

Peter Graves

Fröding, Burns, Scott and Carlyle

In February 1890 the Swedish poet Gustaf Fröding, at that time convalescing in a nerve sanatorium in Schleswig, wrote a respectful letter to Professor Carl Rupert Nyblom, Professor of Aesthetics in the University of Uppsala. He wrote:¹

24 Feb 90

Dear Professor,

As you can see, enclosed herewith are a number of translations of foreign poets – Burns, Chamisso, Lenau, Poe – which I was intending to include in a collection of poems that will possibly be published. However, I know that you, Professor, have translated some poems by these authors, although I can't remember which, and since I don't want to make myself appear to be a plagiariser, I have taken the liberty – you might possibly think it pushiness – of contacting you to request information. My translations are, admittedly, no more than trifles but it would be despicable if they were to appear in print – irrespective of whether they are new of their kind – as second editions of old familiar things...

I ask your forgiveness if I am being discourteous in requesting this, and sign myself,

Humbly yours,

Gustaf Fröding,

Dr Kahlbaum's Sanatorium, Görlitz, Schleswig. [Brev 1, 173-74]

As with a good deal else that Fröding did, the innocent letter misfired. He received in return a postcard from Nyblom pointing out, not unkindly, that 'the only surprising thing about your letter was that, since it had insufficient stamps, I had to pay double postage. But my boys are stamp collectors

and, since the four stamps were of a new variety, one thing balances out the other'. Fröding, with his hyper-sensitive nature, immediately over-reacted and replied:

Görlitz, 4 March 90

Dear Professor,

At the same time as expressing my gratitude for your kind answer, I must express my regret that, quite involuntarily, I caused you unnecessary expense. The insufficiency of stamps must have been caused by the carelessness of my attendant – illness prevents me from attending to the despatch of my own letters.

In order to make recompense, I am, however, sending a postal order for a sum equal to twice the postage.

The mistake, or whatever I should call it, vexes me all the more because I was already regretting my boldness in having written to you.

I have however received a possibly useful and necessary lesson in not setting out into uncharted waters. The slightly sneering tone of your card suggests that you consider me to have been insolent, and I suppose I was – though it was neither knowingly nor willingly. I assume, however, that it is not without precedent for an unknown writer to turn to a well-known author and scholar requesting the latter's opinion of some *opus* or the other without this being thought too daring. That wasn't actually my intention though I won't deny that I considered the possibility that you might in passing make some remarks about the quality of the translations. But my request doesn't seem to me to have been any bolder than that.

I regret yet again that I, a stranger, troubled you and I sign myself humbly,

Gustaf Fröding.

PS. On re-reading your card it seems to be less 'sneering' than 'good-natured and indulgent', and it might, therefore, be foolish of me to feel wounded and depressed.

I have, however, lost the courage to send the translations for publication. I am sending you herewith my last efforts so that your collection is complete and I leave it to you (as

PETER GRAVES

with the earlier ones) to do as you think fit – burn them over a slow fire, consign them to the wastepaper basket or keep them as terrible warnings of bad translation, useful in the education of young poets. In the hope that you will graciously view all of your dealings with me in a humorous light, I sign myself humbly, as above.

PPS. I hope by all the gods and by the royal imperial post-office that this lot carries the correct value of stamps! [Brev 1, 174-75]

Gustaf Fröding (1860-1911) was a member of the generation known in Swedish literary history as 'nittiotalisterna' – the writers of the 1890s. It was a generation that brought romanticism back into literature after the social realism of the 1880s, a decade dominated by the Naturalism of Zola introduced to Scandinavia by the Danish critic Georg Brandes. The interests of the writers of the 90s turned to history rather than the current social debate, to the individual rather than society, to the provinces rather than the cities, to a sense of nation rather than class, to nature rather than civilisation, to folk culture rather than high culture. Reflexes of this cultural change of focus are as clearly revealed in, for instance, music, the visual arts and the museum world as in literature: we can see them in the paintings of Anders Zorn and Carl Larsson, in the slightly later music of Stenhammar and Alfvén, and in Artur Hazelius' creation of the first open-air folk-museum at Skansen in 1891.

Fröding was born into the squirearchy of the densely-forested western province of Värmland, bordered to the south by the lake Vänern, to the west by Norway and to the north by Dalarna. It was, and is, a province with a strong sense of identity, with a feeling of remoteness from the centre, with a distinct dialect and a notable folk-culture. Yet it has also been the home province of some of the major names of Swedish literature: Fröding himself, but before him Tegnér, contemporary with him Selma Lagerlöf, and today Göran Tunström.

