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From New England to the Low Countries

A comparative translation analysis of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the elms* and Arne Sierens' *Het begeren onder de olmen*

Eline Denolf

Making a written work of art from a source culture accessible to a target culture, is the essential aspiration of the literary translator. This operation may seem highly ambitious and challenging; by some scholars it is considered downright impossible. For the dramatic genre, the discipline may become even more complicated, as the medium is charged with a performative aspect. This implies that the literary text is meant to be performed and therefore transcends an audience of remote, delayed readers to one of immediate, present onlookers. The performance dimension moreover influences the dynamics of the dramatic language. This inevitably bears far-reaching consequences for the adopted translation strategies. One specific problem of drama translation which deserves more academic attention than it has been given so far, is that of the manipulation of nonstandard language. Since nonstandard language is highly culture-bound, every such case of translation is characterised by unique sites of indeterminacy. When it comes to academic research however, the translation of drama is one of the most neglected areas in Translation Studies as compared to poetry or prose translation (Bassnett 123). Even less has been published about the treatment of written nonstandard linguistic varieties (see Lemmens). The present study seeks to examine the function of the literary form, in this case linguistic variation, in the service of the dramatic content of the theatre, and how it is treated in translation. Its aim is to stimulate the recognition of theatre translation¹ as an autonomous branch of study at the intersection of Translation Studies and Theatre Studies.

The particular problem of translating nonstandard language in a performance context, was experienced by theatre maker Arne Sierens in 1992, when the Dutch theatre company Het Zuidelijk Toneel brought Eugene O'Neill's play *Desire under the elms* (1924) to the Low Countries and commissioned him a translation of the text into Dutch. The production was directed by Ivo van Hove. Eugene O'Neill is an American dramatist and is considered a pioneer in the use of the American Vernacular, the language of the people, for dramatic dialogue. The target culture for the translation encompasses the Dutch-speaking areas of the Low Countries, namely Flanders and the Netherlands. This contribution investigates how

O'Neill's particular 'code-choice', referring to the dramatic language constructed in this play, with its implications specific to the piece's content and context, is transformed in translation for a Dutch-Flemish audience, as well as what the effects of this transformation are.

To answer this question, a comparative analysis of the characteristics and dramatic implications of the specific codes in both source (ST) and target text (TT) is rendered, followed by insights into the TT's transformation from page to stage. A confrontation of the findings will lead to identification of the applied translation strategies and their outcomes. The aim of this case study is to gain better insight into the particular difficulties that a translator of a dramatic text faces, and into the possibilities for creative solution available to him/her. The primary sources employed for analysis are Eugene O'Neill's play *Desire under the elms* (1924) and Arne Sierens' translation *Het begeren onder de olmen* (1992). Of the latter, also film footage of the staged performance was available. Finally, an interview with dramaturge Klaas Tindemans and paratext² in the form of an introduction to the published translation elucidated certain obscurities about the translation process.³

Theory of drama translation and code-choice

In her extensive study on drama translation, translation scholar Sirkku Aaltonen distinguishes at least five related disciplines: translation studies, theatre studies, literary studies, cultural studies and linguistic studies (2000, 28). Unsurprisingly, theoretical works on drama translation all seem to be drawing on theatre semiotics as a point of departure. However, as theatre studies make a clear distinction between 'theatre' and 'drama', the same accounts for the terms 'drama translation' and 'theatre translation'. Theatre semiotic Keir Elam states that 'theatre' is taken to refer to "the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the system underlying it." 'Drama', then, is "that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions" (2). An interesting remark is also made on the kinds of 'text' figuring as the actual objects of analysis. Elam points out that two dissimilar types of textual material are at stake: those "produced *in* the theatre" and those "produced *for* the theatre" (2). He considers this distinction to concern the theatre semiotician, as opposed to the literary semiotician, and thereby confirms the need for an approach to theatre translation strategies necessarily distinctive from other forms of literary translation. The disparity between Theatre and Literary Studies over time⁴ has resulted in

different types of drama translations. Aaltonen distinguishes three types, based on the openness of their readings. The first type is the 'introductory translation', written "for a large and diverse audience of readers and theatre practitioners" (2010, 107), possibly published as a book, for no particular production intended, and with a long anticipated life span. The second type is the 'gloss translation'. Belonging hereto are open texts, targeted at playwright-translators who want to make "their own translations on the basis of a linguistic analysis of the source text" (107). The third one is the 'performance translation', meant for audio-visual reception in a particular theatrical context, with an undetermined life span. The current study will predominantly concentrate on the third type, i.e. the performance translation of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the elms*, translated by Arne Sierens for a particular staging by Het Zuidelijk Toneel. This performance translation takes into consideration the particular relationship between drama text and performance text. Theatre scholar Patrice Pavis describes the relationship between text and performance as "a way of establishing meaning" through obtaining a "balance between opposing semiotic systems" (90). I will take up Pavis' concept of "mise en scène", which is defined as "the bringing together or confrontation, in a given time and space, of different signifying systems, for an audience" (86), to examine this particular relationship.

Before considering the problem of linguistic variation in our case study, it is appropriate to provide some insight into the functions, dynamics and effects of using different languages and varieties on stage. In his book *Speaking in tongues: Languages at play in the theatre*, performance scholar Marvin Carlson observes that dialects and vernaculars are attractive for creating a sense of realism, which can be explained by their association with orality (92). In most cases, a substandard variety is indeed marked by the lack of codification; it only exists as a spoken language. A frequently applied solution is to construct what is called a 'literary dialect'. Milton Azevedo defines the term as "a stylized representation of speech by means of nonstandard, regional, social or even individual features" (28). Literary dialects should therefore be considered fictional, stylistic artifacts rather than accurate scientific representations of a linguistic variety, as they are inevitably incomplete. When dealing with nonstandard language, theatre scholars Louise Haywood, Ian Higgins and Sándor Hervey identify the main problems the translator faces. First of all, s/he has to recognise the peculiarities of and have enough affiliation with the source text variety (112). The next problem is estimating how important the dialectal features are to the overall effect of the source text (112). Depending on whether or not the variety serves an instrumental function, the translator can opt to ignore it or attempt a translation.

