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AMÉDÉE PICHOT AND WALTER SCOTT'S PARROT: A FABULOUS TALE OF PARROTING AND PIRATING

Céline Sabiron

We have been now, for some years, inundated with showers of Scottish novels thicker than the snow you now see falling; and Alice, who is now in her nineteenth year, has read them all, or rather skimmed them over, merely to say she *has* read them; ... she tells her companions, with an air of consequence, that she never reads any other novels than *Walter Scott's*; though no one, but herself, seems really to know who the deuce it is that scribbles so fast.

Sarah Green, *Scotch Novel Reading* (1824).¹

In the nineteenth century, as Sarah Green suggests of her character Alice, who dresses and speaks as if she had emerged from one of the *Waverley* novels, writing in Scott's shadow was "almost a necessary contagion."² Whether they were Scottish like James Hogg and John Galt, or English like William Harrison Ainsworth, novelists "sought to palimpsestically overwrite Scott" by engaging with what critic George Dekker termed the *Waverley* model.³ This textual intertwining can take the form of an imitation, a pastiche or a parody, whether the writers conformed to Scott's model, or, like Green and even earlier Christian Isobel Johnstone in her best-known work *Clan-Albin: A National Tale* (1815), challenged it. Scott was an all-pervasive point of reference for all writers that "managed to appeal to a vast

¹ Sarah Green, *Scotch Novel Reading; or Modern Quackery, A Novel Really Founded on Facts*, 2 vols (London: Newman, 1824), 1: 4-5.

² Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Sainte-Beuve: "an epoch in which the imitation of Walter Scott was almost a necessary contagion, even for the highest talents," quoted by Richard Maxwell, "Scott in France," in *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe*, ed. Murray Pittock (London: Continuum, 2006), 6.

³ Tamara Gosta, "Sir Walter's palimpsests: material imprints and the trace of the past," *European Romantic Review*, 22.6 (2011), 707-726 (709); George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

reading public dispersed throughout the Anglophone world (and with the help of translations, beyond it).⁴

Scott's writing inspired budding authors far beyond the British borders. A review in 1826 from the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* stressed that Scottomania

runs rampant not only in Scotland and England ... but also in Germany and France, and even in the New World, accompanied by a variety of more and less alarming symptoms and crises. In Germany it is presently raging among the translators as an inflammatory disease of the nerves [*hitzige Hetzkankheit*], among the ludicrously cheap publishers as a constant pursuit of speculation, and a rampaging devourer of paper [*wüthende Papierverschlingerin*].... After all, those today with the capacity and the willingness to read novels ..., what else would they desire than something by Scott, or after Scott, or like Scott?⁵

The proliferation of imitations included such items as *Walladmor* (1823-1824), advertised as a free translation of a Scott novel, and translated “back” into English by De Quincey, despite his conviction that it was a hoax. To account for this pseudo-translation of a text written by German author Georg Wilhelm Heinrich Häring (under the pseudonym of Alexis Willibald), and then wrongly attributed to Scott, the latter's son-in-law and biographer John Gibson Lockhart hypothesized that “a set of suspended sheets might have been purloined” from the printers “and sold to a pirate.”⁶ It was not the first time that literary piracy and translation had been associated: Europe was still shaken by the accusations of literary fraud against James Macpherson's *Ossian*. Since “rapid translation of Scott's texts was the norm by the mid-1820s across much of Europe,” the Scott novel featured at the heart of an aesthetic debate on authenticity and forgery, creation and translation, and an ethical and theoretical argument about authorship and translatorship.⁷

In this context, French translators had all the more essential a role to play for the spreading of ideas and foreign texts since French then held a pivotal

⁴ Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

⁵ *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1826*, 4 vols (Halle & Leipzig: Schwetschke & Königliche Sächsische Zeitungs-Expedition, 1826), 2: 65-71, quoted by Brecht de Groote and Tom Toremans, in “From Alexis to Scott and De Quincey: *Walladmor* and the irony of pseudotranslation,” *Essays in Romanticism*, 21.2 (2014), 107-123 (107).

⁶ John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 10 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1848), 2: 550.