For some years Fröding studied at Uppsala but without graduating. There he lived a wild life, particularly in terms

of alcohol, no doubt partly to boost himself against the nervousness and depression that had been apparent even during his schooldays. He returned to Värmland, lived with relations and worked for some time as a journalist on *Karlstad-Tidningen*. From then on his mental instability increased and the rest of his life was interspersed with periods in mental hospitals – periods that eventually became more or less continuous. His time of full poetic creativity was astonishingly short: he published *Gitarr och dragharmonika* (Guitar and Concertina) in 1891, *Nya dikter* (New Poems) 1894, *Stänk och flikar* (Splashes and Patches) 1896, *Räggler å paschaser* (Stories and Tales) 1896, *Nytt och gammalt* (New and Old) 1897 and *Gralstänk* (Grail Splashes) 1898. In 1910 came *Efterskörd* (Gleanings), and in 1913 the incomplete poetic notebooks of his last years were published posthumously as *Reconvalescentia*.

Gustaf Fröding is perhaps Sweden's finest lyric poet. In a purely formal sense he brought rhyming and metrical verse to an unsurpassable peak, so much so that it was popularly said that the generation that followed him had nowhere to go but to free verse. His rhythms and rhymes flow unforced, never contradicting the natural patterns of the language and never at odds with the content. Not surprisingly, many of his poems have become songs and many are still sung. His language ranges from the broadest Värmland dialect to the most elegant literary Swedish. But if his formal and linguistic skills are astounding so, too, is the scope of poetic theme and mood he gives expression to. With burlesque humour he can be a portraitist of drunken poets and eccentric parsons. He can depict the toiling life of the subsistence farmer. He can rejoice in desirable young women and healthy men. He can rage against oppression and satirise the oppressor. He can enter the dark mythic world of the folk-ballad but equally exult with the Song of Songs. At one moment he reveals himself and his sense of alienation in the world, at another he marches with Xenophon and his ten thousand Greeks. Central to it all is Värmland – his universe, in which in much of his poetry he brings the balm of mild reconciling humour to what he called 'the questioning answers and unanswered questions about good

and evil'.

*

Fröding's interest in Scottish literature goes back a good deal earlier than his correspondence with Professor Nyblom in 1890. Two of his earliest surviving poems, 'Claverhouse' and 'Abbotsford', testify to his fascination with Sir Walter Scott.² Neither of them, it must be said, is a very good poem; but, then, they are early, dated by one scholar to 1883 when Fröding was a twenty-three year old student in Uppsala or, according to Fröding's sister Cecilia, written earlier when he was still a sixteen or seventeen year old gymnasium pupil in Karlstad.³ Cecilia Fröding in her memoirs *O minns du Ali Baba* (O, Do You Remember Ali Baba?) tells us that her brother discovered both Scott and Burns when he was in his teens and that he read Scott, in particular, voraciously: 'At this time Walter Scott was his favourite author. Through him he got interested in Robert Burns who later became the poet who, of all of them, was closest to his heart.'⁴

That Scott's novels were available in Fröding's parents' bookcases is hardly surprising.⁵ The family had literary interests and, that being so, it would have been more remarkable if Scott's work had not been present, given his enormous popularity throughout Europe and not least in Sweden. A Swedish edition of Scott's novels in translation had appeared in the 1850s (individual novels had appeared earlier) and just how widespread his influence was is revealed in Erik Lindström's study of that influence in the first half of the 19th century.⁶

'Claverhouse' (Skr 1, 5-9) is based on the portrayal of John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscount Dundee (1649-89) in Scott's novel *Old Mortality*. Scott's portrait is a fascinating one – for which he was attacked in some Presbyterian circles when the novel appeared in 1816. He was accused of depicting the Covenanters in a bad light and 'an obvious pejorative factor is Scott's transformation of the arch-fiend of Presbyterian historiography, Claverhouse, into a gallant and essentially sympathetic figure' (OM xxxvii).⁷ Scott's

Claverhouse is, of course, personally brave and a competent commander even in adversity ('Never did man, however, better maintain the character of a soldier than he did that day' OM 195). He is ruthless towards the enemies of the state but this is balanced by a sense of honour ('Claverhouse, though stern and relentless, is by all accounts, brave, fair, and honourable' OM 129). He is driven to what he himself refers to as 'this disgusting drudgery' (OM 351) not by personal ambition or animosity but by a sense of duty and service ('let it be your first task to subject to the public interest, and to the discharge of your duty, your private passions, affections and feelings' OM 164). Scott's Claverhouse has, moreover, all the chivalrous qualities of the romantic, aristocratic hero: his speech throughout is measured, civil and English, his manners are serene and courteous, his appearance handsome and superior. The Covenanters, on the other hand, are consistently drawn as a superstitious, fanatical rabble from the underclasses: it is telling that they speak – or rather rant – in Scots. Scott's view of them is perhaps most revealingly summarised in his description of their women and children at the skirmish at Drumclog: 'On the side of the hill that rose above the array of battle which they had adopted, were seen the women and the children...Like the females of ancient Germanic tribes, the shrill cries which they raised...acted as an incentive to their relatives to fight to the last in defence of that which was dearest to them' (OM 182). To the Covenanters Claverhouse is 'a man gifted by the Evil Spirit' (OM 195) and thus in popular belief only vulnerable to a silver bullet.

