

**A “PERIPHERAL” PROBLEM?:
THE USE OF SCOTS IN PLAYS SET OUTWITH
THE CENTRAL BELT OF SCOTLAND**

Katja Lenz
Universität zu Köln

ABSTRACT

The use of Scots in the theatre is becoming more and more popular. The full scale of social and stylistic varieties is made use of and considerable differences in the density and the lexical richness of Scots are to be found. In comparison, regional variation is much less prominent. Most plays in Scots that are meant for supra-regional production are set in the Central Belt area and therefore employ a Central Scots dialect. The ‘peripheral’ areas of the Scots-speaking part of Scotland—the Borders, the North-east, the Far North and the Orkney and Shetland Islands—may be less attractive as dramatic settings, but linguistic reasons seem to be just as responsible for the under-representation of their dialects on stage. These dialect areas are linguistically more conservative than the industrial belt, so that their Scots is denser and preserves a lot of locally specific vocabulary. This type of language is unsuitable for performances on a national level, posing problems both for actors and audiences. A selection of very different plays from the last three decades illustrates some linguistic strategies developed by dramatists in order to set their plays in the ‘periphery’ and still create the illusion of authentic speech.

Scots used to face the same problems as most other non-standard linguistic varieties in the theatre, *viz.* those of acceptability and intelligibility of the stage language. With regard to the former aspect, linguistic attitudes have changed so much in Scottish society that the use of Scots for drama is no longer rejected but is actually in great demand. In spite of this sea-change in the history of Scottish drama (described for

instance in Paterson, and Lenz), the problem of intelligibility remains at least to a certain degree. True, language attitudes are responsible to some extent for the degree to which listeners/readers are able to comprehend a particular linguistic variety, because they influence the willingness to put an effort into understanding (Trudgill 29, 32). And the greater the social acceptance of a variety, the more likely a listener/reader is to come across it and to have the chance of getting used to it (Hudson 36).

Still, the fact that Scots is accepted as a stage language does not solve the problem of intelligibility. This is not so much because only a minority of the population of (even Lowland) Scotland speak it (cf. Máté), but mainly because Scots is not “one variety,” but comprises a number of local dialects which are often not mutually intelligible—at least not without effort. Although there is no Standard Scots, however, there is a kind of Scots that is approaching the status of a modern literary quasi-standard. This variety may be called “ideal” Scots (following Aitken).

The attribute “ideal” refers to the attempts at standardising and institutionalising this variety. It is usually a fairly dense kind of Scots, but still comparatively easy to understand, because it is very homogeneous. It is based on the spoken dialects of the authors who have developed this literary variety from the *Scottish Literary Renaissance* onwards up to the present day, but augmented by words acquired from literary works in Scots. Unlike the synthetic language created by the first “wave” of the *Renaissance*, which is often called “Lallans,” “ideal” Scots contains only few archaisms and neologisms, hardly any localised items from outside the Central Belt, and few socially marked words. Most Scots features belong to what is termed General Scots (cf. *CSD*): they are valid across all dialect regions of Scots and are not necessarily used but known by readers well-versed in the classics of Scottish literature. No particular local accent is indicated by the spelling, which is usually based on traditional literary models (originating from the Central Scots area), but more standardised. Scots of this kind has been employed and refined in Scottish drama ever since the 1930s, starting out with playwrights such as Robert McLellan, for instance, in *Jamie the Saxt* (1937) and Alexander Reid in his *Two Scots Plays* (more recent authors using it for the stage include Donald Campbell in *The Jesuit* [1976], and Ian Brown in *Margaret* [2000]).

Another influential linguistic model is a modern urban working-class idiom, which started to be explored for serious dramatic purposes from just about the same time onwards (with Robert McLeish’s *The Gorbals’ Story* [1946], Ena Lamont Stewart’s *Men Should Weep* [1947], and Roddy MacMillan’s *All in Good Faith* [1954], as early examples and Donna Franceschild’s *And the Cow Jumped over the Moon* [1990], or Simon Donald’s *The Life of Stuff* [1992], as more recent ones). It is supposed to imitate authentic speech in detail, usually, but not necessarily that of Glasgow (cf. Mike Cullen’s *The Cut* [1993], set in the coal-mines of Loanhead [Midlothian], and the adaptation of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* [1994], set in Edinburgh; Joe Corrie’s *In Time o’ Strife* [1928], set in a Fife mining-village, may be seen as a forerunner). The language in these plays is socially and locally marked, pronunciation being indicated with the help of quasi-phonetic transcription, without any attempt at standardisation, and it makes use of few specifically Scots lexical items, which aids intelligibility.