⁷ Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208.

position.⁸ It was the language of translation and retranslation *par excellence*. French translators of the Waverley novels include, along with “official” translator Auguste Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret, Joseph Martin, Henri Villemain, and the versatile and eclectic character of Amédée Pichot, the focus of this essay. Because of the ethical and poetical questions which his literary and critical treatment of Scott’s texts raise, Pichot can be seen as a potential French counterpart to *Walladmor*’s German author G. W. H. Haring or to Ossian’s Scottish “translator” James Macpherson.⁹ France was no exception to acts of pirating Scott’s works, as Philarète Chasles testified: “He was an initiator and he was very much imitated.... The influence and prestige of Walter Scott were so great that everyone hurried to claim themselves heirs to his genius even before he was dead.”¹⁰ Alfred de Vigny’s *Cinq-Mars* (1826) was so much modelled on Scott’s stories and style that Victor Hugo wrote: “There’s no doubt that if someone had presented you with this book as one of Walter Scott’s new works, you would not be the only reader initially to have been taken in.”¹¹

Unlike Defauconpret, Pichot has so far drawn surprisingly little attention from researchers.¹² In addition to his translations, work that he himself authored shows a very singular reworking of Walter Scott, a crosspollination between Scott’s text and his critical discourse on Scott. Pichot’s short fable prefacing his two-volume book *Le perroquet [parrot] de Walter Scott* (1834) exhibits well his metatextual performing and theorizing of both authorship

⁸ Apart from Stendhal, who was also a translator, most French readers and writers could not read English and had to rely on French translations to access texts in English: Jacques G.A. Bereaud, “La traduction en France à l’époque romantique,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 8.3 (1971), 224-244 (227).

⁹ As Pichot’s biographer notes: “Ossian made a deep and lasting impression on his imagination, and began the romantic interest in the far north of Scotland which was to be fostered and developed by his subsequent reading and travels:” Laurence Adolphus Bisson, *Amédée Pichot: a Romantic Prometheus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1942), 180.

¹⁰ “Il fut initiateur et très imité.... L’influence et le prestige de Walter Scott furent si vifs, que tout le monde se jeta pour ainsi dire sur l’héritage de son génie avant même qu’il ne fût mort”: Philarète Chasles, “De la Littérature anglaise depuis Scott,” *Revue des deux Mondes*, 5th series, 1 (March 1839): 196, at <https://rddm.revuedesdeuxmondes.fr/archive/article.php?code=72581>.

¹¹ *La Quotidienne*, 30 July 1826, cited in Victor E. François, “Sir Walter Scott and Alfred de Vigny,” *Modern Language Notes*, 21.5 (1906), 129-134 (133).

¹² On Defauconpret, see Paul Barnaby, “Restoration politics and sentimental poetics in A.J.-B. Defauconpret’s translations of Sir Walter Scott,” *Translation and Literature*, 20 (2011): 6-28, and “Another *Tale of Old Mortality*: the translations of Auguste Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret in the French reception of Scott,” in Pittock, *Reception*, 31-44.

and translatorship.¹³ Pichot's prefatory fable serves as a key to his reworking of Scott's material, which consists in a ventriloquial act of overwriting.

The fable opens on the death of Pichot's pet parrot, Lorito, and Scott sending his own parrot, Pol, to make up for his fellow writer's loss. Pol is no ordinary parrot, though, as he speaks out snatches of conversation heard at Abbotsford. Pichot plans to collect these fragments and to write a book with additional materials sent to him by Scott himself. However, Scott dies before fulfilling his promise, and Pichot is left to write the book himself, which he entitles *Le perroquet de Walter Scott* to pay tribute to his literary master.

Through the totemic image of the tropical bird, Pichot raises the question of voice as both the physical sound of speech and the "enunciating instance."¹⁴ He seems, indeed, to associate translating with parroting and writing with creating, even though it does not exclude pirating. This issue of agency, long recognized in the field of translation studies, can be explored by analyzing Pichot's fabulous tale through several theoretical perspectives: through Bakhtin's dialogism, through Genette's "textual transcendancy," and through notions of voice and performativity developed from the research conducted by Alvstad, Gambier and Van Doorslaer.¹⁵ The translation process is twofold, as it can refer both to the translation act, i.e. the cognitive processes taking place in the translator's mind when identifying and solving translation problems, and to the translation event, consisting of a whole chain of actions and activities. In the latter, the translator is conceived as a social agent holding a pivotal position in the process but one whose actions are intertwined with the agencies of other parties and intermediaries.¹⁶

¹³ *Le perroquet de Walter Scott: esquisses de voyages.—légendes, romans.—contes biographiques et littéraires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Typographie de A. Éverat, 1834), 1: iii-viii, at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96118404>, cited in the text below as *Le perroquet*.

