# A Migrant 'Malgré Soi'[1]: Munro's Ancestor Old James in Slovene Translation

***Tjaša Mohar***
University of Maribor

**Povzetek**

»Pogled z grajske pečine« (angl. "The View from Castle Rock") je kratka zgodba iz istoimenske zbirke kratkih zgodb Alice Munro, v kateri pisateljica opisuje emigracijo škotske družine v Ameriko v začetku 19. stoletja. Literarni liki so zasnovani na pisateljičinih prednikih in poimenovani po njih. Glavni junak zgodbe je James Laidlaw oz. Stari James, pisateljičin prapraprapraded, ki je gonilna sila emigracije družine. Vendar komaj se vkrca na ladjo, s katero bo družina odplula na novi kontinent, že postane čemeren in nejevoljen; rodni deželi začne peti slavospeve kot še nikoli prej, nove dežele pa pozneje ne sprejme za svoj dom. Starega Jamesa karakterizirajo predvsem njegova dejanja in govor. Za njegov govor so značilni pogovorni jezik in številni kulturno specifični izrazi, pojavlja pa se tako v dialogih kot v dveh pismih, ki jih Stari James odpošlje iz nove domovine. Pismi sta – poleg tega, da sta napisani v pogovornem jeziku – polni slovničnih in pravopisnih napak. Prispevek analizira tiste elemente govora Starega Jamesa v dialogih in pismih izvirnika in slovenskega prevoda, ki se zdijo še posebej zahtevni za prevajalski proces.

**Ključne besede:** Alice Munro, »Pogled z grajske pečine«, migracije, književno prevajanje, pogovorni jezik

1 *French*, "against his will".

# 0 INTRODUCTION

*The View from Castle Rock* is Alice Munro's twelfth short story collection, published in 2006. According to Maria Löschnigg (2014: 14), it is a semi-autobiographical collection, while Gordon Bölling calls it an "exceptionally personal book" (2011: 120). Munro's biographer Robert Thacker observes that in this short story collection, Munro deals with "ancestral and personal subjects" and that it contains some of her "most revealing autobiographical writings" (2011: 529). Coral Ann Howells (2016: 81) defines the stories in *The View from Castle Rock* as non-fiction, arguing that some of them represent Munro's heritage narrative, while others trace her immediate family history, with "Working for a Living" being the transitional story between the two. As Löschnigg explains, in *The View from Castle Rock*, "the intradiegetic narrative is framed by the discourse of a first person narrator who appears as a historian or chronicler" (2014: 26). The book is divided into two parts, followed by an Epilogue; the first part, subtitled "No Advantages", consists of a series of stories that trace the history of Munro's ancestors on her father's side, while the second part, subtitled "Home", features several stories from Munro's own childhood, teenage years and adult life. However, as Munro herself explains in the Foreword, the collection does not consist of memoirs but of stories, although these are closer to her own life than some of her other stories with a first person narrator; in addition, the part of the book "that might be called family history has expanded into fiction, but […] within the outline of a true narrative" (2007: np).

Besides being a semi-autobiographical collection, *The View from Castle Rock* is also distinguished in Munro's writing by its strong historical background. While most of Munro's stories from her other collections are set in the Province of Ontario and, to a lesser extent, in British Columbia in the recent past, the first part of *The View from Castle Rock* is set partly in Scotland and partly in the New World, and covers the period from the late 17th century to the early 20th century. The main focus of the first part of the collection is a true event—the emigration of a Scottish family, based on Munro's ancestors, to Canada in the early 19th century. The ship carrying immigrants lands in Quebec, and the family settles in York (later, Toronto). That Scotland sent many emigrants to Ontario is established in the book titled *Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650-1990* by John J. Bukowczyk et al. (2005), which also confirms the exchange of emigrants and settlers across the border with the United States. It is not surprising that Munro has chosen to write about migration; as Franca Iacovetta (1997: 1) points out, Canada is "an immigrant receiving society", and much of Canadian historical scholarship has focused on writing about immigration. Migration is also a common topic in contemporary Canadian literature, for, as Löschnigg (2014: 298) explains, the migration cycle is one of the two major

types of contemporary short story cycles in Canada, the other being the life cycle. By melding the history of her family and her personal history in *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro has created, according to Löschnigg, "an innovative example of the migration cycle" (ibid).

