

ARTICLES / SAGGI

DANTE IN AFRIKAANS. THE “MAGNUS LABOR” OF DELAMAINE DU TOIT (1921-2016)¹

RANIERO SPEELMAN
(Universiteit Utrecht)

Sommario

Dopo aver accennato alle più importanti traduzioni della Divina Commedia in neerlandese fra il XX e l'inizio del XXI secolo, l'articolo si concentra sulla traduzione del poema dantesco in afrikaans ad opera di Delamaine A.H. du Toit (1921-2016) nel periodo compreso fra il 1990 e il 2002.

L'analisi di alcuni brani di questa traduzione, tratti da ciascuna delle tre cantiche, permette non solo di esaminare gli aspetti più complessi del testo e le scelte del traduttore, indicando a volte possibili soluzioni alternative, ma anche di esplorare il terreno comune in cui si sono sviluppati il neerlandese e l'afrikaans e di sottolineare l'importanza della traduzione come fonte di arricchimento per la lingua e la cultura ricevente.

Keywords: Dante – traduzione – Delamaine A.H. du Toit

A Millennium Dante hype

The history of translations of Dante's *Divina Commedia* into Dutch is an interesting and extremely dense testimonial of the love of the Netherlands' reading public for the Italian classic. Many are the translations from the 19th to the early 21st century, with the seventh centennial of Dante's mystic journey's approach as its most

¹ I thank Peter Anderson (UCT) for reading and commenting on this text.

productive phase: in a couple of years first appeared Frans van Dooren's prose translation (1987) that is still available and was then followed by another of *Inferno* by Jacques Janssen (1999), a more freely poetic one by Rob Brouwer (2000b, 2001, 2002a) and the joined work of Ike Cialona and Peter Verstegen (2000a) that strictly follows the original's *terza rima* form. Though critics and translation scholars did not always agree as to which was the best of these – preferences would have invariably implied a choice for traditional rhyme, literal meaning or a compromise between these extremes such as translation studies following Gideon Toury call source- or target-oriented – the rhyming edition was best sold or most successfully marketed. Even an older translation as Father Kops' translation dating from 1929-1930 and reprinted in Amsterdam in 2006 profited from the small *hausse*, perhaps because copyright on this text had expired. Indeed, the translation can be downloaded for free from internet as well².

Paul van Heck's study of Dante translations into Dutch (2003), which starts with 19th century poets like Ten Kate, Kok and Thoden van Velden, mentions a translation of *Inferno* into Afrikaans as well: *Die Goddelike Komedie: Die Hel*, by Delamaine A.H. du Toit, published in Kaapstad by Zebra Publikasies in 1990 (2 vols.). Van Heck does not further analyze this translation, which was, however, reviewed in three short articles by Philiep Bossier, acting chair of Italian Studies at Utrecht and former lecturer at the Witwatersrand³. My colleagues in the Netherlands were of course right to mention the work, which had been followed in the meantime by *Dante se Purgatorium* (1998) and *Die Paradys* (2002b)⁴, in the context of Dutch translations. It may be interesting to place some more remarks on the translation here.

I have to make clear that I am not an Afrikaner and, though I read this beautiful language with much pleasure and understand most of it, I am not a specialist of it (yet). But, as has been written by more than

² http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/dant001godd01_01/ (consulted 13.3.16).

³ Bossier, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c.

⁴ I will generally use the abbreviations *Inf.*, *Purg.* and *Par.* for the three *cantiche*.

one author, both languages share centuries of common history, much of their background, and, for a few years, have shared a common dictionary that prefers listing the words of both languages together in alphabetic order, thus stressing the fact that they are the outcome of older 17th century Dutch enriched with many foreign elements, which may prove that both languages share more than that they differ from one another⁵. Prior to 1983, both languages were officially considered as equal, until Dutch lost its status as such. However, one needs but read the text of the 16 December 1838 Voortrekker's *Gelofte* (oath) or visit Paul Kruger's museum house in Pretoria to realize how strongly intertwined Dutch and Afrikaner culture and language are⁶. This applies to the literary life as well, as may result from the publication history of, among others, Breyten Breytenbach or Elisabeth Eybers, winner of the most important Netherlands' literary prize, the P.C. Hooftprijs, for her poetry in Afrikaans, not in Dutch. An important role was played for centuries by the use of the 1637 *Statenvertaling* Bible in both countries in churches that went back to the same Calvinist tradition⁷.