So, within Scots there are at least two varieties that are widely used for playwriting and are obviously understood by audiences even in their densest forms,¹ while there

are others that are not. The matter of immediate intelligibility is of course more important for drama than for other genres. This may be one reason why local, rural varieties of Scots are rarely used in the theatre on a “national” level —although they are and have been for long very much alive in poetry and even to some degree in prose, particularly in the North-east and the Shetlands (cf. McClure 1993 and Milton 1983). The use of Scots in general has always been more widespread in poetry than in drama, but local forms of Scots are even harder to find in plays. This is surely also partly due to the publication situation. Until recently, plays in Scots were rarely published, and these were sometimes anglicised at the instance of editors. The ones that do reach publication are usually the ones that receive supra-regional productions —and they are mainly set in the Central Belt of Scotland and/or employ one of the varieties of Scots described above. Only a very small minority are set in the Scots speaking “periphery” (be it the Borders region, the North-east or the Far North).² Unpublished play-scripts, though, sometimes contain more local forms of Scots —especially when they are intended for a local audience.

The North-east dialect region (including Nairn, Moray, Banff, Aberdeen and Buchan) appears to have the most substantial tradition of dramatic works of all the “peripheral” areas. This is of course in line with the very strong and healthy poetic tradition there. The North-east is the largest of these non-Central regions, comparatively densely populated, self-contained and fairly independent of the South, with its own cultural centre(s). Authors are not under as much pressure to look for an audience/readership outside the area. Still, even here, the publishing of linguistically localised plays seems to be picking up only slowly after a great boom in the first decades of this century.³

Murray and MacPherson’s *The Lum Hat* (1983), which was first performed in Aberdeen, then taken to the Edinburgh Festival, and later privately published, may serve as an early example of this re-establishment of the publishing of North-eastern plays.⁴ Amy Hardie’s *Precairious Living* (1984), which dramatises the contents of the Christian Watt papers, also received an Edinburgh Fringe production, before touring the North-east, Highlands and Islands. Set in a 19th-century fishing village on the North-east coast, this semi-documentary drama in a naturalist vein employs some recognisably North-eastern Scots speech-forms. Perhaps due to its historical interest, the play was published by Polygon, interestingly enough, with an appended glossary.

Rona Munro may be considered the first truly national figure in North-eastern playwriting. Born in Aberdeen, this prolific dramatist sometimes draws on the cultural heritage of her native region and on the language used there. Examples of her work in that line are *Saturday at the Commodore* (first performed in 1989 and toured around Scotland) and *The Maiden Stone* (1995), both published. The latter even received a performance in London. Although on stage, the North-eastern accent can be very characteristic, neither of the plays shows many dialect features on the printed page. *Saturday at the Commodore* is written in Scots, which is densely marked on all linguistic levels, but the only distinctly North-eastern features are regular spellings with <f-> instead of <wh-> (indicating the stereotypical North-eastern initial sound /f-/ instead of / /), two other spellings representing North-eastern pronunciations (<een> for ‘one’ and <feil> for ‘foolish’) and one dialect word which is associated with the North-east: *loon* ‘young man, boy (now N Fif wLoth Wgt)’.⁵ Apart

from these, the place names mentioned in the text are the only hint at where the story is set.⁶

Duncan McLean's use of Scots in *Julie Allardyce* (1993) is different. Like Munro, McLean was born in the North-east, grew up there and —although he spent most of his adult life elsewhere— was considered to be related closely enough with the area to be commissioned by the *District Council* and *City of Aberdeen District Council* to write a play specifically for this region. It was produced by *Boilerhouse Company*, who recruited their actors for this play from the area. They were expected to be familiar with the local dialect and brought it to bear in the performance. On the printed page, however, the language is hardly localised. McLean himself comments on the linguistic shape of the text with respect to the intended accents:

The accents of the characters have not been represented phonetically in the script; standard spelling has been used throughout. But strong north-east voices are written into the rhythms and syntax of the north-east characters, and it is intended that the actors should also use the vowel and consonant sounds appropriate to their character's age and background. (*Made* 182)

In an earlier version, published in *Theatre Scotland*, McLean adds another sentence: "I won't insult their intelligence by spelling these out for them" (*Theatre* 29).