If the translator opts for translation of the variety, s/he needs to find a language “to accurately represent the ST variety’s associations and connotations” (112-113), i.e. its socio-semiotic value in the target society. If no available variety is deemed suitable as an equivalent, a translator might choose to manipulate the language as to give the impression of a type of language, by adopting features of common vernacular or colloquial speech, not actually reproducing a dialect (Azevedo 41).

The different nonstandard languages of the ‘foreign’ ST and the TT expose only one out of many problems related to possible ‘incompatibility’ between source and target culture. In order to overcome this incompatibility, certain translation strategies can be applied. Acculturation, on the one hand, is the process of toning down the Foreign⁵ by minimising or eliminating the relationship to any specific culture (Aaltonen 2000, 55). For several specific cultures in Europe, for example, it is possible to move to a more generic European image in order to minimise the play’s relationship to the specific culture. Naturalisation, on the other hand, is an extreme form of acculturation. It “denies the influence of the Foreign, and rewrites the play ... as if coming from the indigenous theatre and society” (55), as to disguise the foreign origin of the text. Both are ways of ‘domesticating’ the source text. In the words of Lawrence Venuti, who coined the term, domestication is, as opposed to foreignisation, a translation strategy aimed at fluency and transparency, whereby a cultural ‘other’ is made intelligible (127). Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the theatre translation process is an essentially collaborative act: translators, directors, actors, technicians and set designers all contribute with their individual readings of the play, which finally accumulate into the translated play. Aaltonen introduces the term “collective authorship” to point at this, blurring the lines between translator and author (2000, 109). This indicates both how theatre translation does not terminate on the page and how translators of performance translations engage in creative authorship rather than plain textual transfer.

O’Neill and *Desire under the elms*

Eugene O’Neill’s (1888-1953) aspirations as a playwright arise from his exasperating frustrations and deep concern with the lack of new interpretations and experimentation in the New York theatres in the late nineteenth century. The conventional melodrama, for which saleability was the main success criterion, was characterised by unlikeliness in plot and action, traditional character types and background. Especially its romantic dialogue, filled with archaisms, complicated syntax and inadequate homogeneity in the rhetoric and idiom of all characters (Winther, 105), was a cause for dissatisfaction on O’Neill’s

part. Moreover, its language and style were still very British, the language of the coloniser. To him, there was an urgent need to create a profoundly 'American' theatre. As the American Language Movement had already made headway, around the 1880s, Walt Whitman turned it into a true campaign for the sake of American literature. Whitman promoted the use of native idiomatic words to pursue an honesty of style and artistic integrity, and to support moral claims about the freedom of American democracy. O'Neill was firmly determined to pursue artistic quality in his own work and was willing to take risks in order to overturn the conventions.

The influence of the European theatre scene galvanised O'Neill into exploring the alternatives: in the 1870s, Henrik Ibsen was one of the first to reject the use of verse form in drama, instead devoting himself exclusively to the art of writing "plain language spoken in real life" (Ibsen 218). O'Neill's interpretation of naturalism inclined towards what he ascribed to Strindberg's work and named 'super-naturalism'. The term expresses his rejection of naturalism as an end in itself, but advances the naturalist depiction as a technique to reflect the underlying symbolism of the play. In the beginning stages of his career, O'Neill struggled with the creation of a dramatic unity of form and content. Only when the relationship between technical devices, structure and language on the one hand, and their implied messages on the other, was well-balanced, he believed the super-naturalist technique to successfully reflect the underlying symbolism.

Being the culmination of his experiment with form and content, the language of O'Neill's *Desire under the elms* reflects his theatrical ideas excellently. Written in 1924, it portrays a farmer's family living in New England in the 1850s, at the time of the Californian Gold Rush. The Cabots lead a miserable life, oppressed by the ideal of the American Dream. Miners from all over the world aspired to settle in California after the discovery of gold in early 1848. It is no coincidence that New England, an ethnic name for a geographical sub-region of the North-Eastern United States, is situated at the exteriority of the American continent opposite to California: the "East" versus the "West" reinforces the symbolic disparity between the worlds of dream and reality. The New England region was also characterised by devout Puritan religion and work ethic at the time. The Cabots live in a rural landscape near a small village, and the entire play takes place in and around the farm, which induces an isolated impression. Moreover, the characters almost exclusively talk about their own immediate environment or reality, devoid of any political, historical or cultural references. Their peripheral location, low-skilled

background and humble homestead situate them in the lower middle classes of mid-nineteenth-century American society.

When constructing a suitable language, it is almost incontestable that O'Neill drew inspiration from the features characterising the spelling and grammar found in the fictional dialects of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Moreover, the influence of the American Language Movement promoted the use of the vernacular in literature. The markers of this specific code are not only used to mark the substandard quality of the language, but also the characters' particular idiom. Consistency, rather than linguistic accuracy, is most essential to successfully suggest a particular variety and its associations. The following extract serves to give an impression of the idiom in *Desire under the elms*:

- (1) SIMEON. (*grudgingly*) Purty.
 - (2) PETER. Ay-eh.
 - (3) SIMEON. (*suddenly*) Eighteen year ago.
 - (4) PETER. What?
 - (5) SIMEON. Jenn. My woman. She died.
 - (6) PETER. I'd fergot.
 - (7) SIMEON. I rec'lect – now an' agin. Makes it lonesome. She'd hair long's a hoss' tail – an' yaller like gold!
 - (8) PETER. Waal—she's gone. (*This with indifferent finality—then after a pause*) They's gold in the West, Sim.
 - (9) SIMEON. (*still under the influence of sunset—vaguely*) In the sky?
 - (10) PETER. Waal—in a manner o' speakin'—thar's the promise. (*Growing excited*) Gold in the sky—in the West—Golden Gate Californi-a!—Goldest West!—fields o' gold!
 - (11) SIMEON. (*excited in his turn*) Fortunes layin' just atop o' the ground waitin' t' be picked! Solomon's mines, they says! (*For a moment they continue looking up at the sky—then their eyes drop*)
 - (12) PETER. (*with sardonic bitterness*) Here it's stones atop o' the groun—stones atop o' stones—makin' stone walls—year atop o' year—him 'n' yew 'n' me 'n' then Eben—makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in!
- (204)

I will not render a detailed analysis, but a brief selection of some linguistic features at stake may be useful. Phonologically, the most striking features are vowel and consonant deletion ('*bout*, '*preciate*, *he'p*, *Amighty*) and the 'dropped g' (*downin'*, *somethin'*), which mark the language as distinctly American through

commonalities of many vernacular variants (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 74, 82). Vowel and diphthong shifts, such as *hum* (“home”), *druv* (“drove”), *jine* (“join”), *diskiver* (“discover”) or *jest* (“just”) are considered major indicators of deviation from the norm and contribute to the impression of the substandard. A distinct grammar is mainly created through verb forms, as found in the extended use of the 3rd person form, inadequate past forms (e.g. *knowed*) and omission of the auxiliary verb (e.g. *she done*, *I seen*), as well as the pronouns (*ye*, *yew*, *yer*) and double negative marking. Linguists Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes identify the above features as a mixture of social and geographical markers (74-87), being convincingly American in nature as opposed to British, as well as reflective of the lower strata of society. Given the background of O’Neill’s artistic aspirations, we might say that he used the language as a dramatic instrument to render the American setting and to characterise the Cabots’ social situation in a sufficiently credible way, promoting his supernaturalistic style.

When it comes to the lexicon, a majority of nonstandard items is marked as colloquial in register (e.g. *nary*, *to reckon*, *swig*, *fair and square*, *pesky*), according to Noah Webster’s *New World dictionary of the American language* (1959). Some are dialect or even slang (e.g. *critter*, *vittles*, *jiffy*). A general observation is that the characters’ vocabulary is small in size and repetitive in nature, which signifies the Cabots’ verbal limitation. Their inarticulacy is underscored by the continual reiteration of the interjections *waal*, *mebbe* and *ay-eh*, occurring respectively 62, 51 and 44 times in the play.

Another significant aspect distinguishing the play’s specific code from the theatrical conventions of the time, is that of its rhythm. The dialogue’s lines are strikingly short, composed out of words or phrases rather than sentences, as in lines (1)-(4) above. Line (5) is only an extension of the same principle; it is a sequence of fragments rather than a sentence. Other lines seem longer when chained together by conjunctions – almost exclusively coordinators – or dashes, as in (10) and (12). They prevent sentences from being clearly demarcated, but present them as a collection of tatters, along which characters swerve off topic without batting an eye, as seen in (8). The reference to spoken language could not be more obvious. The fragmentary rhythm of these phrase sequences is an excellent illustration of how a thought gradually develops in the character’s mind, of how words are chosen on the spot; it creates the impression of spontaneity fundamental to spoken dialogue. The specific rhythm of the play’s code thus imitates the dynamics and fluency of dialogue through its fragmentary sentence structure, on the spot development of speech and spontaneity of exclamations, in

order to establish verisimilitude in orality as opposed to the artificial prosaic dialogue of O'Neill's predecessors. Brevity of sentence structure perfectly aligns with the stalling interjections to symbolise verbal inarticulacy and depict language as an obstruction to the unfolding of emotions. Therefore, what is truly revealing, is not what is said, but rather what remains unsaid. This verbal limitation confirms the characters' social setting of poor educational background as well as the theme of their hidebound and insular everyday reality. The symbolic quality of the language in addition to the naturalistic advancement of conversational speech forms the purest example of how supernaturalism in form successfully reflects supernaturalism in content.

Arne Sierens and Het Zuidelijk Toneel: constructing a language

Multiple translations of *Desire under the elms* have been made for the Dutch language area.⁶ However, only one of the available scripts seemed to have made an effort to adopt a language convincingly deviating from the standard: *Het begeren onder de olmen* by Arne Sierens. Sierens translated the drama text for a production by theatre company het Zuidelijk Toneel. Ivo van Hove was the director, with Klaas Tindemans as dramaturge and Gerard Thoolen, Bas Teeken, Peter van den Eede, Peter van den Begin, Hilde van Mieghem and Joost van Es as performing actors.

The play was staged on locations all over Flanders and the Netherlands, which urges us to make a note on the linguistic situation in the Low Countries (here used to refer to the Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium and the Netherlands). This situation is rather complicated as it does not involve clear-cut linguistic boundaries, but is in fact a continuum from North to South and East to West, as well as a continuum from dialect to standard language⁷. Especially in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, increasing dialect loss over the past decades has resulted in the emergence of what is called 'tussentaal' or 'Verkavelingsvlaams', characterised still by many substandard features but less regionally bound. The Dutch used in the Northern part of the Low Countries is distinctly different from that of the South, most remarkably so in spoken discourse. Not only pronunciation, but also vocabulary, proverbs and even syntactical structures may vary. Apart from language-inherent characteristics, also associations with and attitudes towards the language are noteworthy: many Flemings and Dutchmen feel unmistakably different in language (Bakema 7), which charges this language with notions of identity formation.