¹⁴ *La traduction des voix intra-textuelles/Intratextual Voices in Translation*, ed. Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov and Myriam Suchet (Montréal: Éditions québécoises de l'œuvre, 2013).

¹⁵ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 11; *Textual and Contextual Voices of Translation*, ed. Cecilia Alvstad, Annjo K. Greenall, Hanne Jansen, Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017); *Handbook of Translation Studies*, ed. Yves Gambier and Luc Van Doorslaer, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010).

¹⁶ For more on the models of behaviour in translation practices, see Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), 67-69.

Pym's approach to intercultural identity in translation similarly distinguishes two different aspects of the translation event, the act of mediation, be it the process of rewriting or that of overwriting, and the status of the translator as author or agent.¹⁷

Amédée Pichot assumed wavering and competing identities and thereby spoke multiple "contextual voices." Alvstad and Rosa contrast "textual voices," which are "part of the product (narrative voice, the voices of characters and the translator's textually manifested voice)," with contextual voices, which refer to "the multiple agents that produce, promote and write about translations."¹⁸ Before becoming the director and editor of the *Revue britannique* (1839-1877), Pichot had built some reputation as a critic and a translator under the title of "The translator of Lord Byron." From 1822 on, the main translator of Scott's novels in France had been Defauconpret.¹⁹ Pichot had focused instead on translating Scott's nonfiction and poetry, with several subsequent publications of Scott's complete works between 1820 and 1844, and the release in separate volumes of his translations of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in 1824, and *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk* in 1822.

Bourdieu has suggested that the idea of copyright only began to form in the course of the nineteenth century, and others have noted that this development was accompanied by or perhaps resulted in the emergence of a strong "author-translator" polarization.²⁰ Like many nineteenth-century French authors, Pichot constantly sprinkled his own texts with references and plagiarized quotes from other writers, especially from Scott. He had commented profusely on Scott's work in his *Notice sur Sir Walter Scott et ses écrits* (1821) and *Vues pittoresques de l'Écosse* (1826). In the latter, drawings made on the spot by the artist F.-A. Pernot served to illustrate Scott's own descriptions of scenes taken from his novels. The edited book followed the publication in 1825 of Pichot's own *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse*.²¹ Written in epistolary form as a travel

¹⁷ Anthony Pym, *On Translator Ethics: Principles for Mediation Between Cultures* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012).

¹⁸ Cecilia Alvstad and Alexandra Assis Rosa, "Voice in retranslation: an overview and some trends," *Target*, 27.1 (2015), 3-24 (3-4).

¹⁹ Céline Sabiron, "Cross-channel literary crossings and the borders of translatability," *Minding Borders: Resilient Divisions in Literature, the Body and the Academy*, ed. Nicola Gardini, Adriana X. Jacobs, Ben Morgan, Mohamed-Salah Omri and Matthew Reynolds (Oxford: Legenda, 2017), 169-186.

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 75; Lawrence Venuti, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1-17.

²¹ Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse*, 3 vols (Bruxelles: Wahlen et Tarlier, 1826), cited in the text below as *Voyage*.

book and yet presented as a fiction, the *Voyage* offers a very complete panorama of Romantic-period society and culture. The heteroglossic text mingling facts and inventions testifies to Pichot's quest for hybridity. He preferred the status of critic rather than that of author, thus implying that his work is a critical commentary on other's words instead of his own creation.

During his tour, Pichot visited Abbotsford, and he met Scott twice in Edinburgh. His accounts of their conversation give way to a fanciful rewriting of the scene, as well as a critical commentary on Scott's writing.²² In Pichot's staging of the dialogue, Scott is portrayed as a nationalist poet defending Scotland's old national costume and the independence of the country. Pichot concludes that Scott's "poems, like his novels, compose poetical protests against the act of union":

cet homme qui a remis l'Écosse au rang des peuples, en occupant continuellement l'Europe de l'Écosse indépendante. En effet, ses poèmes, comme ses romans, sont de poétiques protestations contre l'acte d'union, et c'est de toutes les flatteries celle qui caresse le plus agréablement l'orgueil national: aussi le peuple reconnaissant aime-t-il la gloire de Scott comme sienne (*Voyage*, 3: 214).