⁵ The Pharos *Groot Woordeboek Afrikaans en Nederlands* (ZA) and Prisma (NL/B) *Groot woordenboek Afrikaans en Nederlands* (also known as ANNA), published in 2011, is a so-called amalgamating dictionary. See: https://af.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groot_Woordeboek_Afrikaans_en_Nederlands (Site consulted 14.3.2016).

⁶ At the level of nomenclature, there are few Dutch towns and cities that do not have a sort of Krugerlaan, Generaal De La Reyweg, De Wetstraat or Transvaalbuurt.

⁷ "Ook in Suid-Afrika is die Statenbijbel intensief gelees, en daar het in die agtiende eeu 'n onafgebroke stroom Bybels uit Nederland gekom. Nie alleen het lidmate dit vir huisgodsdienst gebruik nie, maar die reisiger H. Lichtenstein vertel aan die begin van die negentiende eeu dat mense soms nie ander vermaak gehad het nie as om by 'n tafel te sit en psalms te sing of anders te luister na 'n preek of hoofstukke uit die Bybel wat iemand voorgelees het" (J.C. Steyn, "Die Afrikaans van die Bybelvertaling van 1933", synopsis, in *Acta Theologica*, <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/actat/article/view/67248>, also quoting W.J. van Zijl, *Van skepskis na wakis tot boekrak*, s.l.: Lux Verbi, 1992:107) (consulted 26.3.2016).

The *Divine Comedy* into Afrikaans: problems and possibilities for Delamaine du Toit

But differences do not lack, and some of them render translation out of Italian more difficult. One is the lack of the preterite (commonly called *passato remoto*, but maybe more correctly to be referred to as *perfetto*) that Afrikaans has nearly lost⁸. Translating this verbal form, which in Italian is normally short, into Afrikaans can only be done by using the composite past tense, so that ‘andò’ (he went) becomes “hy het gegaan” (Dutch: “hij ging”) and “rispuose a me” (he answered me) “hy het my geantwoord” (Dutch: “hij antwoordde mij”). Another feature is the double negation, which Dutch does not know and requests ‘nie’ (not) at the end of the negative sentence. This mandatory ‘nie’ takes away not little of the expressive force of the Italian verse, which always accentuates the tenth syllable, making it the most important one of the verse that also carries the rhyme. In *Inf.* XXII, 10-12, “[...] né già con sì diversa cennamella / cavalier vidi muover né pedoni, / né nave a segno di terra o di stella” becomes: “maar nooit op teken van so ’n vreemde fluit / het ek kavallerie of voetsoldate sien vertrek nie, / of skip op teken van land of ster nie”. Both features of Afrikaans make translated verses much longer and difficult to handle from a metric viewpoint, sometimes impeding the use of rhyme⁹. So, “Cred’ io ch’ei credette ch’io credesse” (*Inf.* XIII, 25) loses its slight *vis comica* in the repetitive translation “Ek dink dat hy gedink het dat ek gedink het”. I would have used here one of the Afrikaans’ rare preterites: “dat ek dog”. It might also be suggested that a “narrative present” (also called *praesens historicum*), which

⁸ See *Groot woordenboek Afrikaans en Nederlands* (2011:2215).

⁹ Metric tradition justly ignores the *rima identica* (identical rhyme) as being ugly, but Italian literature has always made an exception for the so-called *rima equivoca*, a rhyme between homophone words with a different meaning. Dante was not particularly eager on using them (we find, however, *volto*, *porta e parte* being used). See K.P. Clarke (2012). There is one *rima identica* that Dante uses: *Cristo*, a name that, because of Christ’s unique nature, for Dante could only rhyme with itself.

was effectively used in Afrikaans from the first Bible translations, may offer a solution to the past tense problem¹⁰.