When bringing *Desire under the elms* to the Low Countries, dramaturge Klaas Tindemans could not possibly overlook the importance of the peculiar language to the overall meaning. He emphasises that the search for a suitable translator was aimed at authors rather than professional translators (personal interview, 4 April 2018). Soon, his search led to Arne Sierens, an established and celebrated theatre maker, proudly identifying himself as born and raised in Ghent. Sierens had been inspired by the phonology, grammar and lexicon of Flemish dialects in his dramatic language from 1986 onwards. Although it was far from common to use the substandard in the Flemish theatre scene of the late '80s, Sierens was certainly popular. Moreover, Tindemans says, "toneelvlaams" [theatre Flemish], which pursued to resemble the standard language, had become discredited, and eloquence had become less prominent among theatre actors. Especially the generation of actors who had been trained by Dora van der Groen (where it had become common to implement 'local' influences in the language) disengaged from superficial eloquence and an affected theatre idiom. One could say that the Flemish theatre scene had been warmed up regarding the staging of substandard language.

Sierens' language was characterised by a seemingly spontaneous, although virtuosically composed rhythm and melody, be it harmonious or deliberately dissonant. This rhythm, creating a poetical effect, was ever at the service of the enacted performance, as though it suggested the gestural element and evoked the performative faculty. Also with regard to theme, Sierens' earlier work befitted the play at issue: he had always been fascinated by the lower strata of society. Theatre scholars Erwin Jans, Geert Opsomer and Christel Stalpaert regard his 'theatre of poverty' as the most radical expression of the 'condition humaine', concerned with the fate of ordinary man (8). This poverty as a theme is reflected in the form and production process of his pieces, marked by purification and reduction to the bare essence (9). Sierens developed a method to reconcile theatre and realism for which he adopted the term 'transcendental realism'. As reminiscent of O'Neill's supernaturalism, he departed from realism in an attempt to transcend it by gathering elements of the condition humaine, distilling isolated realistic details from them and weaving them together, creating fresh, new relationships (11). His local and virtuosically rhythmic language, as well as his themes of poverty, tragedy, fate and the lower social class made Sierens into the most qualified author for *Het begeren onder de olmen*.

For more insight into the translator's approach to the ST code's multifaceted implications, we are very lucky to rely not only on an introductory note to the TT

written by dramaturge Klaas Tindemans, but also on a personal interview with him. The title of the note “Van ‘New England’ naar het ‘diepe Vlaanderen” [From ‘New England’ to the ‘deep Flanders’] (vii) is already revealing with regard to the target setting: the play is markedly set in Flanders, rather than an undefined, neutral place in the Low Countries. The challenge for the translator, it says, was to “discover” a Dutch dialect (vii), which captures not only the social position but also the emotional lives of the characters, covered by O’Neill’s region- and class-bound language. Sierens’ construction of a literary “streektaal” [dialect] (x), he writes, is based on the Flemish spoken in the old Flanders, west of the Scheldt river, as found in the works of Stijn Streuvels and Hugo Claus. Claus (1929-2008), who was born in West-Flanders and also wrote drama, was experimenting with language in the 1970s, in an environment of linguistic purism. *Vrijdag* (1969) was the first play written in his famous dialect-inspired literary idiom. Critics thought his language was marked, and labelled it ‘colloquial’, ‘vernacular’ or ‘Flemish in register’ (Lemmens 130). They acknowledged how it contributed to the atmosphere and authenticity of the story, as redolent of O’Neill.

Desire under the elms and Het begeren onder de olmen: a comparative analysis

Sierens identified the variety’s instrumental function to the overall effect of the ST and opted to create a literary language which represents the ST variety’s associations and connotations as accurately as possible. To observe how exactly this language came about, we will take a look at the translation of the same extract as used for discussion of the ST features:

- (1) SIMON. Schoon!
- (2) PETER. Ja.
- (3) SIMON. ‘t Is achttien jaar.
- (4) PETER. Wat?
- (5) SIMON. Jeanneke. Mijn vrouw. Dat ze dood is.
- (6) PETER. ‘k Was dat vergeten.
- (7) SIMON. ‘k Peins er nog op – af en toe. Alleen is maar alleen... Z’had ne paardestaart tot aan haar gat – de kleur van de zon – geel lijkt goud!
- (8) PETER. Maar ja – z’is er nie meer. ‘t Zit goud in ‘t Westen, Mon.
- (9) SIMON. In de lucht?
- (10) PETER. En in de grond – ‘t is daar al goud in ‘t Westen! ‘t Goudland! – Californie-ah! – Goudvelden vol goud!
- (11) SIMON. ‘t Ligt er zo op de grond – fortuinen zo voor ‘t rapen, zeggen ze! De mijnen van Salomon!
- (12) PETER. Hier is ‘t stenen voor ‘t rapen – steen na steen – al maar

muren maken – jaar na jaar – hij en gij en ik en onze kleine – muren
om ons hier t'houden! (4)

Again, I do not pursue a deep linguistic analysis of the code's markers, due to spatial limitations. Therefore, the following examples are not exhaustive; they serve to give an impression of the constructed code's particular features.