The "rhythms and syntax" of "north-east voices" are, however, hard to detect for the reader. Most of the linguistic features that do not come across as plain Standard English are either characteristic of Scots as a whole or of general non-regional non-standard English. The vocabulary used includes very few specifically Scots words, i.e. words (or meanings of words) that are not shared with English, and only a very small number of them are restricted to the North-east, though still more than in *Saturday at the Commodore*.⁷ The spelling of the text, which hardly diverges from Standard English orthography (in line with McLean's comments), indicates no localised pronunciations, not even the stereotypical word-initial /f/.

In unpublished playscripts the language is sometimes more densely characterised as North-eastern Scots: Charles Barron's *Fooshion* (1993) and *Amang the Craws* (1994), or Rankin and Hill's *Pinkybrae* (1990) may serve as recent examples. The latter uses dense literary Scots on all linguistic levels throughout, localised by means of the typical North-eastern <f-> spellings, but also some other spellings that clearly indicate North-eastern accents, such as <sikk> for 'to seek,' <spik> for 'to speak,' <deem> for 'dame,' and a number of local dialect words or forms of words, such as *snocher* 'snore,' *spurgie* 'sparrow,' *quine* 'girl,' *loon* 'boy,' *styoo* 'dust.'

Plays set on the Shetland Islands and using Shetland dialect are much rarer, mostly restricted to local performance, and there seem to be none that reached publication. Alexander Scott's *Shetland Yarn* (1953/4), though set on the island of Yell, is in "ideal" Scots throughout —as is to be expected from a play by a representative of a later phase of the *Scottish Literary Renaissance*. Two unpublished plays, are thus used as examples. Robin Munro's *Tales of an Island People* (1982) was produced by the Edinburgh-based touring company Winged Horse, first performed in Shetland, then toured through Scotland. The play about the history of the Shetland Isles is set up as an entertainment staged for the benefit of the guests at a wedding-reception. The author

informs the reader about the role of the audience: “It is assumed that the audience are part of this celebration, probably being friends of Tom’s brought over from the new oil related developments, where he works. They are welcomed in by the parents, and things are sometimes explained for their benefit” (i). The audience are outsiders, which provides a sound reason why there is so little dialect used in the play, and why the few dialect words are paraphrased. This practical device is even turned into a running joke:

WILLIE: If du gies da fiddler a drink for each tune, boy, I doot he’ll be goin round in peerie circles.

JEAN: Willie, they don’t know the Shetland words... and du had better introduce... (2)

WILLIE: ... to gie you a peerie welcom... we say ‘peerie’... it means little, wee... short in this case... (5)

ROBERT: And we thought we’s just tell you a peerie bit about our Islands. We say ‘peerie.’

MARY: Robert, Willie explained a yon, when he said du wis makin a *peerie* speech. (6)

In his introductory note on the language of the play, Robin Munro says that:

an attempt has been made in the dialogue to capture the speech rhythms of Shetland speech. The spelling of words has only been slightly altered to give a general impression (e.g. ‘d’ for ‘th’), but I would hope non-Shetland actors could listen to examples of Shetland speech and try to capture the cadence. (ii)

As a result, there is very little Shetlandic lexis, and pronunciation is mainly (though not at all regularly) signalled by the one stereotypical spelling feature mentioned in the language notes. But there are some grammatical characteristics that help give a local flavour even to the written language: perfect tenses are formed as *be* rather than *have* plus participle, the second person singular pronoun takes the form *du* and calls forth the according verb inflection (“du kens...,” “is du forgotten...?”) and sometimes ‘he’ is used instead of ‘it.’⁸

