

REVIEWS

! I'd travel languages and
flattering, ! gloom and
grammar, land and shore, !
falsehood and truth, deer-
forest and harbour, ! Greek,
Gaelic and Danish, ! French,
Arabic and Latin, ! books of
grammar and the ridge of the
sea, ! waves and headland
and kyle and dictionary !
mountain and glen and ocean
and maps ! I'd travel
unknown regions and the
atlas, ! the ridge of the sea, the
ridge of the sea, ! monkey,
marvel, anaconda... ! pyramid
and pterodactyl, ! the ridge of
the sea, the ridge of the sea.]

Thomas Owen Clancy

Peter Graves

Fröding , Burns and Scott

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The influence that Scottish writers have exerted beyond the boundaries of their own relatively tiny country never ceases to amaze. The Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT) project based in the National Library of Scotland has tracked down Scottish writing metamorphosed into a bewildering spectrum of languages from Albanian to Yakut. Nearer home, the Scandinavians have long been receptive to Scottish writers, particularly the 'big three' of James 'Ossian' Macpherson, Walter Scott and Robert Burns who defined Scottish literature before the term became synonymous with gritty realism.

Peter Graves's latest book is a study of one of Sweden's best-loved poets and the inspiration he drew from two of the above-named giants. As such, it will be welcomed by Scandinavianists and Scotticists alike.

Gustaf Fröding (1860-1911) cuts a tragic figure in Swedish literature. Both his parents suffered from severe depression, and Fröding himself was only 29 years old when he succumbed to the mental illness which would dog him for the rest of his life and lead to his being incarcerated in a series of mental hospitals and sanatoria. Yet his poems, especially those in *Guitarr och dragharmonika* (Guitar and

concertina) (1891) and *Stänk och flikar* (Splashes and patches) (1896), were to win him a special place in the affections of the Swedish people, and his death in 1911 'occasioned an outpouring of national grief'. The future archbishop of Uppsala and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nathan Söderblom, gave the funeral oration and a special train carried the poet's body to Uppsala where a torchlight procession of students accompanied it to the graveside.

Fröding served his literary apprenticeship during the 1880s, but that decade of Zola-esque social realism was inimical to his temperament and talents. In April 1889 he wrote to his sister: 'It's almost impossible to be a poet these days when one is forced, willingly or otherwise, to take a dissecting knife to one's feelings rather than abandoning oneself to them as in the old days.' It was a quintessentially Romantic *cri-de-coeur*, and Fröding was not alone in yearning for a new literature which would favour fantasy, beauty and joy over depressing documentarism. In that same year of 1889 his contemporary Verner von Heidenstam had argued the case in his polemic *Renässans*, and Fröding was to become one of the leading 'nineties writers' or *nittitalisterna* whose works reflected von Heidenstam's aesthetic programme.

Fröding's interest in Scottish literature, Graves tells us, went back to his schooldays. According to his sister Cecilia, '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.' In a fascinating chapter entitled 'Fröding and Sir Walter Scott',

Graves traces the latter's influence on Fröding's *oeuvre*, not only in such obviously derivative works as *Claverhouse* and *Abbotsford* but in other works such as *Vapenvilla* (Truce), where the theme of border warfare seems to derive from Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Copious citations from the Swedish poems are accompanied by Graves's own literal translations.

Scott was clearly a source of inspiration to Fröding right up to the end of his life. Even when reading and annotating J.A. Froude's 12-volume *History of England*, in Uppsala hospital in 1904, the ailing poet seems to have seen the course of English history through Scott's eyes, to judge from his annotated comments on the text.

This chapter in Graves's book is followed by one entitled 'The "Scott" Poems', consisting of three avowedly Scott-influenced poems in the original Swedish versions, with Peter Graves's literal versions for comparison. The opening stanza of *Claverhouse* shows with what relish Fröding attempted the ballad mode:-

1. Säg, minns du kanske
Claverhouse,
och kallad lord Dundee,
han var av Grahames ädla
blod
och stolthet sjöd däri.
Han var en man, som aldrig
vek,
och faran var för honom lek
och aldrig såg du honom blek
i stridens raseri.