This paper will focus on the central character of the title story of the collection, "The View from Castle Rock", James Laidlaw or Old James, firstly to define him as a poorly assimilated immigrant, and secondly to analyse his speech, which best characterizes him, yet might also be particularly challenging for translation owing to its culture-specific features manifested by Scottish geographical names and historical references, on the one hand, and colloquial language, on the other.

## 1 OLD JAMES – A MIGRANT MALGRÉ SOI

The story "The View from Castle Rock" revolves around the emigration of Old James, Munro's great-great-great-grandfather, and a few other members of his family (two of his sons, Andrew and Walter, his daughter Mary, Andrew's wife Agnes and their son Young James) from the Ettrick Valley in Scotland to "America", as they refer to the New World in their conversation—more precisely to Canada, as we learn later in the story. The family crosses the Atlantic in 1818 aboard a large ship, together with many other Scots. Old James's youngest son Walter keeps a log of the six-week journey, noting major events, such as deaths and births, as well as the weather, in order to send an account of the journey, once they land in the New World, to his two brothers who have remained in Scotland. As we learn at the end of the story, the passages from Walter's journal inserted in the story are authentic, as well as the two letters that appear in the story and that were written by Old James after he had settled in Canada.

A short explanation of the story's title is in order here. Old James, discontent with life in the remote Ettrick Valley, which according to the Statistical Account of Scotland as of 1799 offers "no advantages" (Munro 2007: 3), constantly talks about going to "America". The story opens with Old James taking a small group of people, including his ten-year-old son Andrew, up the Castle Rock, the hill on which Edinburgh castle stands, to show them "America" across the sea. The scene is rather comic, for all that can be seen from the top of the hill is the other side of the bay, the county of Fife. However, Old James somehow manages to convince the company that what they are looking at is "America":

> "So did I not tell you?" Andrew's father said. "America. It is only a little bit of it, though, only the shore. There is where every man is sitting in the midst of his own properties, and even the beggars is riding around in carriages."

> "Well the sea does not look as wide as I thought," said the man who had stopped staggering. "It does not look as if it would take you weeks to cross it."
>
> "It is the effect of the height we're on," said the man who stood beside Andrew's father. "The height we're on is making the width of it less."
>
> "It's a fortunate day for the view," said Andrew's father. "Many a day you could climb up here and see nothing but the fog."
>
> He turned and addressed Andrew.
>
> "So there you are my lad and you have looked over at America," he said. "God grant you one day you will see it closer up and for yourself." (Munro 2007: 30)

Although Old James's sons, tired of their father's constant mentioning of America, make jokes about his intentions, Old James eventually manages to collect the necessary money to take his family to the New World. However, his sons are not as keen on going as he is, and three of them run away in order to escape their father's plan. Although aggrieved by the fact that he will not be bringing five strong sons to America, he is still in good spirits until he boards the ship that will take them across the ocean and sees all the people on it: "Where are we to sleep? Where have all these rabble come from? Look at the faces on them, are they blackamoors?" (Munro 2007: 32). However, he soon finds a pastime on the ship: he starts telling stories about his home country and his grandfather, who was a kind of a local legend, to anybody who will stop and listen, and thus becomes a shipboard celebrity—some listen to him because they are interested in the stories, others because there is little other amusement available.

