

Traduttore, Traditore: Huygens as translator of Donne

The Renaissance and Reformation authors digested the great literary works of the past with a voracious appetite. Through translations, Ficino, Du Bellay, Denham, Dryden, Vondel, Huygens, Cowley, Florio, Chapman, Jonson and Milton, among others, contributed mightily to the rebirth of literature. Because of the Christian need to disseminate the truth of the Bible to all people by the rendition of God's word into diverse vernaculars, translation acquired a redemptive function and a teleological urgency. By analogy, translations of secular texts gained in respectability as well, since they preserved the wisdom of the past and established a link between diverse cultures that were splitting apart because of religious strife and a renewed sense of national origins. Yet the quality of any translation was considered inferior, a mere copy of the original text, and the translator found him or herself in a subordinate and even subservient position in relation to the original author.

Ever since Cicero's dictum not to translate *verbum pro verbo* (word for word) in 46 BC, translators have attempted to distill the spirit of the original and to infuse their translation with the vitality of the original work. In his laudatory poem to Florio's translation of Montaigne, Samuel Daniel coined translation "th'intertraffique of the mind" (quoted in Steiner 248). This "intertraffique of the mind" occurred at a level beyond language, beyond the barriers of individual tongues. Yet the distillation of the essence of the original remained elusive, and the degree of success has served and will continue to serve as the criterion against which the relative merit of any translation is measured.

Nowhere have the difficulties inherent in translation expressed themselves more than in the translation of poetry. In poetry, form and matter are intimately bound together, and no dissociation is possible. Moreover, language is both ideological and idiolectal: when an individual speaks, he or she utters a specific interpretation of the world that is bound by speech and time; therefore, translations involve linguistic and cultural disjunction. Poets, because they push language beyond

its normal boundaries, compound the problems of transferring the essence across time and space. All poets - and most poets are also translators - are aware of the sheer impossibility of translation. Rilke wrote in March 1922 that each word in a poem is semantically unique in that it establishes its own completeness of contextual range and tonality. In a more poetic vein, Heine said that his poems translated into French were "moonlight stuffed with straw" (quoted in Steiner, 240-241). Translation of poetry carries in itself a sense of sadness, of failure, and of impotency.

The intrinsic failure of any translation of poetry did not deter the seventeenth-century translators; it offered them a creative outlet in the rich store of metaphors they invented to express the inferiority of the translation and the subservient position of the translator. Theo Hermans has made a thorough study of the images, metaphors, and analogues of the Renaissance discourse on translation, researching the metatexts (introductory poems, laudatory poems, and prefaces) to the translated texts (103-135). Here, I wish to investigate Constantijn Huygens' view of translation as expressed in his letters, his preface, and his introductory poem to his Donne translations, and to look closely at his translation of "The Sunne Rising" to evaluate his claims about the status of translation and the role of the translator. Moreover, I will compare Donne's original and Huygens' translations to illustrate the relation between form and meaning and the problems Huygens faced when rendering a poet as complex and idiosyncratic as Donne.

No stranger to the art of translation, Huygens undertook in 1630 and 1633 to translate some of Donne's poems into his native Dutch. He had met Donne in 1622 when he visited England on one of the diplomatic missions on which he served as secretary and interpreter. For Donne, at the time the august Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and renowned preacher, Huygens possessed a reverential admiration and intellectual fellowship. At one level his translations offer an immediate view of translation. They offer synchronicity, all but

eliminating the barrier of time; moreover, the differences between geographical location, cultural heritage, social structure, and religious conviction are minimal. However, proximity - temporal, spatial, and intellectual - also impeded, since Huygens needed to differentiate himself from Donne.

When he sent "Aende Sonn," his translation of "The Sunne Rising" and his first endeavor with Donne's poetry, to his fellow poet and friend P.C. Hooft on August 17, 1630, he called his "stalen" (samples) "schaduwten van schoone lichamen" (shadows of fine bodies), further removing his poem from the excellencies of the original by describing the sun providing the shadows as "belemmerden sonneschijn" (shackled sunshine) - suggestive metaphors for a translation of a direct address to the sun (*Briefwisseling*, I 289). In a subsequent letter to Hooft, Huygens employed the metaphor of weaving, comparing the magnificent English tapestry of Donne with his "sleurlycke snipperingen" (untidy scraps [*Briefwisseling*, I 290]). And in the preface to his Donne translations, written in 1656, Huygens declared that it has been an honor to have stammered after so great a man (*Gedichten*, VI 338). All three images were in common usage in the Renaissance and illustrated the hierarchical relation between original and copy, expressing the humility topos so typical of Renaissance translators.