Fröding's poem is a splendidly declamatory piece that addresses its listener direct from the first stanza and then proceeds with a firm martial rhythm for thirteen stanzas. In the first stanza Claverhouse is introduced to us as noble, proud and brave:

Säg, minns du kanske Claverhouse
ock kallad lord Dundee,
han var av Grahames ädla blod
och stolthet sjöd däri.

PETER GRAVES

Han var en man, som aldrig vek,
och faran var för honom lek
och aldrig såg du honom blek
i stridens raseri.

[Say, do you remember Claverhouse
also known as lord Dundee,
he was of the Grahame's noble blood
with pride seething in it.
He was a man who never broke his word,
and danger was child's play to him
and you never saw him pale
in the fury of battle.]

Stanzas 2-5 depict his relentless hounding of the Covenanters
and their hatred for him:

Och barn och kvinnor skonade
han ingalunda, "ty
rebellavföda växer opp
och är av samma gry
som gamla whiggas", tänkte han,
"och kvinnan eggas upp sin man".

[And women and children were
by no means spared by him, "for
the offspring of rebels grow up
and are of the same mettle
as old Whigs", he thought,
"and women stir up their men".]

Stanza 6 states that he is under the protection and command of
the devil:

Mot döden han föraktfullt ler
och är med häxeri
ställd under onda makters vård,
så säges det, och gjuden hård
och hin rår om den tappre lord,

den tappre lord Dundee.

[He smiles scornfully at death
and, by witchcraft, is
placed under the protection of evil powers,
so it's said, and forged hard,
and the Devil possesses the bold lord,
the bold lord Dundee.]

In stanzas 7-11 Claverhouse's bloodthirsty oppressions are contrasted with his courtier qualities, his handsomeness and his skill as a dancer. The final stanzas then return to the subject of evil powers and tell of his death – by a silver bullet – at Killiecrankie and of the sightings of the ghosts of Claverhouse and his troopers.

In his discussion of this poem the literary historian John Landquist writes that Fröding 'förhålligar' (glorifies) Claverhouse because the latter represents a mixture of elegant man-of-the-world qualities with resilience against erotic temptation, physical bravery and uncompromising harshness towards his enemies. In Landquist's view – which is that of the psychological critic – Fröding loves and celebrates the characteristics in Claverhouse that he (Fröding) does not possess: 'With the insecurity and shyness of his external life, Fröding thus combined a dream-life of a completely contrary kind'.⁸ Stig Sjöholm, too, sees the poem essentially in this light ('Claverhouse...still shows an almost schoolboyish hero-worship') although he does point to some 'more human' elements in it.⁹ Such views, however, do not seem supported by a careful reading of the poem. Throughout all thirteen stanzas, what Landquist calls a 'glorification' of Claverhouse is counterpointed by a series of value-laden phrases that the poet uses to point to the negative ethical aspects of Claverhouse's activities. A few of the many such phrases are: 'women and children were not spared by him' (stanza 4); 'thus he marched on and murdered them' (stanza 5); 'had four hundred murders on his conscience' (stanza 8); 'horrifying cries of murder and massacre' (stanza 11).

All of this suggests that we are dealing with something

more interesting than a straightforward 'schoolboyish' eulogy of a military hero. The Swedish neo-romantic writers of the last decade of the 19th century were undoubtedly drawn to depictions of heroic individuals, particularly historical figures and, in the case of Sweden, even more particularly to the figure of Karl XII (1682-1718). But that fascination is more often than is given credit for balanced by a recognition of the ethically questionable aspects of military heroism: you find it, for instance, in Selma Lagerlöf's depiction of Karl XII in her novel *Löwensköldska ringen* (The Löwensköld Ring, 1925), and you even find it in Verner von Heidenstam's *Karolinerna* (The Charles Men, 1891-98). That, it seems to me, is where Fröding's Claverhouse belongs. If we compare the character of Claverhouse as presented by Fröding with the admittedly much more rounded figure in *Old Mortality* we can see that, while all the elements of the Swedish version are present in the Scots version, Fröding has chosen to foreground elements that Scott has preferred to keep at a distance. Fröding emphasizes Claverhouse's ruthlessness without reference to justice and mercy; he views Claverhouse's chivalrous qualities as a psychological contradiction to his harshness rather than as a mitigating factor; he accepts, as a matter of poetic truth, Claverhouse's alliance with the Devil whereas in Scott its function is to underline the ignorance and fanaticism of the Covenanters.