Delamaine du Toit (1921-2016), who has recently passed away, was a gynecologist who became a translator after his retirement. He worked 18 years on the Dante-translation¹¹. The project was self-financed, though De Toit enjoyed considerable financial support from the Stigting vir die Skeppende Kunste for *Die Hel* and from the L.W. Hiemstra Trust for both *Dante se Purgatorium* and *Die Paradys*. The text in Afrikaans was checked by Rosa Louw (*Inf.*), Roy Pfeiffer (*Purg.*), Daniel Hugo (*Par.*). The three volumes have not been available in bookshops for a long time, but are now sold by www.megabooks.co.za, also known as MegaDigital and publisher of print-on-demand works. Each volume is accompanied by a companion book with an extensive commentary (“verklarende aantekeninge”). I have not further studied these commentaries that give extensive and generally trustworthy information on the historical, cultural, philosophical and – in the first place – biblical background of Dante’s work. Every canto of the translation is preceded by a short introduction. This is a presentation that most Italian, English and Dutch editions offer as well. Indeed, the *Divine Comedy* is a highly complicated work that can hardly be read without commentaries or, at least, introductory sections. Only the *Purgatorio* translation has a short bibliography at the end of each canto (the ‘Bronnelys’) and of the *cantica*. The companion volumes do not have any bibliography and contain no references to Dante scholarship past and present. This clearly denotes the translator’s intention not to bother readers with ‘unnecessary’ scholarly information such as mostly given by serious, ‘scientific’ translators.

What strikes the reader of Du Toit’s translation is that *Inferno* and *Paradiso* received a literal and, as could be argued, neutral

¹⁰ Compare, e.g., the 1895 Bible translation by another Du Toit, Ds. S.J., member of the “Genootskap van Regte Afrikaanders”, with the 1933 translation. Du Toit’s experimental use of the *praesens historicum* conveys a strong dramatic impulse to Matthew 28. Of the 1933 translation, however, J.C. Steyn (2009) observes that “only in the 1933 translation was the historical present tense used in a stylistically satisfactory manner.”

¹¹ <http://www.netwerk24.com/Vermaak/du-toit-onthou-vir-dante-vertaling-20160216> (consulted on 11.3.16).

translation, whereas *Purgatorio* became *Dante se Purgatorium*, “Dante’s Purgatory”, as if it were only meant to be the poet’s and not anybody else’s¹². I would suggest that this must be considered as connected with the translator’s Protestant (Calvinist) background, a feature already stressed in Bossier’s 1992 reviews. Indeed, the Introduction to the book begins with an explanation that:

According to the Roman Catholic doctrine there is a place in afterlife, called Purgatory or ‘Vaevuur’, where Christians who have sinned but died in penitence are being cleaned of their sins before being admitted to the heavenly Paradise. [...]

For the Protestant reader who is not familiar with the teachings of the Catholic Church, it is important as well to know that according to the dogma of that church the prayers of believers who continue to live on earth can be of great importance for the soul of the deceased who find themselves in Purgatory. (page 1, my translation)

A certain reluctance against *Purgatorio* can perhaps be seen in the use of Latin (*Purgatorium*, not *Purgatorio*)¹³, which makes a rather artificial impression, and in the period of time elapsed between the publication of the first two *cantiche* (8 years), while only four years would have been necessary to complete the *Paradys*¹⁴. But this may be just a coincidence. Anyway, the commentary on *Purgatorio* is, with more than 330 pages, the most extensive of the companion volumes. The common Dutch translation of the second *cantica* is

¹² In the MegaDigital print-on-demand version, however, the title has been adapted to the neutral *Purgatorium*.

¹³ *Purgatorium* is, however, an official term in the Catholic theology. See wikipedia s.v. ‘Purgatory’.

¹⁴ Of course, the introduction of bibliographic references may also help to account for this fact, as well as being among the reasons for not providing the *Paradys* translation with such references.

Louteringsberg, which could be used in Afrikaans too¹⁵. Here, Wikipedia in Afrikaans gives no clue: the lemma on Dante is extremely short, but makes a rather serious error, stating that “Dante was die eerste Italianer wat sy werk gepubliseer het”¹⁶. Of course, this is impossible. Dante could not publish his work because book printing had not yet been invented during his life.

The extreme concision of the Dante-lemma in Afrikaans (the one in the little spoken and less written Alemannic language is five times as long and full of information) should not induce us to ignore Dante’s influence in South Africa: in the work of N.P. van Wyk Louw and T.T. Cloete it has an important role¹⁷, while André P. Brink quotes Dante or refers to him in more than one novel¹⁸. Attention to Dante has also been paid by Patrick Cullinan and Stephen Watson in their *Dante in South Africa* (2005).