Robert Alan Jamieson’s *An Aald Lion Lies Doon* (1989) received a local production in Lerwick. It makes fewer concessions to audiences’ dialect competence. Apart from the fact that it is written in very dense Scots, the Shetlandic features are unmistakable and pervade all linguistic levels. The stereotypical spellings <d> and <t> instead of <th> are employed regularly along with many other spelling features indicating Shetland pronunciation, e.g. <aa> in words like *braaly* (General Scots *brawly*, ‘very’), *shaa* ‘show,’ or *aald* ‘old,’ or forms such as *laek* for ‘like,’ *braethe* ‘breathe,’ *draem* ‘dream,’ *ja* instead of General Scots *aye* ‘yes,’ and *gying* for General Scots *gang* ‘go.’ All the grammatical features mentioned above are found in this play, too. Most striking, however, are the numerous specifically Shetlandic words, such as *bal* ‘to throw,’ *benkle* ‘to dent,’ *briggistane* ‘footpath of flat stones laid in front of a dwell-

ing-house,' *bruk* 'refuse, useless material,' *coarn* 'a small quantity, a bit,' *lock* 'an abundance,' *peerie* 'small,' *pooramus* 'frail,' *spørin bottle* 'bottle of whisky brought by the young man as a contractual lubricant (to his prospective father in law),' *skyimp* 'to praise ironically.' Many of these are not registered in the *CSD* nor the *SND*, but are only to be found in a Shetlandic dictionary (Graham).

For the local audience, then, the author need not tone down the local idiom. The fact that the spelling attempts to represent the pronunciation in such detail may seem surprising. Local actors can be assumed to be familiar with the accent—and therefore presumably will not need a quasi-phonetic transcription—whereas this might be of much more help to theatre companies from elsewhere. A possible explanation is that spellings in the Roman alphabet can never be phonetic and therefore may not suggest the intended pronunciations to someone unfamiliar with the accent at all. Actors native to the area, however, will probably know local dialect writing (especially poetry) and its spelling conventions, and to them the spellings will imply the desired accent. This may be why Glaswegian plays seem to employ quasi-phonetic spellings more frequently than others—actors from all over Scotland are expected to know the Glaswegian accent, and Glaswegian dialect writing is a well-known branch of Scottish literature, with its 'orthography' moulded by authors such as Tom Leonard, Steven Mulrine, Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan.

While Caithness may be less conspicuous as a Scots-speaking area, not least because it does not have a similarly strong literary tradition as the North-east and Shetland, its dialect is still very much alive: "the existence of centres like Thurso and Wick and the pervasiveness of a Scots-speaking fishing culture and strong networks separating it traditionally from the *Gaidhealteachd* has protected this distinctive form of speech from extinction" (Johnston 447). Very little drama has originated from that area, in spite of a recent increase. Donald Campbell, who was born in Caithness, started a completely new tradition with his very successful play *Widows of Clyth* (1979), set in a small fishing village near Wick. His sequels *The Ould Fella* (1993) and *The Herrin Queen* (1996) complete his Caithness trilogy. In the 1990s other writers began to pick up on this, notably George Gunn, who set up the Grey Coast Theatre Company in 1992, which has produced seven of his plays so far, the first being *Songs of the Grey Coast* (1992) and the latest *Atomic City* (1999)—a sequel to the former. Both plays are set on the southern coastal border between Caithness and Highland-English-speaking Sutherland, but use the Scots dialect of Caithness. While Campbell's plays were intended for and first produced by Central Scottish theatre companies, the ones by Gunn received local productions by local actors and were then toured all over Scotland.

The Widows of Clyth, the only published Caithness play by Campbell, does not attempt an authentic representation of the dialect. Campbell describes his method as follows:

what I do is I formalize the Caithness idiom, so there's one or two dialect words that are used. But I go for the melody of it really, which is quite different from other forms of Scottish drama. (McGrath 6)

A note on the language in the introduction to the play characterises it in more detail:

Since the very distinctive Caithness dialect would usually create considerable problems for actors and audiences alike, I have avoided its use, preferring instead to incorporate Caithness idioms in the written English of the text. Few dialect words are used and, except where absolutely necessary —e.g. ‘Weeck’ for Wick— no dialect spelling at all. Several well-known Scots usages (notably the preposition ‘til’) have been employed, and preponderance given to the second person singular ‘ye’ (pronounced with a long ‘e’) rather than the more usual plural ‘you.’ My hope is that actors who know Caithness speech will be able to exploit their knowledge, while those who do not have this capacity will not feel encumbered by the text. While enjoining actors to pronounce my words as they see fit, I must add the strongest qualification that, *on no account whatsoever*, must a conventional ‘Highland’ accent ever be used in any performance of this play. (i)