The phonological markers employed by Sierens represent reduced forms ('t, 'k, g', 'm), consonant deletion and assimilations, as well as features like 'd'-enclisis (*ziede, kunde, hebde*). When applied consistently, as is the case, they constantly remind the reader/interpreter of the substandard quality of the language. In translation, graphology was of less importance for suggesting the substandard, because textual reception would mainly happen auditorily. Moreover, standardised spelling would allow the actors more freedom to accustom the speech sounds to their own accents, avoiding an affected or artificial diction. When it comes to grammar, Sierens first of all manipulates personal pronouns into their archaic equivalents *ge, gij, gullie* and *ullie*. Furthermore, he employs remnants of the accusative case adding *-(e)n* to certain articles, pronouns or determiners, as well as old diminutive suffixes *-(e)ke* and *-ske*. The above features then, suggest the archaic and substandard effect of the constructed code. Even more prolific than phonology and grammar is the use of lexical markers. Bakema's *Vlaams-Nederlands woordenboek* identifies a list of attested items as markedly "Flemish" words or expressions, such as *ieverans, bleiten, rieken, zeveren, kieken, zothuis, vort, 't is koekebak, 't zal nie pakken* or *gene klop doen*. These items may well be considered to make an alienating impression on a (Northern) Dutch audience. Also the presence of French loanwords (*salut, embrasseren, soigneren, kolère, fameus* and *miljaardedju*) – as assessed by the *Van Dale* dictionary of 1992 – is significant, and is moreover a typical feature of the "old Flemish" dialects, pointing again to West- and East-Flemish influences in the code. Finally, a series of words labelled in *Van Dale* as "archaic" (*anderman, gans* ("heel"), *lijk* ("gelijk", "zoals"), *subiet* and *voort*) contributes to the suggestion of authenticity of the Flemish countryside, as found with Claus. The recurring fillers *waal, mebbe* and *ay-eh* have been retained, but translated into more variations than the original three, such as *maar ja, allez, awel, wie weet, 't kan zijn* or *goe geweten dat*. More than O'Neill, Sierens deployed lexical items to establish the regional character of the code.

As mentioned before, Sierens is known for his attention to rhythm and musicality in the dramatic text. It will not be of any surprise then that he was well aware of the ST's dissonant melody and fragmentary rhythm created by the length and structure of the sentences. The same fragmentary sentence structure as in the original is retained in line (5) of the above extract: "Dat ze dood is" is not an independent clause, even though it is demarcated by an initial capital letter and a full stop. In this case, the translation accentuates the spontaneous and gradual search for words even better than the original line. The dashes are adopted too, as well as the commas, interjections and incomplete sentences. In some places, Sierens seems to have preserved the original structures meticulously: " 'Twould be hard fur me, too, to give up..." (205) is translated into " 't Zou voor mij ook hard zijn, Mon, om 't op te geven..." (4). Sierens found an alternative to interrupt the sentence in more or less the same place by interjecting "Mon" instead of "too". As we can see, Sierens was exceptionally perceptive about the halting and unruly rhythm of the ST. The fragmentary lines expressing the characters' inarticulacy and the spontaneity of on-the-spot composed language is transferred very faithfully.

Besides code-choice, also the ST's cultural references may induce sites of indeterminacy regarding their transfer to a new context; all the more so since the Flemish-Dutch target context is not culturally homogeneous. Depending on how they were treated in translation, they may enhance or undermine the domestication strategies of the TT code.

First of all, the treatment of proper names may influence the degree of foreignisation or domestication of the translation considerably. In line with the naturalisation strategies of the code, Sierens chose to naturalise the proper names referring to people. 'Cabot' remained 'Cabot', but 'Ephraim' became 'Jozef', with a biblical reference being retained. 'Abbie' is translated as 'Bie', reminiscent of 'Bieke', a common name in the Dutch language area, and 'Minnie' becomes 'Mieneken'. The ST use of the hypocorism 'Sim' for 'Simon' enforces the text's reflection of informality. Sierens substituted it by 'Mon', the alternative more familiar to a Dutch-speaking audience. The most interesting adaptation happens to the name 'Eben', who in translation is consistently referred to as "de kleine" by the rest of the family. Indicating the youngest one of the family, this is a very commonly applied feature in Dutch-speaking families. This naturalisation of proper names was done consistently throughout the play, not only for the protagonists. When it comes to toponyms, Sierens applies conservation strategies. The name 'California' is mentioned repeatedly, but the exotic character of the

name is emphasised by means of the phonology: 'Californie-ah'. The toponym 'New Dover' then, is 'dutchified' into 'Nieuw-Dover'.

Secondly, it may be worthwhile to have a look at how biblical references were treated in translation. The ST was performed in 1920s' Puritan America, while the TT was performed in the 1990s' Protestant Netherlands and Catholic Flanders, in which the Church was gradually losing its central position. A citation like: "An' God hearkened unto Rachel" (235), is translated as: "En God verhoorde Rachel, zij droeg de vrucht!" (43), explicating her pregnancy. The translator must have assumed that the TT audience was not familiar with the biblical passage on Rachel's infertility. A reference to Wormwood (238), a biblical metaphor for things that are unpalatably bitter, was omitted in translation: "Dat maakte mij bitter en ondermijnde mij" (46). Repeated allusions to Solomon's mines, the Songs of Solomon and the Rose of Sharon are conserved, although one may wonder to what extent the 1990s' Low Countries' audience was still familiar with them and their symbolical implications.

That *Desire under the elms* is a profoundly American play, has become evident throughout the above discussion. Therefore, it is almost inevitable for the translator to deal with certain Americanisms incorporated in either dialogue or stage directions. The first example is 'preacher'; however not an exclusively American concept, its translation into "dominee" deserves special attention. 'Dominee' is namely a function associated with the Protestant Church, and thus Dutch-marked in view of the Flemish-Dutch audience. Offering up "prayers of thanksgivin'" (248) then, is also a typically American religious custom, which in translation changes into "om de maagd Maria te bedanken" [to thank Virgin Mary] (58). Virgin Mary is a much more prominent figure in Catholicism than in Protestantism, because she is granted very little mention in the Bible. We may regard this case therefore as a rather Flemish-marked adaptation. Religiously determined cultural concepts were thus naturalised, being either more Dutch or more Flemish in tone. Although attested only once, the word "promenade" (250) may have caused an additional problem to the translator. It is namely a reference to the American tradition of square dancing, a type of social dancing, which is accompanied by a fiddler, the dance's leader, who improvises square dance calls (Fuhrer 35). Again there is no suitable counterpart in the Dutch-speaking area, but Sierens opted for a type of festive dance belonging to the Low Countries' folk culture, typically associated with highly informal parties: the 'polonaise' (60). This type of dance, for which people form a string by placing the hands on the shoulders of the person in front, is not to be confused with the Polish polonaise.