In his introductions to all three volumes of *Die Goddelike Komedie*, introductions that differ only in the second part where the translator thanks his collaborators, Du Toit states as follows:

Graag wil ek verduidelik dat ek nooit wou probeer om Dante se groot gedig in versvorm te vertaal nie. Verskeie persone het dit al met minder goeie gevolge in ander tale probeer doen en ek dink niet ’n Afrikaanse vertaling in digvorm sou juis minder onbevredigend kon wees nie¹⁹. Wat ek wel probeer doen het, is om Dante se verse reël

¹⁵ ‘Loutering’ is in HAT (2015), so ‘Louteringsberg’ would be perfectly clear to Afrikaans speakers. Much less correct, but not unknown in Afrikaans, is the word ‘vaevuur’ (Dutch: vagevuur).

¹⁶ https://af.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Alighieri (consulted on 11.3.16).

¹⁷ <http://www.netwerk24.com/Vermaak/du-toit-onthou-vir-dante-vertaling-20160216> (consulted on 11.3.16).

¹⁸ Brink’s interest in Dante is also documented by at least four entries in *Vlam in die Sneeu* (2015), the exchange of love letters with Ingrid Jonker and a quote of the Francesca da Rimini episode (77).

¹⁹ It is not clear to whom Du Toit is referring. We need not remark here that there are not a few excellent translations of the *Divine Comedy* into English.

vir reël in prosa te vertaal sodat dit maklik sou wees om die Italiaanse teks woord vir woord te kan volg.²⁰

The translator's intention, as we have to understand it, is devoid of any literary or scholarly ambition. As many humble colleagues before him, he only wants to provide a reading aid permitting readers to follow Dante's text word-by-word of the "testo a fronte" edition on the opposite page. And that is a pity, being the fruit of sincere but not always justified modesty. Quite different from the contemporary prose translation by Frans van Dooren, by far the most experienced and productive translator of older Italian poetry²¹, who in spite of good results gave up using verse translations for Dante, claiming it was impossible to translate him in verse. In my opinion, the force of poetical beauty is so important and essential to any understanding and appreciation of the "Sacred Poem" that a translator should not try to ignore it, but rather attempt an imperfect translation that at least does some justice to its poetry, which was created by the Florentine poet to express the idea of the Christian Trinity in its very metric form. I hope to show that at least some improvements might be made to Dutoit's excellent and laudable version.

Prose or poetry?

Du Toit used, however, an intermediate form between prose and poetry that often assumes the rhythm of poetry or tries to do so. Some examples, beginning, of course, with the poem's famous opening lines²²:

²⁰ "I would like to make clear that I have never had the intention to translate Dante's great poem in verse. Several persons have tried to do so in other languages, with poor results and I do not think a verse translation into Afrikaans would be less unsatisfactory. What I tried to do, however, is translating Dante's verse one line after another in prose, which would make it easy to follow the Italian text word-by-word." ('n Woord Vooraf) (my translation). Du Toit does not explain which results he considers 'poor' and for what reasons.

²¹ Van Dooren distinguished himself with the verse translations of, among others, Petrarch, Michelangelo, Tasso (the complete *Gerusalemme liberata*), Leopardi and others. He was given the most important Netherlands' translation prize, the Martinus Nijhoffprijs in 1990, among other works for his translation of the *Commedia*.

²² The *incipit* is so famous that I will not reproduce the Italian text here.

Halfpad deur die reis van ons lewe
het ek my in 'n donker woud bevind
daar ek die reguit pad byster geraak het. 3

Ag, hoe pynlik om dit te beskryf,
hierdie bos so wild en wreed en dig
dat bloot die gedagte daaran my vrees hernieu! 6

Só bitter is dit dat die dood skaars erger is.
Maar om verslag te doen van die goeie wat ek daar gevind het,
sal ek vertel van die ander dinge wat ek daar gesien het. 9

Even without a solid knowledge of Afrikaans one can see the 'verse' length is uneven. This is not uncommon for free translations into Germanic languages, which generally have a strong trochaic tradition but use iambic structures as well. In Du Toit's version, verse 1 is lacking some syllables, 6 has an irregular rhythm, 7 could be an alexandrine, while 8 and 9 are too long. Punctuation does not follow the original (the full stop in 7 is a semicolon in most Italian editions)²³. The variation 'woud' (2) – 'bos' (5) is unnecessary, since Dante uses 'selva' twice, whereas the synonymic couple "aspra e forte" is rendered with "en wreed en dig", for which alternatives would not lack.