The second poem, 'Abbotsford', is a eulogy to Sir Walter Scott himself. The poem opens with the words:

Ack, romantikens ton förklungit,
dess sista sträng på harpan sprungit,
dess störste skald, sir Walter Scott,
för längesen från oss har gått.

[Alas, the tones of romanticism have faded,
its last string on the harp has broken,
its greatest bard, Sir Walter Scott,
departed from us long ago.]

We should remember that the poem was written shortly

before or after the opening of the 1880s, that is, the decade when Naturalism rather than Romanticism was foremost. The poet goes on to imagine that the grounds of Abbotsford are populated by the shades of the characters of Scott's novels: from *Waverley* come 'old, faithful Evan Dhu', Fergus MacIvor and Bonnie Prince Charlie; we meet Prince David of Rothsay from *The Fair Maid of Perth*, Ravenswood from *The Bride of Lammermuir* and Mary Queen of Scots from *The Abbot*; *A Legend of Montrose* gives Dugald Dalgetty and the Marquis of Montrose himself; and, finally, 'a beautiful Mediterranean figure, royally proud in every way' – Rebecca from *Ivanhoe*. In the last two stanzas the poet moves into the house where he introduces us to Sir Walter himself:

Ja, här han satt av sjukdom bruten,
men in i döden dock besluten,
att om han icke leva kan,
han dock ska dö som gentleman.

[Yes, here he sat, broken by illness,
but determined unto death,
that if he cannot live,
he will at least die as a gentleman.]

A third early poem 'Vapenvila' (Truce) (Skr 1, 47-49), printed first in 1886, picks up and questions more overtly the theme of warrior heroism discussed above with reference to 'Claverhouse'. The Scott analogue in this case has been suggested as being 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel'.¹⁰ 'Vapenvila' opens with stanzas describing the bloodthirsty and inhuman hatred of border warfare:

Om gränsen de trätte och slogos,
tills gränsen av blodstänk blev röd,
och fästningar gävos och togos
och högt över dödsskränen ljöd:

'Hugg skurkarne sönder och samman,
de strida mot sanningens sak',

PETER GRAVES

och hatet, den härjande flamman,
sjöd vilt i bataljernas brak.

[They quarrelled and fought for the border,
until the border was spattered red with blood,
and fortresses were given and taken
and high above the scream of death was heard:

'Chop the villains completely to pieces,
they are fighting against the cause of truth',
and hate, the ravaging flame,
seethed savagely in the noise of the battles.]

The poet then moves on to suggest the impossibility of blind hatred once one has met and knows the foe; strife may continue but the foe will be recognised as having the same human qualities and aspirations as oneself:

Att fiender icke blott strida
av ondska och låghet han fann:
de tro och förtvivla och lida
och längta och hoppas som han.

[He found that enemies do not merely fight
out of evil and base motives:
they believe and despair and suffer
and long and hope just as he does.]

As Olsson has pointed out, 'Vapenvila' does not only give voice to a fascination with Scott and to Fröding's moral questioning of warfare but it also has a direct contemporary relevance in that the ending of the Union between Norway and Sweden was high on the political agenda at the time it was written – and Fröding's Värmland is one of the Swedish border provinces.¹¹

If Scott was there at the beginning of Fröding's poetic career he was equally there at the end: reminiscences and motifs from Scott 'form a frame to his writing' as Stig Sjöholm has phrased it.¹² During Fröding's long periods in hospital he

read voraciously and widely; he also had the habit of writing copious marginal notes in what he was reading. In 1904, while in the Uppsala Hospital, he was reading and annotating J. A. Froude's twelve volume *History of England* and it is clear that not only was his memory of Scott's works sound but that 'he had a tendency to see parts of English history with Scott's eyes, or to call up by association related parts of Scott's productions'. Sjöholm goes on to quote some of his annotations. Of Froude's depiction of Queen Elizabeth, for instance, Fröding comments: 'Walter Scott's Elizabeth [in *Kenilworth*] seems to me on the whole to be in agreement with Froude's – the character of a ruler, of powerful intelligence, but sometimes thrown off balance by weaknesses that are usually regarded as specifically female'.¹³ And later again in his life, in the poetic notebooks that he was writing during his last three years and which were published posthumously in 1913 with the title *Reconvalescentia*, he opens with a Scottish poem 'Den kufvade klanen' (The Suppressed Clan), subtitled in the published version 'see W. Scott' but in another notebook version 'Reminiscence from W. Scott and Others'.