In addition to these comments, Huygens wrote a dedicatory poem to Maria Tesselschade (*Gedichten*, II 267-268) accompanying his 19 Donne translations. (I reproduce it with an English version, after the Donne poem and Huygens' translation, at the end of this article). This poem stands as an eloquently poetic tribute to the relative values of translation and, because the poem turns on wit, clever arguments, and ingenious images, on the translation of Donne in particular. In this poem, Huygens reverses - at least partly - the hierarchy between original and translation. Huygens establishes the shadow-body dichotomy as the touchstone of the relation between original and translation in the opening stanza: "'T vertaelde scheelt soo veel van 't onvertaelde dicht, / als lijf en schaduwten" (The translation differs so much from the original as a body differs from its shadow). Huygens then argues in a rapid-fire succession that leaves the reader but little time to counter, that although shadows (the translations) are nights, crooked, black, obscure, tepid, nothings, and daydreams, they are nonetheless daughters of light, that some of the original form remains, that only a poor reader cannot see the light through them, that the outward tepidity hides fire inside, that they are embodied nothings, and that they feed on reality. Almost surreptitiously, Huygens meta-

morphoses the shadow analogy into the digestive imagery, claiming that he had devoured the kernel and the marrow of Donne's verse before he converted them into Dutch food. Although claiming the superiority of the English food, he nevertheless invites Tesselschade to enjoy his meal "op schaduwten, op scheef, op zwart, op koel, op niets" (of shadows, crookedness, blackness, coolness, nothing) with complete confidence that she will find his dishes delectable.

Let us now turn to Huygens' translation of "The Sunne Rising" and judge for ourselves how bland Donne's recipes become when prepared in a Dutch oven. It was the first poem Huygens translated and shows in the original manuscript fewer corrections than many of the other poems he translated. "The Sunne Rising" represents Donne's witty but serious portrayal of love and the superiority of such love to the world around it. I want to investigate the poem and its Dutch copy on the levels of meter, rhyme, and syntactical arrangements in order to show that in poetry, especially the densely packed poetry of Donne, the interconnection between matter (the possible meanings of the poem) and form (as expressed by meter, rhyme, and syntax) is so strong that any dissociation will result in a skewing of possible readings, a weakening of argument, and a leveling of complexities.

Huygens' change in meter is immediately apparent. Most of Donne's Songs and sonnets follow their own metrical pattern, carefully suited to mood and intent. Huygens translated many of Donne's poems into alexandrines, a meter suited to his native Dutch speech rhythm and embodying the sense of decorum of the sedate, law-abiding Dutch burghers of the New Republic. In his translation of "The Sunne Rising," Huygens keeps the three stanza form; however he changes all the lines to a uniform meter, utilizing a longer line. Whereas Donne employs an uneven syllable count (his lines follow the pattern 8, 4, 10, 10, 8, 8, 10, 10, 10, 10), Huygens regularizes this pattern to an iambic pentameter line of either 10 syllables ending in a masculine rhyme or 11 syllables ending in a feminine rhyme. Thus he changes the syntactical arrangement and grammatical unity and damages the force of the short lines, upsetting the forceful tension these lines embody.

In the first and second stanzas, these short lines are addressed to the sun, questioning its authority in the first stanza: "Why dost thou thus"; and eclipsing this authority in the second: "Why shouldst thou thinke." In the third stanza, the lovers have become the authority denied the sun: "Nothing else is." All syllables in these lines receive stress; moreover, the three short lines present the argument, its development, and its comple-

tion. Huygens, adhering to his static meter, seriously disrupts and weakens the force and development of Donne's argument.

Huygens incorporates Donne's first question to the sun into his first line: "Oud, besigh geck; wat mooght gh'ons leggen schijnen" (Old, busy fool; why do you shine on us). Huygens eliminates not only the ambiguous and insulting phrase "unruly Sunne," but also the force of Donne's short second line that holds in abeyance the sun's eventual action. In the second stanza, Huygens' regular and longer lines severely damage Donne's little game with the sun. Apparently reversing his scolding, Donne opens the second stanza with "Thy beames, so reverend and strong," only to crush the sun's ego by his terse inversion in his short second line: "Why shouldst thou thinke?" Huygens does not want to play such games with the sun; neither does he like the epithet "reverend" that hints at a level higher than the secular. His lines read quite mundanely and don't hold the reader in suspense: "Hoe mooght ghij op uw' stercke stralen stuyten?" (Why should you be proud of your strong beams?). Donne's hyperbolic claim that the lovers are the world in the short line of the last stanza, "Nothing else is," all but vanishes in Huygens' rendering of it because he fills his longer line with part of the next clause.