Du Toit tends to introduce modal adverbs to better explain the text to his readers, such as 'bloot' in 6. This might be typical for Afrikaans (and other languages) that indulge(s) in words like 'dalk', 'mos', 'tog', 'darem', 'net', 'maar', 'juis', 'eers' (non-temporally used), 'vrek', 'al', 'byna', 'veral', 'selfs', 'eintlik' and many others, which may perhaps be more numerous than their Dutch equivalents. In not a few cases, this may take the original's poetical force away. Maybe a solution could be: "dat daaran denke nog my vrees hernieu!". Another typical problem is that of the deictic pronouns: Afrikaans uses

²³ It is unnecessary to explain here that medieval punctuation differs from the currently used one.

‘deesdie’, ‘daardie’, ‘hierdie’, etc., which are less elegant and could be substituted with ‘die’.

Some expressions have not been correctly translated. I would not use ‘pynlik’ (4) but rather ‘moeilik’ (difficult). We should be reminded of the fact that ‘duro’ (Occitan *durs*) has a clearly defined meaning that points to the highest, ‘tragic’ literary style.

Focusing on Ulysses

One of the best known encounters Dante has in Hell is that with Ulysses (Odysseus) and Diomedes in the XXVI canto. Ulysses tells his last voyage into the unknown, beyond the Pillars of Hercules. This episode would inspire Tennyson’s famous poem “Ulysses” and would somehow keep Primo Levi alive in the Auschwitz concentration camp²⁴. We will examine part of Du Toit’s translation, beginning with the canto’s *incipit*:

Godi, Fiorenza, poi che se’ sì grande,
che per mare e per terra batti l’ali,
e per lo ’nferno tuo nome si spande! (1-3)

Verheug jou, Florence, aangesien jy so groot is
dat jy jou vlerke oor land en see klap
en jou naam selfs deur die hele Hel bekend is. 3

‘Aangesien’ (since) is too long, I would prefer ‘omdat’ or ‘oordat’, both of which would improve the rhythm. ‘Selfs’ (even) is unnecessarily added, just as ‘hele’ (all over) and ‘bekend is’ (is known) lessens the effect of “si spande”. Here “a hoë vlug neem”, “dy uit” or “brei uit” would be better options, the first of which is maybe more poetic. Du Toit substituted the exclamation mark of the Italian text in 3 with a simple full stop.

One of Dante’s most beautiful verses, “come la mosca cede a la zanzara” (28) becomes “en op die tyd wanneer die vlieg die muskiet vervang”, losing all charm. It does not explain that “die vlieg” is the

²⁴ Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* [If This Is a Man] (1947), chapter “Il Canto di Ulisse”.

subject of the sentence – for all the translator wrote, the “muskiet” could perform the same function. Dante is extremely short here and crystal clear: “as die vlieg voor die muskiet moet wyk” would be my translation.

In 68, “fin che la fiamma cornuta qua vegna” is translated as follows: “tot die vlam wat na ’n horing lyk nader kom”. But the flame is really double, like two horns, one enclosing Diomede and the other and bigger one, Ulysses. This is essential, since the Greek heroes are punished, just as they have sinned, together (56-57: “[...] e così insieme / a la vendetta vanno come a l’ira”). One horn may serve as best for blowing or drinking out of it. I would rather propose, with a iambic pentameter: “Totdat die vlam se horings nader kom”.

In 72, “ma fa che la tua lingua si sostegna” has become “maar hier moet je asseblief jou tong bedwing”. ‘Asseblief’ (please) is added, just like ‘hier’, and ‘bedwing’ has a stronger meaning than “si sostegna” (literally: hold your tongue)²⁵.