'Den kufvade klanen' (Skr 6, 205-12), consisting of seven short 'songs', opens with the poet lamenting the fading of memories of the past. It then moves back into the past to present us with the picture of the Highland chief ('den store Glengarran' – the great Glengarran) lying on his bier after death in battle; around him are the last few mourners and 'the lad without inheritance'. The last bard sings of the past might of the clan, now powerless in the face of Cumberland's murderous rabble:

En skog kan ej stå för orkanen,
vi äro de sista af klanen,
vi äro för alltid förskjutna
från hembygdens älskade mark!

[A forest cannot resist the hurricane,
we are the last of the clan,
we are displaced for ever
from the beloved soil of our home!]

PETER GRAVES

All that remains for the clan is to follow the young Glengarran – 'the lad without inheritance' – into the service of the conqueror, the House of Hanover, and to die performing great deeds in distant countries, 'i Tibets och Afrikas sand' (in the sands of Tibet and Africa). Meanwhile, the dear lands the clan has once inhabited are:

hyrts ut af den främmande herren
från London som jaktmark åt klubben,
vid insjön fabrikerna torna
sig skyhögt, af skogen är stubben
det enda, som finns af det forna,
och borgen, där höfdingen bodde,
gjorts om till en papperskvarn.

[rented out by the foreign masters
from London as hunting land for the club,
factories tower beside the lake
sky-high; the stumps of the forest
are all that is left of the past,
and the stronghold where the chief lived
has been converted to a paper-mill.]

The notebooks contain many variant lines and phrases, in the earliest of which the clan is named as the Macdonalds. And in a sketched continuation Fröding has the clan appearing as Queen Victoria's guard at Balmoral, where the Queen states her partially shared ancestry with them: 'jag är Stuart såväl som Hannover' (I am Stuart as well as Hanover).¹⁴

So the enthusiasm for and stimulus from Sir Walter Scott remained with Fröding to the end. But what is particularly fascinating and, I think, touching about 'Den kufvade klanen' is the identification of Fröding and Glengarran, of Värmland and Scotland in the verses. Fröding was a descendant of the old Värmland squirearchy, a class with strong, tight-knit and localised traditions and, moreover, a class that had suffered decline and 'dispossession' with the industrialisation of forestry and iron-working during the 19th century: his own

It is not, of course, my intention to undertake any particularly deep and detailed research and consequently I do not need to examine a mass of more or less comprehensive sources. The main thing for me is just to gain an accurate picture of the poet's life and work so that my account should not conflict with the most recent literary research results about him. [Brev 1, 278]

There is no documentary evidence to show whether Schück replied to Fröding's letter, but in a note to a reprint of his Burns' booklet some twenty years later, Fröding stated: 'The only things I managed to get hold of were a monograph by the British cleric Sharpe, an essay by Carlyle, some English literary handbooks, Burns' own commentary in a Tauchnitz edition of his works,¹⁹ and what was written about him in Ahnfelt's *History of World Literature*' (Brev 1, 278, note). On the 4 November 1892, that is just over a year after the correspondence with his sister and Schück, writing from a private nursing home outside Lillehammer in Norway, Fröding sent what must have been the final proofs of the Verdandi booklet to the publisher Albert Bonnier. The work appeared before Christmas with the title *Folkskalden Robert Burns. En lefnadsteckning efter engelska källor* (Robert Burns – Poet of the People. An Account of his Life based on English Sources).²⁰

As its title suggests, Fröding's booklet devotes more space to a description of Burns' biography than to the poetry as such. Fröding, however, rates the poetry very highly. He stresses, in particular, its universal and eternal qualities. Literary fashions may change but mankind's emotional life remains constant, and that which gives a true reflection of that life will remain: the Song of Solomon, Old Norse poetry, Shakespeare, Goethe – and Burns. His poems 'exert the same power on the uneducated settlers in the wilds of Australia and America as they do on the most sophisticated connoisseurs in the literary circles of London' (Skr 5, 68). This is because they demonstrate a perfect union of form and 'nature' – they are as natural as bird-song in their expressions of joy and sorrow but they also reveal 'all the sensitivity and soulfulness that

pertain to a highly-developed and, in a profound sense, refined character, together with a harmoniousness that, even without the help of a composer, has the effect of the most melodic music' (Skr 5, 68). Writing of literary influence on Burns, Fröding refers to Allan Ramsay and to Ferguson but points especially to 'a collection of Scottish folk-songs' Burns loved in his youth. And summarising Burns' importance, he writes: 'he was the first seriously to break with the numbed and numbing French taste, and with the fresh and natural sources in his songs he gave new life to British poetry, which later through Wordsworth, Scott and Byron took a powerful hold on the cultural life of Europe' (Skr 5, 103).