So there is only very little local vocabulary. Typical of the region, though not exclusive to it, are *cown* ‘to weep, lament,’ *to tak long to* ‘to grow weary for, long for,’ *lockie* ‘a (small) quantity, a handful,’ *owse-room* ‘the space in the wale of a boat from which the bilge-water is baled out’ (not in *CSD*, but in Geddes, Sutherland, and *SND*), the diminutive suffix *-ag* in *boyag* and some usages of *til* ‘prep governing an infinitive.’ Less clearly associated with Caithness, but with the northern regions of the Lowlands are *shore* ‘a landing-place, harbour (now N Fif, only Sc),’ *skerry* ‘an isolated rock or islet in the sea (chf Sh Ork),’ *shortago* ‘a short time ago (Sh-Per),’ *swack* ‘active, lithe, supple (now local Sh-Fif).’ The rest of the Scots word material is known and used all over Scotland.

The spelling hardly deviates from Standard English orthography, so that the total density of Scots in the written text seems to be rather low in spite of the still fairly great number of Scots lexical items. The only Caithness-specific spelling feature is indeed the spelling of the place name ‘Wick’ as *Weeck*. This, however, may lead the reader unfamiliar with the accent to think of a pronunciation with [i], which does not match the local realisation of the vowel as [ɛ] —more evidence for the hypothesis that modified spellings cannot function as phonetic transcriptions but only as signals to the reader that an accent different from the one probably natural to him or her is intended (for a detailed discussion of the problem compare Ives 1971, and Foster 1977).

George Gunn’s play *Songs of the Grey Coast* takes a similar approach with respect to vocabulary though perhaps the Scots lexis is denser (associated with Caithness are for instance *trock* ‘nonsensical talk,’ *troskie* ‘silly person,’ *peedie* ‘small’ and *-ag* in *bouyag* ‘boy’ and *Beelag* ‘Billy’). On the level of orthography, however, the language is much more clearly marked as Scottish, although only a minority of the spellings indicate specifically Caithnesian pronunciation: the form *lek* ‘like’ may count as one, and spellings like *peeg* ‘pig’ and *beeg* ‘big’ as well, though with the above mentioned reservations.

Iain Sutherland’s *Barley Bree* (1992), also set in the southeastern corner of Caithness, remained unpublished. Again, the number of local dialect words is small, compared to the great number of General Scots words (e.g. as in the other plays: *swack*, *lok* and *peedie*, in addition to words like *cairn* ‘a heap or quantity of anything [N],’

boxie ‘melodeon or accordion [now Cai, Abd]’). As in *Songs of the Grey Coast*, the spelling is densely marked, though most of the features belong to ‘ideal’ literary Scots. However, unlike the other two authors, Sutherland introduces the local regular use of <f> for <wh>, and (rarely) the stereotypical Highland /tʃ/ for /dʒ/ as represented by spellings like *chust* or *choost* for ‘just,’ which is indeed found in Caithness. In addition to these peculiarities, Sutherland also spells ‘like’ as *lek* and ‘Wick’ as *Week*. Even though his is the most detailed portrait of the local accent, it still does not attempt to give a quasi-phonetic representation.

With respect to the Border dialect and its distinctive traits, Johnston states: “Southern dialects have been losing their traditional characteristics for a long time, and are being ‘captured’ by neighbouring speech communities with greater cachet and influence [...]. It seems only a matter of time before Central Border dialects become fully-fledged East Mid ones” (431). Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that plays set in the Borders do not show localised language to any great extent. The typical “Border comedy” (represented for instance by Dudgeon’s *Muckle Mou’d Meg* [1930], McLellan’s *Jeddart Justice* [1934] and *Toom Byres* [1936], Reid’s *The Lass Wi’ the Muckle Mou’* [1950], and Cochrane’s *The Campbells are Comin’* [1977]) makes use of “ideal” Scots. Alexander Scott’s *Untrue Thomas* (1951) is more serious in tone, though also based on a Border legend. Its use of Scots verges on the “synthetic” type found in the poetry of the *Scottish Literary Renaissance* —as is very appropriate for this lyrical play— but is not at all localised.