Besides being the central character in the story, Old James is the most comic one. His actions reveal him as determined and persistent but also as quick tempered and obstinate. His two sons are embarrassed by him and try to avoid him on the ship; his daughter Mary is afraid of him, while Agnes, his daughter-in-law, finds him annoying. If, at the beginning of the story, Old James is a fervent advocate of emigration, who urges his family members to exchange the God-forsaken Ettrick Valley for a better life in the New World, as soon as he comes aboard the ship he starts complaining and regretting his decision: "Oh, that ever we left our native land!" (ibid). When the ship finally sails within sight of the new continent, he refuses to look at the land (Nova Scotia), and starts praising the Ettrick Valley again. As the ship lands in Quebec, "among such clamour of the French tongue and cries of gulls and clanging of Papist church bells" (ibid: 81), Old James laments: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (ibid: 82). That he is concerned about matters of the soul in this strange new land also appears in the letter that he writes to his eldest son Robert, who has remained in Scotland. Although in the letter he is rather optimistic about life in the new country, he

is sceptical of the new religion. In another letter that he writes to the editor of a magazine, he expresses his great concern for his fellow Scotsmen, who have gone astray, exchanging religion for Whiskey. In addition to the two letters that testify to the fact that Old James is a poorly assimilated immigrant, Old James says to his son Andrew: "It [the new country] cannot be my home. It can be nothing to me but the land where I will die" (ibid: 80).

## 2 OLD JAMES'S SPEECH

Old James's speech appears in the form of dialogue as well as in the form of the two letters that he writes from the new continent—one to his son Robert in Scotland and the other to the editor of *The Colonial Advocate* magazine. The analysis of Old James's speech is divided into two parts: the first part deals with translation challenges related to the historical and geographical references in the speech, while the second part deals with translation problems related to its linguistic features.

### 2.1 Historical and Geographical References

Since the story is culturally strongly embedded into early 19th-century Scotland, numerous culture-specific terms appear in old James's speech. While such terms play a crucial role in representing a certain culture in the source text, they are particularly difficult to translate, owing to what Newmark (2004: 94) calls a "cultural gap" that exists between the source and the target languages. Translation problems may occur in cases where culture-specific terms do not have an equivalent in the target language, such as proper names pertaining to material and social culture. Two possible translation approaches when dealing with culture-specific features are foreignization and domestication, which were, as Lawrence Venuti (1995: 19) points out, defined by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of the 19th century. As Schleiermacher explains, in the first case the translator "leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him", while in the second case the translator "leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (in Venuti 1995: 19-20). Štefan Vevar (2001: 12-13) argues that contemporary translation practice is in favour of domestication or relativization of absolute foreignizing items in order to preserve the function and the artistic effect of the original text. Vevar (ibid) further argues that the appropriate degree of foreignization or domestication to be used in literary translation differs from case to case and is

dependent on various factors. As the following analysis will show, domestication is the preferred approach in the Slovene translation of culture-specific references in Old James's speech.

In Old James's account of life in his home valley, there are several geographical and historical references:

> "In the Ettrick there is what they call the highest house in Scotland," James says, "and the house that my grandfather lived in was a higher one than that. The name of the place is Phauhope, they call it Phaup, my grandfather was Will O'Phaup and fifty years ago you would have heard of him if you came from any place south of the Forth and north of the Debatable Lands." (Munro 2007: 47)

The Slovene translation:

> »V dolini Ettrick stoji to, čemur pravijo najvišja hiša na Škotskem,« reče James, »in hiša, v kateri je živel moj ded, je bila više od te. Domačija se imenuje Phauphope, pravijo ji Phaup, moj ded je bil Will O'Phaup in pred petdesetimi leti bi slišali zanj, če bi živeli v katerem koli kraju južno od Fortha in severno od spornega ozemlja.« (Munro 2017: 53)

The geographical name of *Ettrick* that appears in the original text is accompanied in the Slovene translation by what Newmark (2004: 82) calls a culturally neutral third term or functional equivalent in order to reduce the foreignizing effect, e.g. *dolina* Ettrick (back translation (BT): the Ettrick valley). The geographical name of *Forth*, on the other hand, which stands for the Firth of Forth, cannot be rendered in the target language by simply adding a functional equivalent to avoid foreignization. In such cases it is possible to keep the original term and explain it in a footnote. In the Slovene translation, the following explanation is given in the footnote: *ustje več škotskih rek* (BT: the estuary of several Scottish rivers). *Debatable Lands* is another historical geographic term that can be deforeignized in the target language. A possible solution is to translate it literally and add a footnote with the English name and an explanation, as is the case in the existing Slovene translation: the term is translated as *sporno ozemlje* and the following footnote is added: *Angl. Debatable Lands, ozemlje med Škotsko in Anglijo. Ko sta bili to še ločeni kraljestvi, je bilo sporno, kateremu kraljestvu pripada* (BT: /…/ an area between Scotland and England. When these were separate kingdoms, it was debatable to which kingdom the area belonged). This kind of translation procedure is in line with Vevar's suggestion (2001: 106) that elements in the text that might sound foreign in the target language should be translated hermeneutically, by explaining them to the reader.