The most strikingly American concept is perhaps the sheriff. Because no equivalent capturing the same semantic content exists in the Low Countries, this reference remains unaltered. Sierens also preserves the American Dollar in translation, enhancing the ties with the ST setting and culture. In conclusion, Sierens only sporadically opted to either delete (and therefore avoid) or preserve the cultural reference. In most cases, he went with substitution for a target culture equivalent. Because the majority of cases are either naturalised or omitted, the overall translation strategy with regard to culture-specific references should be considered domestication. There are only a few cases in which the foreign undeniably filters through.

The mise en scène: a textual comparison between the page and the stage

We have previously identified theatre translation as a collaborative act, which implies that, besides the translator, also director, actors, technicians and set designers contribute with their readings of the play in the course of the production process. The occurrence of modifications during this process is natural: strict fidelity to the translated text is highly uncommon, out of considerations regarding the text's performability and because of the artistic freedom granted to the aforementioned agents involved. This section examines the extent of this 'fidelity', and tries to elucidate both the motivation for and the effect of possible deviations from the translated drama text in the "mise en scène". The discussion of the adaptations made between page and stage was based on film footage of the recorded play in 1992, obtained from Het Zuidelijk Toneel.

First of all, some important modifications have been made with regard to the drama text. Omissions have been made, not only on the level of individual lines, but even of entire parts of a scene. A striking observation is that the omitted lines and passages contained a vast amount of typically regional lexical items; *bleiten*, *kloefen*, *kloek*, *koekebak*, *kolère*, *stekken*, *subiet*, *vaneigen*, *voort*, *zothuis* and the exclamation *dadde*, *mannekes!*, as well as the typically Flemish and moreover final word of the translated text *amaai* have disappeared in the performance text. Also certain items which may deviate too much from the desired informal and unsophisticated register are replaced by more according alternatives: *betaand* becomes *vol tranen*, the exclamations *krijg nu de stuipen* and *God den Heer Allemachtig* are replaced by respectively the profanities *godvermiljaardenonedju* and *godverdomme*, while *babietje* is substituted by *kinneke*, a colloquial synonym with archaic diminutive suffix. There is yet another element of the drama text to consider, namely what is called 'diction' and which only materialises in performance. Important to mention here, is that three of the actors (Peter van

den Begin, Hilde van Mieghem and Peter van den Eede) naturally have an Antwerp accent, while Bas Teeken and Gerard Thoolen were born and raised in the Netherlands, although they had been living in Antwerp for more than ten years. This influences their natural accents in the direction of the Flemish, but there is still a divergence noticeable, which calls into question the homogeneity of the family's language, and therefore the likeliness of the common dialect. On the other hand, this ensures a greater inclusivity regarding the audience's geographical range. What may complicate matters of comprehensibility more than the accent is the simultaneous utterance of dialogue lines by the actors throughout the play. However confusing, it does reinforce the effect of credibility as it reminds us of natural and spontaneous spoken discourse. Moreover, it enhances the rhythmical, dissonant tension underlying the dialogue, an advantage of the theatre medium over that of dramatic literature.

Apart from omissions and substitutions, additions have been made in the text as well as in actions and gesture. The first significant addition is the brothers crossing themselves before having dinner. The application of such a ritual is far more common in Catholic than in Protestant tradition, in which the Word of God in the Bible is the main source of authority and rituals are not a central part of religious praxis. This addition can be considered a form of domestication to the Catholic cultural context. However, the question is to what extent the reference is meant to be taken seriously: the actors namely mumble the recitation of the Trinitarian formula in such a comical way that the gesture conveys a farcical impression rather than a sense of cultural recognition. Also the song "Californie-ah!" is yelled, blared almost, by Simon and Peter, first while playing air guitar melodramatically, then while stomping around the stage and jumping on top of the dining table. Tindemans says that this added humour was mainly influenced by the actors. The addition of obscene and 'improper' actions, such as spitting or even urinating on the stage floor, as well as the eye-catching and rather startling presence of five cows on stage during the entire performance, contribute to this comical effect. It can be argued that the shameless execution of those actions and the stage design promote the play's naturalism, as Van den Dries writes, wherein the actions reflect the emotional inner world in physical gesture, thus establishing a physical-demonstrative kind of theatre which transcends the realistic frame (46). In opposition could be argued that the humorous way in which the actions are performed rather diminishes the play's dramatic tension. Instead of advancing the play's likeliness in supernaturalism, they add to its implausibility, run the risk of turning the characters into caricatures and

effectuate the exact impression which O'Neill sought to avoid with the language: that of a farce.

In conclusion, the omission of some typically Flemish lexical items in addition to the Antwerp and slightly Dutch accents of the actors, effectuates a decrease of alienation on the part of a Northern Dutch audience. The substitution of vocabulary and expressions that were considered too formal enhances the homogeneity of register, while the simultaneous utterance of lines contributes to an impression of spoken dialogue spontaneity and thus credibility. The staged performance text induces therefore a less regional, but more colloquial impression than the translated dramatic text.

The balance between domestication and foreignisation

In this final section, the above observations will serve to review the balance between the translation strategies made with regard to the current case. This will demonstrate to what extent the difficulties and the applied strategies for drama and theatre translation deviate from other forms of literary translation, and to what extent the literary and performance translations are either domesticated or foreignised.