In the 1980s and 90s, the Borders setting became less restricted to “old legend” topics. Sue Glover’s highly acclaimed play *Bondagers* (1991) about female farm-workers in the 1860s was first produced by the Traverse Theatre (Edinburgh) and has since travelled all over Scotland, England and even Canada and the United States. Glover’s use of General Scots vocabulary is even denser than that in *The Widows of Clyth*, but just like Campbell, she modifies the spelling of only a very small number of words shared with English. None of these spellings identify the intended accent as that of the Borders. The few Scots words that are regionally restricted do not necessarily suggest this setting either. There are some that are (or were) used predominantly in the Borders (*Hiring Fair* ‘the fair or market held for the purpose of engaging farm-workers,’ *gliff* ‘a sudden fright, a scare, a shock,’ *hind* ‘a married skilled farm-worker who occupies a farm-cottage,’ *mugger* ‘an itinerant tinker,’ *striddle* ‘to stand on a corn-stack while it is being built and pass the sheaves from the cart to the stack-builder,’ *whang* ‘move with sudden force’). The distribution of others, however, quite clearly excludes the Borders.⁹ The intention is clearly not to give a realistic representation of Border dialect —as Glover, who herself comes from Edinburgh, asserts herself in her introduction to the published text:

The dialogue here is not authentic 1860-speak. How could it be? No reliable record of the speech of the fields (or the streets, or even of the drawing-rooms) survives. (Letters and diaries can only give clues; people do not talk as they write.) The function of the language in *Bondagers* is dramatic: to help the audience believe in the time, the place, and above all, the characters.

The function is not to place the story in a certain location.

Mary Strathie’s play *The Derners* (1992) about female workers in the Borders’ woollen mills was written for an amateur theatre company from Galashiels, where it is set. It was later taken up by a professional company and toured through villages and towns all over the Borders. The author acted as a dialect coach for this production. In spite of the distinctly local interest of the play, the kind of Scots employed in the printed adaptation of the script (privately published by the author) is largely known and used all over Scotland apart from two lexical items (*a set home* ‘the act of being taken home [now Bwk, Kcb, SJ]’ and *scoogie* ‘tweed apron [wLoth, SJ]’ which are associated with the Borders and the irregular use of *oo* and *ee* (or *ye*) for the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘you.’ Frederick Mohr’s *Hogg* (1985)—an unpublished play about the ‘Ettrick Shepherd’—displays the densest usage of both General Scots vocabulary and Scots spellings of these three Borders plays, but this use of “ideal” literary Scots may of course be expected in the presentation of the life of a literary figure.

Whatever the methods chosen by individual authors who set their plays in the ‘periphery’ of Scots-speaking Scotland, using clearly localised dialect does not seem to be an option—at least as far as published scripts are concerned. Some stereotypical pronunciation features and a small number of local words—if they are used at all—have to suffice to evoke patterns of ‘natural speech’ and to create the illusion of linguistic authenticity. Local language as in North-eastern or Shetland poetry has not made it—and probably never will make it—to a pan-Scottish, let alone British, stage. Glaswegian seems to be the only possible clearly localised variety of Scots in published writing for the theatre.

As noted by Donald Campbell, this is not only due to necessary concessions with respect to audience and publishers: playwrights who want to achieve supra-local productions of their plays set in the ‘periphery’ cannot rely on actors to be able to represent (or easily understand) local dialects. So the authors often settle for a “note on the language” and some thinly dispersed linguistic symbols rather than a fuller representation of the dialect on the written page, hoping that actors will find out about and imitate the intended accent. This is a difficult task, unless a dialect coach is employed, which is often too expensive a solution. The Scots Language Resource Centre is currently producing tapes to help address this problem. However, so far the first set of tapes only contains dialect or rather accent samples of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen.

While one dramatic function of the use of Scots in drama may be the localisation or setting of the scene, this only goes as far as placing the story either in Scotland as a whole or in Glasgow. It is the actors’ accents that put a certain place to it. So, although it is certainly justified to celebrate Scottish theatre—and particularly “new” Scottish theatre—as employing a great variety of language forms, and creating a linguistic identity by using Scots, there are still a number of barriers for the use of highly localised speech forms in published playscripts.

Notes

¹ For a very useful model that helps characterize fictional Scots as ‘dense’ vs. ‘thin’ and as ‘literary’ vs. ‘colloquial’ cf. McClure “Range” 29 (Rpt. in *Scots* 173).