References to Scottish history are found in Old James's account of the Scottish kings on the occasion of the famous climb up Castle Rock:

> "It was King Jamie asked the young Douglases to have supper with him and when they were fair sitten down he says, oh, we won't bother with their supper, take them out in the yard and chop off their heads. And so they did. Here in the yard where we stand.
>
> "But that King Jamie died a leper," he went on with a sigh, then a groan, making them all be still to consider this fate.
>
> Then he shook his head.
>
> "Ah, no, it wasn't him. It was King Robert the Bruce that died a leper. He died a king but he died a leper." (Munro 2007: 28-29)

The Slovene translation:

> »Kralj Jamie je povabil mlada brata Douglas na večerjo in komaj sta sedla k mizi, je rekel, ah, kaj bi si dali opravka z njuno večerjo, odpeljite ju na dvorišče in jima odsekajte glavo, In tako so storili. Tu, na dvorišču, kjer stojimo.«
>
> »Ampak kralj Jamie je umrl gobav,« je nadaljeval in zavzdihnil, nato zastokal, da so morali vsi stati pri miru in razmisliti o tej usodi.
>
> Nato je zmajal z glavo.
>
> »Ah, ne, to ni bil on. Kralj Robert Bruce je umrl gobav. Umrl je kot kralj, ampak umrl je gobav.« (Munro 2017: 36-37)

The names of the kings in the above passage are not further explained in the target language, which means that in these cases foreignization has been preserved. However, a footnote about "the young Douglases", which is rendered into Slovene as "mlada brata Douglas" (BT: the young Douglas brothers), is added in the Slovene translation: *Člana vplivne plemiške družine na Škotskem* (BT: members of an influential noble family in Scotland), which means that this element has been translated hermeneutically.

## 2.2 Colloquial Language

Although the story is partly set in 19th-century Scotland and its protagonists are Scottish, there are not many Scots words in the text. Among those that do appear in direct speech are, for instance, *ye* (Scots denoting the pronoun "you"), *wee* (Scots for "little"), *laddie* (Scots for "boy") and *aye* (Scottish Gaelic for "yes"). In the existing Slovene translation, only the word *aye* has been preserved, which the protagonists consistently use instead of the standard affirmative expression *yes*. In the Slovene text, the word *aye* is written the way it is pronounced, *aj*, which is a possible solution, considering that some Slovene readers can probably recognize

this word as the Scottish colloquial word for *yes*, and for those that cannot, this is not crucial for the understanding of the text as a whole.

In Old James's speech, colloquial language appears in dialogues as well as in the two letters that he writes. His direct speech is partly ungrammatical: there are several examples of non-standard syntax, for instance a plural noun followed by a verb in the singular form (as in "even the beggars is riding around in carriages"). However, in his two letters, ungrammatical language is also accompanied by several spelling mistakes. As Tomaž Onič (2008: 148) argues, grammar mistakes are usually not easily translatable, owing to the specific nature of individual languages. Particularly in translating drama or direct speech in prose texts, Onič (2017: 141) suggests that the translator should find a different translation solution with the same intensity and a similar effect. This is in line with what Keith Harvey (2004: 37) calls the technique of compensation. While according to Hervey and Higgins (1992: 34-40), the lost element should be replaced with a new one of a different kind in the same place in the text, or with the same element in a different place in the text, Mona Baker (1992: 78) and Hatim and Mason (1990: 202) are less precise about where in the text the compensation should take place. In addition to grammar and spelling mistakes, Old James's letters are also characterized by the absence of punctuation (a few punctuation marks do appear in the letters, probably to show that Old James is aware of their existence, but is unsure of or careless about how to use them properly). While the absence of punctuation is strictly observed in the Slovene translation, as will be shown in the examples below, the grammar and spelling mistakes are not preserved. However, some cases of compensation do appear in the Slovene translation in order to preserve at least some of the colloquial character of Old James's speech, a selection of which will be presented here.