Echoes of Carlyle's essay on Burns are audible throughout Fröding's booklet and it is not without sympathy that one imagines the Swedish poet struggling with Carlyle's digressive verbosity. On a number of occasions Carlyle is quoted direct and with approval: Fröding concurs with Carlyle that, in the case of 'The Jolly Beggars', 'the subject truly is among the lowest in Nature – but it only the more shows our Poet's gift in raising it into the domain of Art' (TC 215),²¹ and he agrees with Carlyle's assessment that, towards the end of Burns' life, only 'three gates of deliverance' were open to him – 'clear poetical activity; madness; or death' (TC 232). It seems likely, too, that Fröding's references to Ramsay and Ferguson are drawn from Carlyle, as is his judgement that it was Burns who freed British literature from French taste. Carlyle had also stressed Burns' popularity with all classes of men in every far-flung corner where English is spoken, and he had likewise suggested Burns' all-round intellect – 'All the faculties of Burns' mind were...equally vigorous' (TC 209). Behind Fröding's statement 'Love first...and love last...in Burns' eyes more or less everything is beautiful' (Skr 5, 77) we can hear Carlyle's words '...Burns's fervid affection, his generous all-embracing Love...Not man only, but all that environs man in the material and moral universe, is lovely in his sight' (TC 211). And to Carlyle we can probably trace Fröding's somewhat dismissive view of 'the perhaps over-regarded poem about Tam O'Shanter' (Skr 5, 100), of which Carlyle wrote: 'Tam O'Shanter itself, which enjoys so high a

favour, does not appear to us, at all decisively, to come under this last [poetical] category' (TC 214).

For all that Fröding drew on Carlyle there is ultimately the world of difference between the two men's perceptions of Burns. To Carlyle, notwithstanding his praise, Burns is limited, a might-have-been: 'All that remains of Burns...seems to us...no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him...His poems are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions...Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments, would be at once unprofitable and unfair' (TC 201). And of Burns the man, when he compares him with Locke, Milton and Cervantes, Carlyle is similarly critical: 'His morality, in most of its practical points, is that of a mere worldly man; enjoyment, in a finer or coarser shape, is the only thing he longs and strives for' (TC 236). Fröding's judgements are much more humane and, it has to be said, more informed with literary sensibility than those of the Victorian panjandrum. He does not find Burns wanting simply for being the kind of poet he was but recognises with joy and wonder the formal and emotional perfection that Burns achieved in his chosen forms. Of Burns the man, he concludes: 'It is actually a pointless task to try to find explanations for that sort of double personality...To judge, or to try to excuse, is even more pointless. One has to be satisfied with pointing to the failings as well as the noble characteristics...' (Skr 5, 104).

It should be mentioned that Fröding's familiarity with the writings of Carlyle went well beyond the latter's essay on Burns. He had certainly read and admired *The French Revolution* – as had most of the Swedish writers of the 1890s. He had his own copy of *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* and it contains a number of marginal annotations on the topic of Walter Scott.²² Nor was he uncritical of Carlyle, referring to the latter's 'piously sarcastic judge's expression' – an expression that he puts on 'for humanity as a whole – except for the "more or less arbitrarily chosen elite" that Carlyle calls "the heroes"'.²³

Whenever Fröding refers to his Burns translations he does so in a dismissive tone. In the letter to Nyblom (Brev 1, 173) he calls them 'obetydligheter' (trifles); later, to Mauritz Hellberg (Brev 1, 182), he says they are 'dilettantverk' (amateurish work). We should be careful not to take such statements literally since Fröding's references to his own works are frequently excessively, even neurotically, modest. On a number of occasions he insists that Burns is 'oöversättlig' (intranslatable) (Skr 5, 82; Brev 1, 209) and only once does he say anything about the principles he followed when translating. This is in response to a letter from Nyblom who had commented that Fröding's translations sometimes became paraphrases. Fröding answered: 'The freedoms I have taken with the originals are partly because of idleness but also partly a matter of principle. I imagine how the poet would express himself if he were writing in Swedish, and it seems to me that he would not always choose the same words and expressions as in the foreign language – after all, the *sound of the words* is often of decisive importance to the poet. It seems to me that the most recent poets pay much too little attention to the musical element in poetic form – the mood depends almost exclusively on it' (Brev 1, 179).

In fact, when we look at the fourteen poems translated by Fröding we find that, with two exceptions that come into the category of paraphrases, the translations are true to the source texts in almost all respects – remarkably so given the exigencies of metre and rhyme – and that the 'freedoms' he takes are minimal. A comparison of 'Ae fond kiss' with Fröding's version 'Än en kyss' reveals the quality of his work as translator. To begin with generalities, but important generalities. 'Än en kyss' can be read, recited or sung as a fine Swedish poem in its own right, that is, it shows no trace of being a translation, of having its origin in any other language than the one it appears in. Nowhere does it falter and nowhere does it demonstrate those awkwardnesses that even good translations are prone to. (All of this could, however, mean that it is a thoroughly bad translation, that

in order to create a viable poem in the target language the translator has wilfully or otherwise distorted the poem as it existed in the source language: there are many examples of good poems that are simultaneously bad translations.)