Such a misreading of Scott's work was highly detrimental to the reception of Scott in France and beyond, since the critic-author presented the rewritten dialogue with Scott as an authentic or verbatim account, recorded for the French reader in direct speech.²³ In fact, it had been subjected to a double act of fabrication, both through the work of translation from English to French and through the accompanying critical discourse which clouded and even contradicted Scott's own agenda. In Pichot's case, his competing identities clashed, leading to acts that to other eyes might seem piracy and forgery.

²² An English version appeared as "literary and miscellaneous dialogue, translated from the tour of an eminent foreigner," by J. W. Lake, "Memoir of Sir Walter Scott," *Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (London: Crissy, 1839), xxii-xxiii. Cf. Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 2: 791; Duncan Macmillan, "'A journey through England and Scotland': Wilkie and other influences on French art of the 1820s," *British Art Journal*, 3.1 (2001), 28-35. Pichot's visit occurs too early to be recorded in Scott's *Journal*, and there are no letters from Scott to Pichot included in the Grierson letters, but the *Millgate Union Catalogue of Walter Scott Correspondence* lists five from Pichot to Scott (1822-1829): <https://www.nls.uk/catalogues/resources/scott/>.

²³ Cf. Paul Barnaby and Tom Hubbard, "The international reception and literary impact of Scottish literature of the period 1707-1918," in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Susan Manning (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 33-44.

Pichot's dialogical self, exemplified by his polyphonic production made of a meshing of voices, led his biographer L.A. Bisson to subtitle his book "romantic Prometheus."²⁴ Bisson portrays Pichot as the official champion of English literature in France through his critical reviews and translations, popularizing Scott's texts among budding French writers. As the subtitle suggests, he is also depicted as the trickster figure who defied god-like authors by stepping outside his median position as intermediary to ignite the interest of the reading public in Scott with what he called his "biographical tales," the early one discussed here, *Le perroquet de Walter Scott*, and two later tales, *L'Écolier [Pupil] de Walter Scott* (1860), and *La Belle Rebecca* (1864).

Le perroquet de Walter Scott mixes "fiction" ("oeuvre d'imagination," *Le perroquet*, viii) with biographical fact. Pichot for instance mentions that Scott's response to his letter had not been written by Scott himself, "struck, as was well-known, by a fatal hemiplegia," or stroke ("frappé, comme on sait, d'une fatale hémiplegie," *Le perroquet*, vi).²⁵ Scott had confessed during their meeting that he made his literary "début in 1799, with an imitation of some ballads of Burger, and a translation of the chivalresque drama of Goethe, Goetz von Berlichingen."²⁶ In moving from translation to original work in 1834, therefore, Pichot was imitating Scott's example.

Pichot's conscious imitation or echoing of Scott is illustrated by the preface to *Le perroquet de Walter Scott*, which plays on the parrot trope to reflect on the status of the translator and test its limits. Beyond the rhetorical effect created by the paronomasia, the association of parroting and pirating was part of pirate lore before Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1882) made it a popular cliché through his pirate character, Long John Silver, and his pet parrot Captain Flint. The parrot, a favorite since antiquity as shown in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* (350 BC), and recorded as an exotic luxury gift as early as the fourteenth century, has always intrigued by its impressive ability to mimic human speech. It had often been used as a comic device, as in the 1811 vaudeville play *L'Auberge du perroquet* quoted by Pichot (*Le perroquet*, vi). Pichot's parrot, as implied by its reflexive name ("Lorito" being Spanish for "parrot") becomes a transcending symbol, a highly signifying literary object which Pichot (and his own mirroring six-letter name composed of the exact same number of vowels and consonants: Parrot/Pichot) self-mockingly uses. In the staging of his fictional encounter and exchange of parrots with Scott, he switches from the notion of voice as the

²⁴ Bisson, *Amédée Pichot*, as in n. 9 above.

²⁵ On Scott's physical inability to write, see Céline Sabiron, "Handing over Walter Scott? the writer's hand on the English and French marketplace," *Walter Scott: New Interpretations: Yearbook of English Studies*, 47, ed. Susan Oliver (2017), 58-74.

²⁶ J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs*, 48-49.