In his letter to the editor of *The Colonial Advocate*, Old James writes:

> /…/ Now sir I could tell you bit of Stories but I am afraid you will put me in your Colonial Advocate I do not like to be put in prent I once wrote a bit of a letter to my son Robert in Scotland and my friend James Hogg the Poet put it in Blackwoods Magazine and had me all through North America before I new my letter was gone Home /…/ (Munro 2007: 84)

The Slovene translation:

> /…/ Gospod lahko bi vam povedal kaj zgodb ampak se bojim da me boste dali v časopis nimam rad da me dajo v časopis nekoč sem napisal pismo mojemu sinu Robertu na Škotsko in moj prijatelj pesnik James Hogg ga je dal v revijo Blackwood ki so jo poslali povsod po Severni Ameriki preden sem vedel ali je moje pismo prišlo domov /…/ (Munro 2017: 85).

The colloquialism "I could tell you bit of Stories" is partly preserved in the Slovene translation ("lahko bi vam povedal kaj zgodb", instead of the standard "nekaj

zgodb" or "kako zgodbo"). The colloquialism "I once wrote a bit of a letter to my son Robert in Scotland" is translated in the way that the possessive pronoun "mojemu" ("nekoč sem napisal pismo mojemu sinu Robertu") replaces the standard reflective possessive pronoun "svojemu", which is a case of compensation. This is in line with Onič's (2017: 142) suggestion regarding the grammar mistakes pertaining to Slovene colloquial language that the translator into Slovene can use in order to lower the level of formality of the text. The words *prent* and *new* that are misspelled in the original text are not misspelled in the target text. One might be tempted to compensate *prent* with the colloquial word *cajteng* in the Slovene translation. However, "to put in print" is not colloquial or dialectal; thus using a colloquial word in the Slovene translation would lower the level of language in the target text.

In the same letter, Old James writes

> /…/ The Scots Bodys that lives heare is all doing Tolerably well for the things of this world but I am afraid that few of them thinks about what will Come to thear Soul when Death there Days doth End for they have found a thing they call Whiskey /…/ (Munro 2007: 83-84).

The non-standard syntax in the above passage ("the Scots Bodys that lives heare" and "few of them thinks") is not preserved in the Slovene translation. Neither do the several spelling mistakes in the original text (Bodys, heare, thear, there (instead of their)) appear in the Slovene translation. However, a compensation does appear towards the end of the passage, where the pronoun *čemur* is replaced by the pronoun *ki* ("nekaj ki mu pravijo viski") to add to the colloquial character:

> /…/ Vsem Škotom ki živijo tu gre še kar dobro kar zadeva stvari tega sveta bojim pa se da jih malo misli na to kaj se bo zgodilo z njihovo dušo ko bo smrt končala njihove dni kajti našli so nekaj ki mu pravijo viski /…/ (Munro 2017: 84)

As regards Old James's letter to his son Robert, the numerous spelling mistakes from the original text do not appear in the Slovene translation; however, the colloquial language is partly preserved. For instance, the passage "/…/ the people here speaks very good English there is many of our Scots words they cannot understand what we are saying /…/" (Munro 2007: 82) is translated into Slovene as "/…/ ljudje tu govorijo zelo dobro angleško veliko naših besed ne morejo razumeti kaj pomenijo /…/" (Munro 2017: 83). The improper use of third person singular instead of third person plural in the original is compensated with the non-standard syntax is in the translation: "veliko naših besed ne morejo razumeti kaj pomenijo".