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then for ever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him:
Me, nae chearful twinkle lights me;
Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy:
But to see her, was to love her;
Love but her, and love forever.

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly!
Never met – or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace, Enjoyment, Love and Pleasure!

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
Ae fareweel, Alas for ever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

[Än en kyss, och så ett sista
avsked, du för alltid mista!
Djupt i hjärtat vill jag bära
dig med trofast sorg, min kära.

PETER GRAVES

Den en glimt av hopp ledsagar,
är en dåre, om han klagar.
Mig mot sorgerna skall värna
ingen glimt från hoppets stjärna.

Men mitt val jag vill ej klandra,
du var mera ljuv än andra,
svår att motstå, svår att mista,
värd att älskas till det sista.

Hade vi ej mötts i livet,
ej så blint och övergivet
blevo till varandra knutna
– ej vi skildes hjärtebrutna.

Så farväl, du var mig kärast,
skönast, ljuvast, renast, skärast!
Så farväl! Och dig tillstädje
lyckan allt av livets glädje!

Så farväl och så den sista
kyssen, du för alltid mista!
Djupt i hjärtat vill jag bära
dig med trofast sorg, min kära!]

In terms of rhyme scheme and metre, 'Ae fond kiss' is written in trochaic tetrameters – that is, there are four feet in each line and those feet are trochees (a strong stress followed by a weak stress i.e. — x):

— x — x — x — x

Ae fond | kiss, and | then we | sever

The rhymes are in couplets and, since the metre is trochaic, this means that the rhymes are technically feminine rhymes i.e. the final syllable of the line is unaccented and therefore, to create a full value rhyme, the penultimate syllable of the line should also rhyme (e.g. grieves him / leaves him). Although the poem has twenty-four lines rhyming in couplets, thus making a possible maximum of twelve rhymes, Burns only uses five rhymes: the *aa* rhyme dominates, returning four

times in the poem (sever / ever; love her / ever; treasure / Pleasure; sever / ever), and the *bb* rhyme is repeated at the end. The effect of the limitation on the number of rhymes and of the repetition of the first stanza at the end is to bind the poem together into a tight and coherent whole, to prefer a tightly closed circle to linear development. One further point about Burns' metrication, and it is one that is less visible on the page than when the song is heard sung: the last foot of each line is preceded by the slightest pause, which throws weight on to the immediately following rhyme and thus stresses the semantic import of the rhyming word(s). If we read nothing but the list of rhymes we find that they effectively function as a summary of the song as a whole.

Fröding parallels Burns' rhyme scheme almost exactly. The use of trochaic metre gives him an advantage in that Swedish, thanks to its system of adjectival endings and verbal and nominal forms, offers a natural abundance of trochees. As in Burns, the lines are tetrameters and they rhyme in couplets. The rhymes likewise are feminine and they flow naturally – that is, the achievement of rhyme is not marred either by convolutions of word order or by strained selection of rhyming vocabulary. Like Burns, Fröding limits the number of rhymes – in this case to eight, with three *aa* rhymes and three *bb* rhymes. Particularly impressive is Fröding's retention of the pause before the last foot of each line, thus imparting an unmistakably authentic cadence to his translation.

'Ae fond kiss' is, of course, a song of parting from a lover. The poet states in stanza 1 the sorrow of parting and then moves on in stanza 2 to state the hopelessness of his position; in stanza 3 the irresistibility of the loved one is voiced, together with his lack of regret at having loved her; stanza 4 suggests that had their love not been so deep and blind they would not now be suffering; stanza 5 returns to the 'farewell' but adds the wish that the loved one will prosper in life; stanza 6 closes the circle by repeating stanza 1. Thematically, Fröding's translation follows the source text as outlined above couplet by couplet. The most important structural principles of the poem, which are its use of parallelism and repetition, are reproduced throughout. The imagery, too, remains the same in

PETER GRAVES

translation and in source text – thus, for instance, in stanza 2 the image of the 'twinkle' from 'the star of hope' remains the 'glimt från hoppets stjärna'.

The translation, however, is far from slavish: Fröding is less concerned with immediate word-equivalence than with the musical, formal, thematic and emotional equivalences already noted. A literal back translation of Stanza 5 is revealing of his method:

So farewell, you were to me dearest,
loveliest, sweetest, purest, prettiest!
So farewell! And to you be granted
by Fortune all of the joy of life!