First of all, the problems for translation of a substandard language as outlined above (Haywood et al.) will be addressed in order to assess how they were overcome in the current case. The first problem is the recognition of the source language's peculiarities. To state the obvious: Sierens was very aware of the deviant, marked nature of the ST code. One could however wonder how much affinity he had with the specific phonology, grammar and lexicon which characterise it. Herein, he is considered disadvantaged as compared to the professional translator, who is expected to have received a much better training in this field. We have however observed that O'Neill's code combines several vernacular features from different areas. This facilitates the recognition of peculiarities somewhat for the translator. In other words: it is not necessary to localise certain features, because the impression of a substandard prevails over the language's region-specific qualities.

The second problem then, is to estimate the importance of the dialect for the play. Here, it is most apparent that the theatre translator takes a different approach than the translator of other literary forms: it is the dramaturge and not the translator, who plays the most important role at this stage, recalling Aaltonen's concept of collective authorship. Klaas Tindemans' job is to determine the

function of the substandard code for the play. The introductory note to *Het begeren onder de olmen* proves that he was clearly attentive to the versatile role of this particular code as a dramatic instrument in support of theme, setting and character formation, as well as the larger socio-cultural American context. It escapes me how previous translators have failed to recognise this, which emphasises the importance of retranslations.

The final and most important step is finding a language to accurately represent the variety's associations and connotations. After having determined its value on several levels, Sierens faces the task to find a Dutch-related language which would represent these connotations and implications as completely and faithfully as possible. Note that he seeks to write a performance translation: an autonomous dramatic work for a specific company with a well-known target audience. In the face of the enacted performance, the translator therefore takes the subsequent *mise en scène* into account. He decides to also employ a substandard variety in order to create the colloquial, miserable and to a lesser extent regional, isolated character of the play. Because substandard varieties generally lack codification, the construction of a literary dialect, as defined above (Azevedo), was shown to be necessary. This construction involves the selection of linguistic markers, while taking into account their respective associations. Sierens' first strategy is thus to look at the languages created by authors such as Streuvels and Claus, to explore the possibilities. Due to a lack of codification, Sierens still faces indeterminacies when adopting these languages in a new translation. Here, his own geographical descent is of importance: a solid affinity with the new code is required on the part of the translator. Fortunately, he is thoroughly familiar with the Ghent dialect, situated in the 'old Flanders' of Claus. Moreover, the setting of this area is historically most apposite to the suggestion of the poor and rural Flanders, as an alternative to the poor and rural New England. There is thus an area with similar socio-economic associations available in the target context to project the peculiar ST language onto, which is a major advantage and should not be taken for granted in every translation context. Both this fact and the translator's own affinity with the language, as well as earlier models, account for the selection of this region as a model for construction of the literary language. When it comes to Dutch, deviating from the standard means selecting a certain area. In order to stage an 1850s' farmer's family in a credible and naturalistic way, Sierens had no other option than to take sides: as the Flemish now causes an alienating effect on the Dutch audience, using standard Dutch would have alienated the characters from their social setting, and would have annihilated the ST code's colloquial qualities. We can conclude that Sierens managed to successfully preserve the

play's intrinsic qualities, and at the same time create an autonomously functioning literary work in the target culture.

Besides the substandard, Sierens also manages to transfer, and at times even enhance, the unruly rhythm and dissonant melody. This too, demonstrates how drama translation deviates from that of other literary genres: Sierens seems to 'tailor' the text's rhythm to the actors' gestures, he sees the performance enacted on stage, just like O'Neill did. The fact that affinity with the ST's performative aspect is required, explains why the theatre maker/playwright, and not the professional translator, turned out to be most qualified for the job. The actors' (and of course director's) input in the final script emphasises the collaborative nature of theatre translation, also subsequent to the page.

If we want to evaluate the balance between domestication and foreignisation strategies, we encounter a problem with the definitions of the respective terms. They assume a notion of 'the target culture', which is, in the case of the Low Countries, especially with regard to language, not homogeneous. When it comes to code-choice, there is a naturalisation strategy for at least one part of the target culture: the ST code was markedly brought to Flanders, which effectuates the fluency aimed at in domestication strategies. In the (Northern) Netherlands, this will be perceived as estranging, although it may not actually be called 'foreignisation', since the 'Foreign', here, is not related to the source culture, but indeed to a less familiar area of the target culture. Also for culture-specific references, mainly naturalisation strategies have been applied. If not, deletion was another strategy to clear off any threats of foreignisation. The cases in which the references are retained after all, as found with toponyms, 'sheriff' and 'dollar', figure as anomalies and evoke a highly exoticising effect. Biblical references are largely preserved, but typically American religion-related notions have been substituted by more familiar concepts, giving them a Catholic-Protestant rather than Puritan tone. In general, the references have been domesticated to a great extent.

At this stage, we note a dissociation between domestication of code-choice and culture-specific references on the one hand, and still foreign geographical location and themes on the other. We see that there is a linguistic (and cultural) disparity within the Low Countries, which implies that the 'Foreign' is experienced even within the target culture itself. In the Old Flanders, the constructed, Flemish-coloured code is met with familiarity and therefore deemed naturalised. However, in the Northern Netherlands, this same code is still

perceived as estranging. Also culture-specific references, which have largely been naturalised, urged the translator to choose between the Northern or Southern culture. The elements which have remained uncompromisingly American, tend to cause a breach in the play's coherence: in light of these elements, the code may come across as artificial, which disturbs the illusion of authenticity and literary realism. The actors' addition of humour during the *mise en scène* promotes this impression. This intersection is where the translation process is most visible: the play may have been brought to Flanders in language, but not in themes and physical setting; its American roots are too strong to be discarded. This seems to be the paradox of this specific case of translation: the more faithfully the translators seek to render the implications of the substandard and idiomatic ST code, the more they are urged to select a certain geographical target culture are – in this case the new, distinctly non-American setting of the 'deep' Flanders. As this area cannot relate to the themes of the Gold Rush and the American Dream, it seems to be impossible to reconcile the translators' aim to preserve both the 'foreign' core of the play and the specific implications of the linguistic form without causing the above-mentioned breach. The references to the play's American setting undoubtedly contribute to an estranging effect on the part of the target audience. However, if we consider a dramaturgical strategy which chose to eliminate or substitute (domesticate) these references, and therefore the play's thematic core, the result could no longer be called a 'translation', but would be a pure case of 'adaptation'.

