chainsaw pas aiguisée'. ⁷⁰

Another aspect of language that Welsh's text revels in is, of course, the endless repetition of swear words. This offered an interesting opportunity for translation, for *joual* has a rich and varied storehouse of expletive language, including, of course, the integration of the familiar English words repeated so relentlessly in *Trainspotting*. *Joual* in fact surpasses the endless repetition of *fuck* and *cunt* and the occasional *shite* in Scots and English with a litany of words drawn mostly from the Roman Catholic Mass. Chief among these are *câlisse* for 'chalice', *tabarnak* for 'tabernacle', *hostie* for 'host', *sacrament* for 'sacrament', *ciboire* for 'ciborium', and *criss* for 'Christ'. The most commonly used of these words are *hostie*, *tabarnac*, and *câlisse*, which found their way into the text in such phrases as 'hostie d'criss' ⁷¹ for 'fuckin shame' ⁷² and 'Davie Tabarnac Mitchell' ⁷³ for 'Davie fuckin Mitchell'. ⁷⁴ The sentence, '[t]he gig's fucked, it's aw fuckin fucked' ⁷⁵ demonstrates in the *joual* version, the dialect's playfulness with syntax: '[l]e party est fini câlisse, toute décrisse câlisse'. ⁷⁶ This use of religious terminology as the strongest form of expletive language in Quebec French reflects, of course, the importance of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec history. Quebec was cut off from France after the French lost to the British at the Battle of Quebec in 1759. The population of New France (later the British colony of Lower Canada, still later the Canadian province of Quebec) recognised the Church as its dominant authority, an authority that came out of its own traditions, and not the State, imposed upon them by a foreign presence. *Joual*, despite the secularisation of Quebec life over the last forty years, reflects this dominance. These religious swear words provided the translation of *Trainspotting* with

the possibility of affirming the Catholicism of Welsh's characters. Had Welsh written about Protestant Edinburgh drug addicts, we would have been unable to use this vocabulary with the same appropriateness and the project itself would have been undermined by the dialect itself.

The thorough-going presence of this religious terminology in *joual* swearing is nowhere more obvious than in the monologue with which Francis Begbie, the hard man, introduces himself to the audience. A study of the original Scots text reveals seventy-one instances of expletive language, with thirty-one instances of 'cunt', thirty-nine of 'fuckin', and one of 'shitein'. In the *joual* version, reflecting the francophone speaker's delight in doubling words, there are eighty-nine such swear words with thirty uses each of 'câlisse' and 'tabarnac' and eight of 'hostie' with a total of seven other words making up the complement. No anglophone, nor even Wajdi Mouawad, for all his currency with *joual*, could be the final arbiter on the use of these words and in every case we bowed to the judgment of the performers, native-born francophone Quebecers all, for their placement, which in the vigorous spirit of *joual* are transformed into adverbs and verbs and used in a vitally energetic linguistic acrobatics.

Such acrobatics allow such translations from Scots to Quebecois as the following. The vibrant obscenity of Begbie's Scots,

Ah wis fuckin game fir a swedge. If the cunts hud've fuckin come ahead it wis nae problem like. Ah mean, you ken me, ah'm no the type ay cunt thit goes lookin fir fuckin bothir likes, but ah wis the cunt wi the fuckin pool cue in ma hand, n the plukey cunt could have the fat end ay it in his pus if he wanted, like. Obviously ah wis cairryin ma fuckin chib an aw. Too fucking right. Like ah sais ah dinnae go lookin fir fuckin bother but if any lippy cunt wants tae start, ah'm fuckin game. So the wee specky cunt's pit his fuckin dough in, n he's rackin up n that, ken? The plukey cunt jist sits doon n says fuck all. Ah kept ma eye oan the hard cunt, or at least he wis a fuckin hard cunt it the school, ken. The cunt nivir sais a fuckin word. Kept his fuckin mooth shut awright; the cunt. Tommy saes tae us 'Hi Franco is that boy getting lippy? Ye ken Tam, he's no fuckin shy, that cunt. They fuckin heard um like, these cunts, but they nivir fuckin says nowt again. The plukey cunt and the so-called hard cunt. N it wid've been two against two, cause you ken Rab; dinnae get us wrong, ah lap the cunt up, but he's fuckin scoobied whin it comes tae a pagger. He's pished ootay his fuckin heid n he kin hardly haud the fuckin pool cue. This is fuckin half past eleven oan a Wednesday mornin wir talking about here. So it wid've been fuckin square-gos. But they cunts sais fuck all.²⁷

becomes in my translation:

J'ai envie d'me battre tabarnak! J'veux dire! Tu m'connais tsé, j'sus pas l'genre de grosse plotte tabarnak à charcher des hostis d'problèmes, mais j'étais le gars avec le câlisse de bat de billard din's mains et c'te

grosse plotte là à face d'étron pouvait bien se r'trouver a'c le câlisse du bout gras du bat dans sa câlisse de grosse yeule, si y'avait envie J'suis prête à l'faire tabarnak! Tsé, j'vas pas chercher une câlisse de misère à personne mais si un seul tabarnak de grosse touffe à marde veut s'mettre, j'suis game en tabarnak! Alors l'hostie d'cave met son cash et y est prêt à casser, et pis là, la grosse plotte à face d'étron s'assied et ne dis pas un câlisse de mot tabarnak! Moi j'avais toujours ce gros tabarnak de Jakey à l'oeil, ce câlisse de toff, ou au moins y étais un câlisse de tabarnak de toff à l'école tsé. Ben ce tabarnak là y a pas dit un câlisse de mot. Il gardait sa câlisse de yeule fermée, l'hostie de câlisse de grosse plotte. Tommy y nous fait "Hé! Franco, Ce gars là tu trouves pas qu'y a une grande yeule!?" "Tsé Tom y'est câlissement pas gêné, c'te tabarnak là. Y l'on entendu en sacrement, ces deux câlisses là, mais y ne tabarnakaient toujours pas un mot tabarnak. Le câlisse de grosse plotte à face d'étron pis l'aut'tabarnak de supposé toff. Ça aurait fait deux cont'deux parce que tu connais Rab; i peut pas la faire tsé. j'l'aime ben ce tabarnak là, mais c'est un hosti de gros lâche quand y faut se décâlisser le corps. Son hostie de tabarnak de face y pissait l'alcool, y arrivait à peine à t'nir son ésti d'bat de pool. A c'te moment là, on était un mercredi y 'est onze heure et demi. Fait-que ça aurait faite un deux cont'deux. Mais ces câlisses de grosses plottes là y disent pas un tabarnak de mot!⁷⁸

The linguistic vitality of the Quebecois version represents not only a translation of words, but of place, register, cultural reference and, of course, idiomatic obscenity.⁷⁹

Future Potential

As both Scotland and Quebec move forward with their ongoing projects of political self-realisation, many Quebecers and Scots have come to share a sense of common aspirations rooted in a common experience of history. Recent developments in Scotland, for example, such as the opening of the Parliament, were followed in the French media in Quebec with a keen interest. As someone who has lived these parallel cultures for many years through the medium of literary translation, it was an exciting project to see to what degree the vernacular language of Montreal could embrace the Edinburgh Scots of *Trainspotting*. The capacity of *joual* to reflect the complexities of Welsh's demotic language was so complete that one wonders what other Scots writers would be well-served by translation into this language. *Trainspotting (version française)* so far is the only work to be translated from Scots into Quebec French. It may not be the last.

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Footnotes

¹ Luc Boulanger, 'Trainspotting: De fil en aiguille' in *Voir*, 15-21 January 1999, p. 12 (trans. by Martin Bowman). [[Return to Text](#)]

² Joyce McMillan, 'Tenement Temptations' in *The Guardian*, 5 May 1989, p. 33. [[Return to Text](#)]

³ Raymond Bernatchez, 'Trainspotting pique dans le vif' in *La Presse*, 23 January 1998, B 4. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁴ Raymond Bernatchez, 'Trainspotting pique dans le vif' in *La Presse*, 23 January 1998, B 4 (trans. by Martin Bowman). [[Return to Text](#)]

⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 3. This text, used for the Quat'Sous production, is unpublished and differs slightly from that published in *Trainspotting and Headstate* (London: Minerva, 1996). [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 3. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 26. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 42. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 27. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 43. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995), p. 12. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, unpublished, 1998), p. 19. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 18. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 21. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995), p. 14. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 22. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 32. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 55. [[Return to Text](#)]

¹⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 31. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 52. [[Return to Text](#)]

²¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 27. [[Return to Text](#)]

²² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 45. [[Return to Text](#)]

²³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 31. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 53. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 36. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 22. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 10. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 16. [[Return to Text](#)]

²⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 11. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 16. [[Return to Text](#)]

³¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 38. [[Return to Text](#)]

³² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 65. [[Return to Text](#)]

³³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 12. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 12. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁵ Marie Labrecque, '*Trainspotting*, Beau fixe' in *Voir*, 29 January - 4 February 1998, trans. by Martin Bowman). [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 13. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 36. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 37. [[Return to Text](#)]

³⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 37. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁴⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 32. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁴¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 54. [[Return to Text](#)]

- ⁴² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 9. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 1. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 8. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 30. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 1. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 1. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 51. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁴⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 24. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 52. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 22. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 36. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 35. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 35. [[Return to Text](#)]
- ⁵⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 4 [[Return to Text](#)]

⁵⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 5. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁵⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 11. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁵⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 17. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁵⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 32. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 54. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 31. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 26. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 43. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 29. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 48. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 48. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 10. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 41. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁶⁹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 11. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁰ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 17. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷¹ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 20. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷² Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 13. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 43. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁴ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 26. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 13. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), p. 20. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁷ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, The Citizens' Theatre, 1995, unpublished), p. 18. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁸ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (adaptation by Harry Gibson, trans. by Martin Bowman and Wajdi Mouawad, Theatre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, 1998, unpublished), pp. 27-28. [[Return to Text](#)]

⁷⁹ For a further discussion of the details of this passage follow *Trainspotting* hyperlink at <http://www.literarytranslation.com/index2.html> [[Return to Text](#)]