- ² Other areas are here not regarded as belonging to the ‘periphery,’ although they are clearly not part of the Central Belt either. Dundee for example has a thriving theatre, and a small (and growing?) number of texts are being written for it (e.g. Billy Kay’s *They Fairly Mak Ye Work* [1986], Bill Findlay’s translation of Hauptmann’s *The Weavers* [1997], or Hector MacMillan’s translation of Molière’s *The Hypochondriack* [1987]), but none of them are published, and the local linguistic features are not as strikingly different from the Central Scots varieties as those found in the ‘periphery.’ The latter argument also applies to Ayrshire (McClure “Varieties”). The similarity of the kind of Scots of many Ayrshire plays with ‘ideal Scots’ may at least partly be due to the fact that ‘ideal Scots’ relies on literary tradition, greatly influenced by Burns, an Ayrshire man, although his Scots was not highly localized. Several plays deal with the life of Burns and are therefore set in Ayrshire (e.g. Joe Corrie’s *Robert Burns* [1958], Agnes Adam’s *The Bachelors’ Club* [1970s], Robert Kemp’s *The Other Dear Charmer* [1951], Donald Campbell’s *Till All the Seas Run Dry*, [1982], and Lara Jane Bunting’s *Love But Her* [1993]), but none of them shows clear features of the local dialect on the page (the actors’ pronunciations are a different matter, of course).
- ³ Aberdeen University Library holds a five-volume-strong collection of plays written and published in the North-east in that period, many of them using North-eastern dialect, for example Margaret Argo’s *The Makkin’ o’ John* (1920), A. R. Birnie’s *Ongauns at Cairnprop* (1912), Donald Campbell’s *Kirsty’s Surprise* (1930), W. Cumming’s *Burnie’s Jeannie* (1924), Perter Grey’s *The Making of a King* (1928), James Leatham’s *The New Road* (1920s), Anges Mackie’s *Skerry’s “Meal an’ Ale”* (1925), Elsie Rae’s *The Guidin’ o’ t* (1933)— to give a small selection showing the wide range of publishers involved (although T. Buncl & Co. in Arbroath seem to have dominated this early market), and incidentally pointing to the fact that women playwrights were apparently more integrated in the early 20th-century North-eastern drama ‘scene’ than in the Central Belt up to the 1980s. At least some of these plays still seem worthy of revival for the present-day community, though not for a nation-wide audience, as is shown by the recent re-staging and republishing of Gavin Greig’s *Mains’s Woin’* (1894).
- ⁴ Glasgow’s Brown, Son & Ferguson, which became involved in publishing Scottish plays mainly for the amateur or community drama sector in the 1920s and maintains a series called “Scottish plays” (the catalogue now listing about 320 texts in print, the majority of which are in Scots), occasionally takes on plays in North-eastern Scots as well, such as Charles Barron’s *Groomsnicht* (1979).
- ⁵ Statements about the geographical distribution of lexical items and pronunciation features rely on Robinson 1985 (*Concise Scots Dictionary*).
- ⁶ The same is true for the published script of Munro’s radio play *Dirt under the Carpet* (1988). For the medium radio, immediate intelligibility of the language used is of course even more vital than for stage drama.
- ⁷ They are: *broch* ‘burgh,’ latterly also ‘the Broch’ used as a proper name for ‘the nearest town (now only Fraserburgh in Abd or Burghead in Bnf),’ *hease* ‘a large amount (this sense only attested by the *Scottish National Dictionary* [Grant & Murison 1931-76, *SND*] in Abd and Mearns),’ *quine* ‘a young woman, a girl (now NE Ags),’ *strums* ‘a fit of pique or bad humour, the huff (Mry, Abd, Per).’
- ⁸ Another more recent Shetlandic play, produced by local artists and shown at the Edinburgh Festival, Grace Barnes’ *Wir Midder, da Sea* (1999), would allow for interesting comparison, but was not available at the time of writing.

⁹ For instance *calfground* 'the place of one's birth and early life (now Ags, Fif),' *dadd* 'to strike heavily, beat violently (now Cai, midLoth),' *doodle* 'to dandle, lull (a child) to sleep (now Kcb),' *feeding storm* 'a storm which adds more snow to that already lying (now local NE-Gall),' *scraffle* 'scramble, claw about with the hands (now Sh, Ork, Cai),' *sorner* 'scrounger, someone who abuses someone's hospitality, a parasite (now N, Per).'

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