Strange is that the Italian ‘tu’, which is the normal pronoun used between Virgil and Dante, becomes the formal ‘u’ when Dante addresses Virgil, who uses ‘jy’ speaking to Dante. The use of the formal form is much reduced in Afrikaans as in Swedish and Icelandic. No need to introduce it when Dante does not use it (but correctly renders “[...] Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?” with “[...] Is u hier, ser Brunetto?” in *Inf.* XV, 30). Let’s have a look at *Inf.* XXVI 90-93:

[...] Quando
mi diparti’ da Circe, che sottrasse
me più d’un anno là presso a Gaeta,
prima che sì Enëa la nomasse, [...]

That becomes:

[...] In die tyd,
dat ek Circe, wat my langer as ’n jaar
weggeneem en gehou het daar naby Gaeta,

²⁵ A further redundant ‘asseblief’ follows in 83.

voor dit deur Aeneas so genoem is, verlaat het [...] 93

Here the syntax is being made more complicated by the displacement of “verlaat het” (“mi diparti”, ‘left’). “Weggeneem en gehou het” translates ‘sottrasse’ with seven syllables instead of three. In v. 93, Du Toit makes passive what is active in Dante. All these changes are made at the high cost of extra words or syllables and loss of literary effect.

As ek
Circe verlaat het wat my langer as ’n jaar
Gegysel het gehou naby Gaeta
voordat Aeneas díe plek só genoem het

would be my solution here.

Purgatorium and Paradys

We may now follow the – now – more experienced translator in his work on *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, to begin with *Purg.* I, 13-24:

Dolce color d’oriental zaffiro,
che s’accoglieva nel sereno aspetto
del mezzo, puro infino al primo giro,

a li occhi miei ricominciò diletto,
tosto ch’io uscì’ fuor de l’aura morta
che m’avea contristati li occhi e ’l petto.

Lo bel pianeta che d’amar conforta
faceva tutto rider l’oriente,
velando i Pesci ch’erano in sua scorta.

I’ mi volsi a man destra, e puosi mente
a l’altro polo, e vidi quattro stelle
non viste mai fuor ch’a la prima gente.

The translation is as follows:

Die soet kleur van oosterse saffier,
wat besig was om te groei op die helder aangesig
van die hemel, af tot onder op die horison, 15

het weer vreugde na my oë gebring
sodra ek gekom het uit die dooie lug
wat my bors en oë so gefolter het. 18

Die skone planeet wat liefde aanwakker,
het die hele ooste laat glimlag
en die Visse in haar gevolg versluier. 21

Ek het my na regs gedraai en my aandag gevestig
op die ander pool, en daar vier sterre gesien,
vantevore nooit gesien, behalwe deur die eerste mense. 24

In 13, I would *metri causa* prefer ‘soete’ to ‘soet’. In 16, the subject of ‘ricominciò’ is not “dolce color [...]” but the free translation may be defended. In 14 the aspect of growing (‘groei’) is so not strongly present in the Italian ‘s’accoglieva’ (gathered) but is acceptable. The progressive aspect (“Besig was om te groei”), though, is lacking in the original and had better be suppressed. I do not quite understand the translation of 15, in which the important (and stressed) ‘puro’ has been lost. As a Dutch speaker, I do not find it elegant to consecutively use four prepositions (“af tot onder op”, ‘af’ should be more correctly considered adverbial here). I appreciate 17 but would substitute ‘sodra’ with ‘as’ for rhythm’s sake. Equally, I would use ‘mooi’ in 19 instead of ‘skone’ and “tot liefde aanspoor” or ‘opwek’ for ‘aanwakker’. In 20 Afrikaans needs fewer syllables than Italian and Du Toit chose ‘glimlag’ rather than ‘lag’. Who would prefer to completely respect the metrum may opt for “Het heel die ooste met haar lag getooi”²⁶.

²⁶ Of course, ‘getooi’ has an archaic taste (see HAT s.v. ‘tooi’), and perfectly suits ‘versluier’ in 21.

From 22, Afrikaans needs more words than Italian. I suggest “Ek het, na regs gedraai, my blik gewerp” and 23 could be shortened to “En aan die ander pool vier sterre gesien”. Verse 24 has become inelegant prose. “Wat slegs die eerste mense het gesien” is what I would prefer. Instead of ‘slegs’, ‘net’ can also be used, of course.