“characteristic, individual physical sounds of speech, singing, and so forth” to that of the metaphorical voice understood as an enunciating instance.²⁷

Pichot positions Scott’s parrot symbolically among other familiar texts on his own bookshelves, “his cage naturally finding its literary place in my library.”²⁸ With its beautiful plumage and voluble nature, the parrot stands for the figure of the translator who, equipped with a quill pen made from the moulted flight feather of a large bird, faithfully speaks out snatches of conversation which had been overheard in Abbotsford’s aptly named “parlour” and which he had memorized.²⁹ “I collected and transcribed two long pages of those cryptic sentences,” writes Pichot, before sending them back to their author in order to check their meaning.³⁰

The fable thus dramatizes the translation process through the back-and-forth motion between the original source text and the target text, and the sometimes painful deciphering and translating of an author’s text into a foreign language. With the exotic caged talking bird, Pichot points at the liminal status of the translator, both foreign to the text that he has not authored and domesticated, both outside and inside, holy and fallen as mere conveyor of the words of another authoritative voice.³¹ Pichot hints at his feeling of entrapment and his desire for more creative freedom when, in the sentence quoted above, the noun “bird” grammatically disappears to be replaced as subject by “cage.” The reference to the embedded story of Aesop’s fable “The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs” (“perroquet plus précieux que la poule aux oeufs d’or,” *Le perroquet*, vii) shows that the translator is tempted to escape by plagiarism from his position as a ventriloquist. He dreams of taking up and carrying on with the great writer’s masterpieces (“continuer les chefs-d’œuvre du grand romancier,” *ibid.*, viii) to produce a text made of Scott’s “fragments” and “narrative shreds” (“lambeaux de récits,” *ibid.*, vii), with him filling in the blanks thanks to Scott’s additional sources: as Pichot has Scott write to him in his fictitious

²⁷ *Textual and Contextual Voices of Translation*, as in n. 11 above, 4-5.

²⁸ “sa cage trouva une place toute littéraire dans ma bibliothèque,” *Le perroquet*, v.

²⁹ “il n’a que de la mémoire; et j’ai reconnu toutes les phrases que vous me citez de lui pour des fragments de conversations qui se sont tenues dans le *parloir* d’Abbotsford,” *ibid.*, vii.

³⁰ “Je recueillis et transcrivis deux longues pages de ses phrases sibyllines pour les envoyer dans ma lettre à l’illustre voyageur,” *ibid.*, vi.

³¹ Cf. Diana Donald: “[parrots] had been described since the middle ages as ‘creatures out of paradise’: their ability to speak suggested a survival, unique among extant animals, of the powers which all were believed to have possessed in the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Man.” Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 5.

letter, "I want ... to give you the sources that will enable you to complete [the narrative] in my place."³²

Pichot's preface points to the very porous boundary between authorship and translatorship, and this is further clarified by Peter Flynn's image of this distinction as a cline, or measurable gradient for differences in a specific trait:

Perhaps it would be better to arrange such writers along a cline: at one end those who only translate others and at the other end writers who translate themselves. This would allow us to deal with varying degrees of translatorship and authorship in each case. There are some enigmatic characters who are difficult to place anywhere along such a cline.³³

Certainly, such is the case with Pichot. The allegorical tale amounts to a literary operation designed to confer legitimacy on the translator as author and to justify his rewriting of Scott's texts. Playing on Scott's posture as a ghost writer in his *Waverley* novels, Pichot states that he will owe his fortune and glory to the parrot, as Walter Scott owed his to his good narrator Jedidiah Cleishbotham.³⁴ Hence, we as the readers of Pichot's text are left with an image of Scott's parrot, Pol, formerly a very attentive but silent listener, gaining self-confidence, and "trying to become a storyteller in turn."³⁵

Le perroquet de Walter Scott rewrites Walter Scott from the very title and in its every page by means of multiple quotations and allusions peppered throughout the 900-page book. Pichot's agenda of parroting and pirating is revealed from the outset in the opening of his travel narrative "Two Journeys to the Hebrides." Pichot's setting here, in Shetland and Orkney, is that featuring in Scott's *The Pirate* (1822), a novel written from his diary of the 1814 tour as a Commissioner for the Northern Lighthouses. Pichot's erudite work was written in the manner of Scott's *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1816), and it is therefore no surprise that Scott's parrot be called "Pol" [pɔl], a transcription of the French pronunciation of the first name Paul [pɔ:l] in

³² "je veux ... vous indiquer les sources qui vous permettront de les compléter à ma place," *Le perroquet*, vii.