1. Tell me, do you perhaps
remember Claverhouse,/ also
called Lord Dundee,/ he was
of/ the noble blood of the
Grahames/ and it seethed

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with pride./ He was a man
who never gave ground,/ and
danger was just a game to
him/ and you never saw him
pale/ in the fury of battle.

In Abbotsford, by contrast, the
wistful evocation of Scott, the
long-vanished bard, is Ossianism
in its purest form:-

1. Ack, romantikens ton
förklungit,
dess sista sträng på harpan
sprungit,
dess störste skald, sir Walter
Scott,
för längesen från oss har gått.
Men än hans sång vårt öra
tjusar
och vemodsfullt en viskning
susar,
en röst från minnets
tempelgård
i ekarne på Abbotsford.

1. Alas, the strains of
romanticism have faded,/ its
last string on the harp
broken,/ its greatest bard, Sir
Walter Scott,/ passed from us
long ago./ But still his song
delights our ear/ and a
whisper sighs full of
sadness,/ a voice from
memory's temple/ in the oaks
at Abbotsford.

Fröding and Scott occupy 46
pages of the book. The remaining
87 pages of text consist of an in-
depth examination of Fröding's
interaction with, and debt to,
Robert Burns. In chapter 4,
'Fröding and Robert Burns',
Graves discusses Fröding's
booklet about the Scottish poet,
which was published in 1892,
and - in a fascinating section for
practitioners of the translator's
art - analyses Fröding's
translations of 15 Burns songs.

Fröding had no access to the
melodies for which Burns wrote
his songs, nor is he likely to have
had direct experience of
traditional Scottish music - which
makes his faithfulness to the
originals all the more impressive:-

... his usual procedure is to
follow the rhythmic patterns
of the Burns songs with near
total exactness: the rhyme
schemes are identical; he uses
the same metrical units as the
originals; his syllable count
per line rarely differs from
Burns's; his pauses and
emphases coincide with those
of the source texts; he runs on
where the original runs on
and end-stops where the
original end-stops; his use of
euphonious effects mirrors
that of Burns. From the purely
technical point of view it
would be difficult to fault
these translations in terms of
their match with the tunes.
Given that Fröding was
working without the aid of
the melodies, the sheer
singability of his translations
is nothing short of
extraordinary.' (Graves,
p.60).

This high praise is borne out by
chapters 5, 'The Songs and the
Translations', and 6, 'Comments
on the Songs and Translations',
where not only are Burns's songs
explained and analysed, but - an
inestimable benefit to the reader -
the tunes are also printed, so that
melodically-inclined readers can
test for themselves how well
Fröding's words sit with the
melodies he never heard. 'O
whistle, and I'll come to you, my
lad' slips easily into 'O, vissla, så
kommer jag till dig, min vän;
'Contented wi' little, and cantie

wi' mair' is felicitously rendered as 'Förnöjsam med litet och glad att få mer', and how about this for the opening of Macpherson's Farewell ?:-

1. 'Farväl, min cell, farväl i
frid,
du var mig mörk och trång
ej lång skall bli Macphersons
tid
inunder galgens stång!'
2. Så stolt och käck och utan
skräck,
så trotsig var hans gång.
Han sjöng och tog i dans ett
språng
allt under galgens stång.

(Burns) 'Farewell, ye
dungeons dark and strong,
The wretch's destinie!
Macpherson's time will not be
long.
On yonder gallows-tree.

Sae rantingly -, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he:
He play'd a spring, and
danc'd it round
Below the gallows-tree.

(Graves) 'Farewell, my cell,
farewell in peace,/ you were
dark and confined for me/ -
Macpherson's time will not be
long/ beneath the gallows
pole!

So proud and bold and
without fear,/ so defiant was
his step./ He sang and/ took a
dancing leap/ all under the
gallows pole.

One does not need to be an
armchair psychologist to imagine
how the sickly, introverted
Swedish poet must have

empathised with and envied the
brash Highland rogue.

Each chapter ends with a
column of notes, and the book
concludes with a five-page
bibliography.

With its Swedish and Scots
texts, its translations and back
translations, its printed music,
painstaking textual exegesis and
bibliographical detail, 'Fröding,
Burns and Scott' can be
unreservedly recommended as a
model of comparative literary
study.

Harry D. Watson