Translating *Paradiso* is any translator’s most arduous task. Indeed, Dante in his final *cantica* faces the extremely difficult task of “Trasumanar significar per verba [...]” (*Pd.* I, 70), “Die meer as menswees kan nie verduidelik word deur woorde nie”. For this purpose, the poet created a set of neologisms mostly based on Latin words. Even though Afrikaans boasts a strong tradition on the field of neologisms and has an enormous capacity of assimilation of words from other languages, it is practically impossible to follow Dante in his often abstract and scholarly thought while using metric forms. Significantly, Du Toit’s comment on the *cantica* is much shorter than that on *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

I have chosen the *cantica*’s central canto XVII for comparison, where Dante’s ancestor Cacciaguida reveals the future to the poet, explaining how prescience and free will do not exclude each other.

La contingenza, che fuor del quaderno
de la vostra matera non si stende,
tutta è dipinta nel cospetto eterno;

necessità però quindi non prende
se non come dal viso in che si specchia
nave che per torrente giù discende.

Da indi, sì come viene ad orecchia
dolce armonia da organo, mi viene
a vista il tempo che ti s’apparecchia.

Qual si partio Ipolito d’Atene
per la spietata e perfida noverca,
tal di Fiorenza partir ti convene.

Questo si vuole e questo già si cerca,

e tosto verrà fatto a chi ciò pensa
là dove Cristo tutto dì si merca. (37-51)

Gebeurlikhede wat nie verder strek
as die volume van jul materiële wêreld nie,
is almal afgebeeld in die Ewige Visie; 39

maar is nie om díe rede onvermydelik niet,
ewemin as wat die beweging ’n skip wat stroomaf vaar,
afkomstig is van die beeld in die toeskouer se oë. 42

Daarom, soos die soet harmonie van ’n orrel
na die oor kom, kom daar na my gesigsveld
die tyd wat op jou wag. 45

Soos Hippolotos Athene moes verlaat,
deur toedoen van sy wrede en valse stiefmoeder,
so sal jy Florence moet verlaat. 48

Dit wil hulle; dit beplan hulle reeds;
en gou sal dit gedoen word deur hom wat dit bedink
daar waar Christus daagliks gekoop en verkoop word. 51

In 37, I would recommend the use of the comma, just like in Italian. Indeed, “che [...] stende” specifies the limitations of the ‘contingenza’ (contingence). The “Ewige Visie” (39) might prove not quite clear. Centuries of Bible commentaries may provide solutions as for instance “in Godes oë”, “in God s’n gees”. In 41, I suspect that between ‘beweging’ and “’n skip” the preposition ‘van’ is lacking. Is here “Soos die beweging van ’n skip dat stroomaf vaar / sleg deur die toeskouer s’n oë weerspieël word” an alternative? In Afrikaans, 45 is unnecessarily short: “ti s’apparecchia” means “is being prepared for you” and could be rendered as “die tyd wat reeds vir jou beraam word”. In 47 for rhythm’s sake I would prefer ‘stiefma’. Rather than ‘hulle’ (they, but who?), in 49 ‘mens’ might be used to translate the impersonal ‘si’. This would take away the contrast between ‘hulle’, plural, and ‘hom’, singular, in 50. Instead of “Hom wat” may be used

‘wie’, but this will only slightly shorten the hypermetric verse. For “tutto di si merca” I would suggest “elke dag verhandel word”.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown here that the poetic quality of the translation can be enhanced by minor changes. Of course, Du Toit’s work merits every praise as a great pioneer’s. Unlike Van Dooren, Brouwer and Cialona & Verstegen, or English Dante translators, he could not use a series of translations in his mother language but had to find solutions for every word. Du Toit did not use Dutch versions, or at least, he does not mention them, whereas he refers in his bibliography in *Purgatorium* to translations by Sinclair, Singleton and Sayers. Even though in South Africa most readers are familiar with English and can choose between a dozen translations into British or American English, translating the great classics of world literature into Afrikaans is an essential element of literary production and a contribution to a language that has been open to changes and enrichment bottom-up for centuries. I think the Dutch language, through its intimate relationship with Afrikaans, can contribute to rendering its beautiful grown-up daughter more flexible in this process. This would directly involve the use of archaisms (i.e. pre-1900 words and forms) of Netherlands origin. Because, as had been written, “Afrikaans is ook Nederlands” (Afrikaans is Dutch too)²⁷.

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