³³ Peter Flynn, "Author and translator," in Gambier and Van Doorslaer, n. 15 above, 4: 16.

³⁴ "Every anonymous writer is, like the celebrated Junius, only a phantom:" Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 3; "the present author, himself a phantom." Scott, *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, ed. J.H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 183; "je te devrai ma fortune et ma gloire, comme Walter Scott dut la sienne au bon Jedidiah Cleishbotham," *Le perroquet*, vii (hyphen in Pichot).

³⁵ "après une si longue bouderie, un mutisme si obstiné," "after sulking for so long, and remaining so obstinately silent," *Le perroquet*, v; "Pol était un auditeur très attentif, et je vois maintenant qu'il s'essayait à devenir conteur à son tour," *ibid.*, vii.

English. In the preface, the anecdote about the fall of Walter Scott's bust, for which the overzealous but clumsy maid is charged, rewrites the passage in *The Antiquary* (1816) where Oldbuck lashes out at his chambermaid for causing great havoc in his *sanctum sanctorum*: "the last inroad of these pretended friends to cleanliness was almost as fatal to my collection as Hudibras's visit was to that of Sidrophel."³⁶

Pichot does not hide out from his parroting and thus pirating of Scott's content and style. Placing himself under Scott's moral and aesthetic authority, he presents himself as his pupil, and even his natural and legitimate literary heir.³⁷ "Who knows," Pichot asks, "if, when making an inventory of Walter Scott's inheritance, his heirs might not come across the legacy intended for me at the bottom of some drawer?"³⁸ The topic of heritage permeates the text, from the exchanges of letters between the two men to Scott's parrot, Pol, which is bequeathed to Pichot after the death of his own Lorito. Scott's death is symbolically enacted both through the fall of his bust ("too sad and true an omen") and the use of a performative language endowed with proleptic references to the writer's impending death.³⁹ The preface turns out to be a parodic literary testament in which the Sacred Word of God is perverted into the invented and profane disjointed words of the "Wizard of the North," as Scott was nicknamed. In the fairyland of his fable fraught with the lexical fields of magic and the supernatural ("sorcerer"; "magician"; "necromancer"; "like an oracle"; "sibylline"), Pichot conjures up an imaginary lineage, with Thomas the Rhymer's "magic wand" (*Le perroquet*, vi) being passed down to Scott and then to himself.⁴⁰ The spell is cast as shown by the semantic shift from the French "charme" ("the spell was broken") to "charmé," meaning, "being well pleased," but also "spellbound." The sentence Scott allegedly wrote to Pichot "Je suis

³⁶ "le buste du grand homme ... venait d'être précipité de son piédestal par une servante maladroite," *Le perroquet*, v; and cf. Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 21.

³⁷ "trop heureux si on voulait bien y trouver que l'élève n'a pas inutilement étudié le maître," *Le perroquet*, viii; cf. Pichot's later work *L'écolier de Walter Scott* (1860).

³⁸ "Qui sait, d'ailleurs, si, en inventoriant la succession de Walter Scott, ses héritiers ne rencontreront pas, au fond de quelque tiroir, le legs qui m'était destiné?," *Le perroquet*, viii.

³⁹ "(triste et trop véridique présage)," *Le perroquet*, v; "L'auteur de Waverley partait justement pour son voyage sur le continent, le dernier, hélas! qu'il devait faire," *ibid.*, v; "l'homme physique appartenait à moitié au tombeau," *ibid.*, 6; "hélas! mourant," *ibid.*, vii.

⁴⁰ "sorciers"; "magicien"; "nécroman"; "comme un oracle"; "sibyllines," *Le perroquet*, vi.

charmé de ce que vous me mandez de Pol” (*Le perroquet*, vi-vii) can thus be interpreted as “I am spellbound by your narrative on Pol.”

