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Translation from the Borders: Encounter and Recalcitrance in *Waverley* and *Clan-Albin*

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Translation from the Borders: Encounter and Recalcitrance in Waverley and Clan-Albin
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Certainly everything does not come out in translation, but something does.¹ Paul Ricoeur
When Anne Grant produced *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders* in 1811, she was working within a well-established matrix of proto-ethnographic eighteenth-century genres (travel-writing, translation, and Scottish historiography) which were gradually moving the peripheries of British culture into the realm of English representation. Interest in oral forms such as the ballad, in historical categories such as "savage" society, and in the notion of distinct cultural habitats had been directing scholarly and literary interest to Celtic cultures for some time, but in her introduction Grant claimed that even at that late date, such interest had nevertheless failed

to bring the Highlands into learned culture. "Men of capacious mind and enlightened curiosity," she wrote, have been eagerly pursuing knowledge of remote cultures, but have virtually ignored one "concealed in the recesses of their native country."² She traced this ignorance to a curious reluctance on both sides of the English-Scottish border to engage in translation: "The neglect of pretenders to science, in omitting to acquire a language, through which so

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 282. ² Anne Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland* (London: Longman, 1811), 1:7. ³ EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION, Volume 9, Number 2, January 1997. ⁴ EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION much is to be known, and the apparent indifference of natives, in not producing at an earlier period in the light of a more current language, the hidden treasures of their own, seems equally unaccountable."³ Understanding translation as a movement—a transfer—on both sides, Grant took advantage of the space opened up by the failure of learned culture to effect such a transfer, and wrote her own translation of the Highlands. In all this, she was engaging in the familiar critical move of clearing space for her own project, but in the process she drew on a notion of translation that deserves more attention. Locating her work as a cultural translator outside both scholarly knowledge ("pretenders to science") and insider competence ("natives"), Grant foregrounds an intercultural third term, most obviously when she defines her own enunciation as that of one who is "not absolutely a native, nor entirely a stranger."⁴ By moving translation into the unstable and equivocal space of "not absolutely ... nor entirely," Grant presents it as a less certain and imperialist gesture than is often charged, and her formulation draws attention to an understanding of the question of translation of and from the peripheries in the early nineteenth century that not only complicates some standard assumptions about proto-ethnographic work in this period but also usefully crosses some of our own current critical preoccupations with the same question. Although postcolonial and cultural studies have lately been rewriting the foundational themes of Western cultural analysis in less binary, totalizing, and static terms, the notion of translation has remained largely tied to an oppositional model (dominator versus dominated) in which imperial power flows relatively smoothly from the centre, absorbing and transforming the differences of the peripheries.⁵ Defined in terms of such an assimilatory model, translation—whether in its stricter linguistic or more general ethnographic sense—tends to be invoked in terms of imperial territorialization, pacification, and appropriation. Keenly alert to the ways in which translation puts the peripheries to "good use" for the metropolis, Michel de Certeau points out that metropolitan discourse not only

³ Grant, 1:9-10. ⁴ Grant, 1:10. For the distinction between "intercultural" and "cultural" figures in ethnography, see James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 96-116. ⁵ See, for example, the complex suspicion of translation that informs much of the discussion in two important, recent collections: *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 1992). For a positive approach to translation...

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¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 282.

² Anne Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland* (London: Longman, 1811), 1:7.





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