Regardless of the dissociation between foreign themes and naturalised code, Sierens' outstanding effort to transfer the ST's social setting and the characters' idiom, and to successfully recreate a regionally and colloquially distinctive language, should be acknowledged. As opposed to previous translations, the ST code's value was here not only recognised, but also lived up to in transformation to another culture.

Conclusion

O'Neill's major occupation with language in the wider cultural context, was to go against the traditional, commercial, entertainment culture of the theatre of his time, in favour of artistic merit. European influences, in combination with the American Language Movement, made him develop a code utterly distinctive from that of the coloniser to emphasise America's autonomous identity, which was promoted by O'Neill's search for supernaturalism in the unity of form and content. Transfer of this aspired supernaturalism would be the translator's main field of interest.

The formal component is most prominently expressed in O'Neill's code-choice. When comparing the markers selected in both ST and TT, we found that O'Neill rather alludes to the vernacular through phonology and grammar, while Sierens deploys the lexicon to a much larger extent. Nevertheless, Sierens manages to promote the substandard with only a handful of carefully selected (mainly) grammatical features. The motivation for this shift in emphasis of markers is most likely urged by the aim for intelligibility: while O'Neill's vernacular markers were known and intelligible over a large area, finding such markers was much more difficult for the Low Countries.

An explanation for selection of the region on which the markers were based, should be found in earlier literary models, which evoked certain regional and thematic associations that aligned with the play, as well as in Sierens' own descent. He may have been familiar with the use of a literary substandard in his own work, but had to accustom it to a disparate target audience and especially to the peculiar rhythm which distinguishes the characters' idiom. His themes, social settings, language and experience as a theatre maker/dramatist, qualified him as the most suitable translator for the piece, bearing in mind the code's multitude of implications. He managed to find a way to transfer the peculiar code into an utterly different linguistic target context.

So far for the major obstructions with regard to form. The successful transfer of linguistic markers and rhythm means a successful transfer of the play's social setting and character-specific idiom. When it comes to content, references to the Gold Rush and the myth of the American Dream are copious; the theme is at the core of the play. Geographical references have thus been preserved, which is arguably detrimental to the vast amount of naturalised culture-specific items throughout the play. However, altering (domesticating) the play's foundational core would have resulted in an adaptation of the play, rather than a translation. The paradoxical effect of the balancing between foreignised and domesticated elements in a pursuit to remain faithful to the ST code and themes, make the translators' interventions highly visible; one could argue that even this work flirts with the border of the adaptation. The distinction between translation and adaptation of a play however in itself provides material for an autonomous study, which could certainly prove complementary to the current case-study.

In the current publication, I have demonstrated the importance of thorough exploration of the ST code's connotations and implications, regarding both

content and context. It does not suffice to just translate a substandard code into another substandard, but it should indeed be exactly *that* code which most accurately transfers the implied functions into the TT culture. Herein, the study seeks to contribute to the recognition of drama translation, and all the more so theatre translation, as autonomous fields on the crossroads of Translation Studies and Theatre Studies. Their concerns and strategies differ remarkably from the translation of other literary genres, and therefore require an individual approach.

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¹ It might have come to the attention that both the terms 'drama translation' and 'theatre translation' have been used so far. I have adopted Keir Elam's definitions of 'theatre' and 'drama' in order to distinguish between the terms. 'Theatre' is taken to refer to "the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the system underlying it." 'Drama', then, is "that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions" (2).

² 'Paratext' is a concept introduced by Gérard Genette and is used in literary interpretation. In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*, Genette defines 'paratext' as "a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations", which reinforce and accompany the literary work. He writes: "although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (1).

³ The current research project was originally conducted in the framework of my Master's dissertation, titled *From New England to the Low Countries: A comparative translation analysis of substandard language in Eugene O'Neill's Desire under the elms and Arne Sierens' Het begeren onder de olmen* (Eline Denolf, 2018, Ghent University).

⁴ The relationship between Theatre and Literary Studies is discussed in more detail by Bart Philipsen in the article "Old quarrels, new liaisons: On the vexed relationship between theater studies and literary studies", published in *Documenta*.

⁵ Aaltonen capitalises the 'Foreign' as analogous to the phenomenological concept of the 'Other' (in opposition to the 'Self').

⁶ Most of them were performance translations. Available to me were the translations by Dolf Verspoor (premiered in 1965) for Toneelgroep Theater, Arnhem; Wim van Rooy (premiered in 1974) for the Haagse Comedie, Den Haag; Arne Sierens (premiered in 1992) for Het Zuidelijk Toneel, Eindhoven and an anonymous one (s.a.) for the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Amateurtheater, Krommenie. The database of Theater in Nederland lists only one more Dutch professional theatre company which performed the play – this already in 1930, which is strikingly early – namely Oost-Nederlandsch Tooneel, Arnhem. Unfortunately, this translation could not be found.

⁷ Here it should be pointed out that the term ‘dialect’ in the Low Countries has a different meaning than in Anglo-Saxon contexts: it is understood as a language exclusively existent in spoken form, often of lower prestige than the standard and regionally determined. As Bonaffini writes, ‘dialect’ is considered an autonomous and historically determined linguistic system (which is not necessarily so in Anglo-Saxon definitions) (281).