As a symbol of his self-granted position as both Scott’s protégé and messenger, pupil and heir, Pichot stages himself as travelling in the Scottish archipelago with letters from Scott intended to the Hebridean lairds (“Muni de quelques lettres de sir Walter Scott pour les lairds hébridiens, j’ai rejoint à Oban le jeune docteur Mac-I,” *Le perroquet*, 41). They serve as safe conducts, as similar letters do in Scott’s novels, where Edward Waverley (*Waverley*), Frank Osbaldistone (*Rob Roy*) and Henry Bertram (*Guy Mannering*) all brandish such talisman-like passports to cross the sacred Highland line.⁴¹ Pichot uses the preface to *Le perroquet de Sir Walter Scott*, a marginal paratextual space, to perform an unholy liminal rite of passage parodying Elisha’s inheriting from Elijah’s mantle (2 Kings 13) and serving to legitimize his gradual emancipation from Scott’s overshadowing presence and his crossing of the boundary between translatorship and authorship.⁴² In an 1834 review published in the weekly-illustrated journal for literature and fine arts *L’Artiste*, an anonymous critic gave this summary of Pichot’s book:

it is very eclectic in both its style and choice of topics as suggested by the subtitle ‘travel sketches; legends and novels; biographical and literary tales.’ ... M. Amédée Pichot’s Parrot, as a true carrier bird, takes us from the North to the South, from Scotland to the Provence region.⁴³

Pichot’s transgressive act of creative liberation is eventually embodied by his invention of a centaur-like spirit animal, a mixed construct modelled on both Scott’s parrot and Alexander the Great’s Bucephalus mentioned in the preface. Yet, he appropriated the character, a horse, which he nonetheless called after the name of a large bird, *Passeroun*, meaning “passerine” in the regional language of Provence.⁴⁴

The preface to *Le perroquet de Walter Scott* is more than a fabulous tale of parroting and pirating. Beyond the eccentric and parodic staging of himself as Scott’s literary heir, Pichot blurs the lines between the translator’s and the author’s voices. It is through the parrot that voices merge, since the

⁴¹ Scott: “Waverley riding post ... without any adventure, save one of two queries, which the talisman of his passport sufficiently answered, reached the borders of Scotland”: Scott, *Waverley*, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 312.

⁴² Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris: Picard, 1909).

⁴³ A.L.G., “Le perroquet de M. Amédée Pichot, en oiseau voyageur, nous fait passer du Nord au Midi, de l’Écosse à la Provence,” *L’Artiste: journal de la littérature et des beaux-arts*, 1.8 (1834): 219:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k19962c/f287.image> (accessed February 2018).

⁴⁴ *Le perroquet*, 239-423.

talking bird is both the “emblem of the writer’s voice,” as Julian Barnes writes, and the image of the translator voicing another’s words.⁴⁵ Pichot’s literary manifesto raises identity questions and hints at the fact that the self may no longer be construed as a unified whole but rather as a decentered and free-floating construct of multiple texts and discourses. It shows that “voices in and around translated texts mix and blend in intricate ways that reveal how translation is a matter of circulation and of confrontation between voices and of constant negotiation and re-negotiation of meaning.”⁴⁶

The parrot emblem has been taken up and redefined at least twice in later French literature. First, Gustave Flaubert borrowed a stuffed parrot from a Rouen museum and put it on his desk as a source of inspiration while writing *Un coeur simple* (*A Simple Heart*, 1877).⁴⁷ The bird was even given a central role within the fiction since Loulou, Félicité’s pet parrot, is worshipped as the reincarnation of the Holy Ghost, the giver of tongues, floating over her deathbed. Second, in Julian Barnes’s novel *Flaubert’s Parrot*, the parrot, seen as a transcendental presence, both profane and sacred, material and spiritual, becomes Barnes’s source of metafictional inquiry, as he and his narrator ponder the ways in which art mirrors life and then turns around to shape it. Through Geoffrey Braithwaite, a widowed, retired English doctor visiting France, Barnes wonders whether the writer is little more than “a sophisticated parrot” capable only of “repeating at second hand the phrases he hears” (Barnes, 18). As in Pichot’s translation, Barnes’s writer is viewed not as the one who speaks, but as one who is spoken, feebly accepting language as something “received, imitative, and inert” (*ibid.*, 19). Challenging the conventional author-translator polarization is a way to continue the debate.

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⁴⁵ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot* (London: Picardo, 1984), 12.

⁴⁶ *Textual and Contextual Voices of Translation*, as in n. 11 above, 4.

⁴⁷ Though there is no proof that Flaubert’s parrot was inspired by Pichot’s, the two men certainly knew each other’s works, and *Madame Bovary* (1856) was later serialized in *La Revue de Paris*, edited by Du Camp and Pichot.