Here we might say that the translation misses out the incremental list 'joy and treasure, Peace, Enjoyment, Love and Pleasure' and summarises it with 'all the joy of life' – an apparent weakening since the emotional force of the stanza depends on the incrementation. But Fröding has instead provided a compensatory incrementation in the first couplet by stacking the identically-suffixed (and to some extent alliterating) superlatives 'kärast, skönast, ljuvast, renast, skärast'. In other words, as a poet himself, he has recognised that word-equivalence is only one of many equivalences open to the translator – and not necessarily the most important one at that.

It is difficult to imagine better translations of Burns into any language than those Fröding produced in Swedish. And given his enthusiasm for Scottish literature it is not surprising that, unlike many poetic translators, he does not re-locate his texts in the landscape of his target audience, nor does he generalise the landscape into some anonymous poetic zone. Instead, his translated texts remain firmly localised in Scotland and peopled by Scots:

By Oughtertyre grows the aik,
On Yarrow banks the birken shaw;
But Phemie was a bonier lass
Than braes o' Yarrow ever saw.

[Vid Auchtertyre står eken grön
och björkar står vid Yarrow's våg,
men sådan tös som Phemie var
ej Yarrowdalen såg.]

What is perhaps surprising is that Fröding, who himself produced a good deal of verse in the Värmland dialect, should have consistently translated Burns into standard Swedish. The reason, I suspect, is to be found in Fröding's class background; fluent though he was in Värmland dialect and for all his familiarity with the traditions of the people, he was a product of the upper-class. The verse he wrote in dialect tends to deal with humorous topics, with anecdotes from folk-life, with portraits of peasants and eccentrics, but the language of the farmers, crofters and foresters was not his own language and it was not a language that he would have considered appropriate beyond a limited range of themes. None of the poems and songs he translated come into the broadly humorous or satirical categories, most of them being love songs or songs to nature. One can only regret that the plans he was discussing with Gustaf af Geijerstam in 1897 to produce a whole volume of Burns came to nothing (Brev 2, 330-31).²⁴

Notes

1. Fröding's letters have been published in two volumes: G. Michanek & I. Rosenblad (eds), *Gustaf Frödings brev 1 & 2*, Stockholm: Bonnier, 1981-82. (Hereafter referred to as Brev.)
2. Unless otherwise stated, references to Fröding's works are to the five volume edition: *Skrifter av Gustaf Fröding 1-5*, Stockholm: Bonniers, 1949. (Hereafter abbreviated to Skr.)
3. John Landquist, *Gustaf Fröding: En biografi*, Stockholm: Bonniers, 1956, p. 175.
4. Cecilia Fröding, *O minns du Ali Baba*, Stockholm: Norstedts, 1960, p. 99.
5. Henry Olsson, *Fröding: ett diktarpporträtt*, Stockholm:

- Norstedts, 1950, p. 134; Landquist, 167.
6. Erik Lindström, *Walter Scott och den historiska romanen och novellen i Sverige intill 1850*, Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerber, 1925.
 7. References to Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* are to the edition edited by Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson (Oxford: OUP World's Classics, 1993).
 8. Landquist, p. 169.
 9. Stig Sjöholm, *Övermänniskotanken i Gustaf Frödings diktning*, Göteborg: Elanders boktryckeri aktiebolag, 1940, p. 179.
 10. Olsson, p. 221.
 11. Olsson, p. 221.
 12. Sjöholm, p. 171.
 13. Sjöholm, pp. 169-70.
 14. R. G. Berg (ed), *Samlade skrifter av Gustaf Fröding 1-16*, Stockholm: Bonniers, 1917-22; 'Den kufvade klanen' and its variants are to be found in vol. 8, pp. 3-10 and pp. 53-61.
 15. Olsson, p. 214.
 16. Cecilia Fröding, p. 102.
 17. Titles and numbering of works by Burns are according to James Kinsley (ed), *Burns: Poems and Songs*, Oxford: OUP, 1969.
 18. Henrik Schück (1855-1947), by far the most prominent literary historian of his time; best known as joint editor of *Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*.
 19. The German publishing house of Bernhard Tauchnitz, Leipzig, became well known for its series *Collection of British Authors*, which began in 1841.
 20. References here are to the version that appears in *Skr* 5, 67-105.
 21. Carlyle's essay on Burns first appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, No. 96 (1828). References here are to: Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* Vol. 1, London: Chapman and Hall, 1888. (Hereafter abbreviated to TC.)
 22. Sjöholm, p. 416.
 23. Sjöholm, p. 133.

24. At the proof stage of this article I became aware of Gustaf Johnson's book *Frödings lyriska översättningar* (Gustaf Fröding-sällskapets skriftserie XIX, 1987) which surveys all of Fröding's translations, from German as well as from English. Johnson adds another Burns translation to the total: 'Själva fan for i väg med vår tullkarl' (The de'il's awa wi' the exciseman, 386).