Similarly, the passage "/…/ Some [farm Houses] will have as good as 12 Cows and four or five horses for they pay no Taxes just a perfect trifell and ride in

their Gigs or chire like Lords … /…/" (Munro 2007: 82) is translated into Slovene as "/…/ Nekatere kmetije imajo celo dvanajst krav in štiri ali pet konj saj ne plačujejo nobenih davkov samo eno malenkost in ljudje se vozijo okrog z gigi in kočijami kot gospodje /… /" (Munro 2017: 83). Colloquialisms in the original text include "some will have as good as 12 cows"; "just a perfect trifell", and "[they] ride in their chire". In the Slovene translation, colloquial language is preserved in "ne plačujejo nobenih davkov samo eno malenkost". However, the words "trifell" and "chire" that are misspelled in the original are not misspelled in the translation.

The numerous spelling mistakes that appear in the original text are mostly enabled by the complex spelling rules and the numerous homophones that exist in the English language. For instance, Old James writes the word *here* as *hear*; *their* as *thear* and *there*; *bodies* as *bodys*, etc. These instances of incorrect spelling that add to his characterization cannot easily be preserved in the Slovene translation, for in Slovene, spelling is less complex and there are fewer homophones. In the above passage, the word "konj" could perhaps be misspelled as "kojn", and the word "davkov" could be written as "daukou", as it is pronounced, to preserve at least some cases of misspelling. There are quite a few translations of literary works into Slovene where the low register as well as the non-standard grammar and spelling of the original texts have been preserved, for instance Andrej Skubic's translation of Irvine Welsh's novel *Trainspotting*. However, Welsh is a contemporary Scottish writer and his use of non-standard English (a mixture of Scots language and Standard Scottish English) is consistent in speech throughout the novel, whereas the story "The View from Castle Rock" is written in standard English, with the exception of some cases of direct speech and the two letters written by Old James. In addition, Munro's use of colloquial language and Scots expressions is not consistent in the characters' direct speech throughout the story. It seems more as if, by using a few Scots expressions, Munro sought to add to the authenticity of her Scottish characters, rather than write their utterances in genuine Scots colloquial language, that of the early 19th century, for that matter. Perhaps Munro tried to match the imagined dialogue in the story to the recorded language in Old James's letters that have been preserved in the original. The one that Old James sent to *The Colonial Advocate* was published in William MacKenzie's book *Sketches of Canada and the United States*. MacKenzie was in fact the very editor of *The Colonial Advocate* to whom Old James sent the letter. In *Sketches of Canada and the United States*, MacKenzie (1833: 468) remarks that Old James (or Auld James, as he refers to him) depicts in his letter "America as he found it," and that his mode of spelling has been preserved in the letter.

As Onič (2008: 147) observes, the contemporary translation studies cannot offer definite guidelines regarding the translation of colloquial and dialectal language owing to the specifics of individual languages. Therefore, it is up to the translator

to decide how to translate passages written in a lower register appearing in a literary work that is mostly written in standard language, such as is the case of Old James's letters in "The View from Castle Rock". Considering the fact that Old James is a 19th-century character, it would be very difficult to find a linguistic equivalent of his speech in Slovene to replicate the historically-mediated interpretations between Scots and English.

## 3 CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed at identifying some of the linguistic and stylistic textual elements in Old James's speech that are potentially challenging in the translation process, in this case in the translation into Slovene. Old James's speech is characterized by a strong historical dimension and numerous culture-specific terms, on the one hand, and by extensive use of colloquial language, on the other. Apart from identifying potential translation challenges and providing brief general comments to their transfer into another linguistic and cultural context, the existing translation solutions have been analysed.

Although there is much theoretical knowledge available to support the relevant translation issues that appear in this kind of literary text, the existing guidelines suggested by various translation scholars are not universal, owing to the specific nature of individual languages and cultures. Therefore, in the final stages of polishing the translated text, the literary translator often needs to rely on his or her sensibility for the target language when judging the appropriateness of the language elements to be used in the target text against the background of the target language and culture.

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