Moreover, Huygens' choice of a uniformly longer line leads to verbosity. Huygens uses 106 syllables in each stanza to Donne's 88. He is forced to fill his longer line with words not found in the original. Not only does this result in a more commonplace and unimaginative language, it also alters the intent of the original. His images become less compressed, his sentences less cramped, and his syntax less distorted. This may have pleased Ben Jonson since it gives more clarity and less confusion; Donne, however, used compression and complexity as vehicles for the thematic possibilities of the poems.

Closely linked to his changes in meter are the changes Huygens made in the rhyme scheme. Although none of Donne's so-called sonnets are true sonnets, he does in "the Sunne Rising" play with some of the sonnet's conventions. Each 10-line stanza is by rhyme (abba/cddc/ee), grammatical unity; and thought structure divided into two quatrains and a couplet. The couplet carries the climax of the argument set up in the preceding quatrains. The timely question in the first quatrain "Busie old foole, unruly Sunne ... Must to thy motion lovers seasons run?" moves through a temporal and external frame of schools, offices, and the King's palace in the second quatrain and is answered in the couplet: "Love, all alike, no seasons knowes, nor clime, / Nor

houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time." Huygens does not follow the significance of the rhyme scheme and internal division of each stanza because he makes profound changes in these crucial areas. In lieu of two quatrains and a final couplet, his rhyme pattern is aabbccdeed, with no clear internal divisions. Because of this choice, the external world, so meticulously separated from the lovers by Donne, intrudes oppressively on the lovers throughout the poem. The significance of Donne's couplets, especially the command to the sun and the reversal of his earlier dismissal in the final couplet, is weakened by Huygens' changes in rhyming patterns.

Forced by his choice of a longer line and different rhyme scheme, Huygens needs to make crucial changes in the syntactic structure of Donne's poem. I have already discussed the weakening of the inversion that starts stanza two when Donne seemingly honors the sun, using the adjectives "reverend" and "strong," only to reverse them in the second line. Huygens also chooses different subject-verb relations in his translation of stanza two. He makes "ick" (I) the subject in line 12 and not the sun. Therefore, he needs to dislocate the "mee" in line 18 where Donne asks the sun to tell him "Whether both the India's of spice and Myne / Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee. / Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday, / And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay" (17-20). Huygens connects "ick" to all these lines - trapped by his rhyme scheme - and thus the lover becomes the possessor of the beloved, a profound change of Donne's emphasis on a mutual relationship: "Ick wedd, / Taelt merghen avond hier naer all die schatten, / Ghy sultse mij ten volen sien bevatten, / Besitten en beleggen in dit bedd" (I bet, look tomorrow evening here for all those treasures, you will see them here by me contained, owned, and covered in this bed). The reference to kings, the emphasis on the beloved as encompassing all, and the mutuality of such exalted love have all but vanished from Huygens' translation.

But nowhere is the change in syntactic arrangement so devastating as in the last stanza. By syntactical sleight of hand, Donne traps the world between the lovers, the "She" and the "I," by beginning and ending the line with the subject-pronouns: "She is all States, and all Princes, I," reinforcing the "all" by the stressed short line that follows: "Nothing else is." These two lines carry most of the weight of Donne's argument that love can transcend all and that the entire world is contained in the two lovers. Huygens does not grant such status to mere earthly love. His lovers don't embrace the world: "Sij's alle Staten, ick ben alle

Heeren" (She is all states, I am all lords); moreover the punctuation also separates the line from the next claim, weakened by Huygens' addition of words and linking to the next clause: "Geen ander dingh en is: die 't all beheeren" (no other thing is, those who lord over all, etc).

The last four lines of Huygens' version provide a significant example of the slackening of the tension between form and matter. After a period in line 26, Donne closes the poem as follows: "Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee/To warm the world, that's done in warming us. / Shine here to us, and thou art every where; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare" (27-30). We have a complete reversal of the wish to get rid of the "busie old foole" of stanza one. The transient world of kings and schoolboys has faded into the background, replaced by the pronoun "us," repeated twice in close succession and formed by joining of the "She" and the "I" of the first line in the stanza. Donne has collapsed the world into "us," while simultaneously telescoping "us" into "every where." By reversing the initial stress in the last line, the pronoun "this," "thy," "these," and "thy" take on added significance by the break in the iambic pattern, as does the verb "is" by careful placement before the caesura: the world does become the bed, the bed the world.

Huygens renders these line as follows: "U dient voortaan gemak van ouderdom. / Schijn hier, ghij sult soveel al allom blaken, / En warmen 't all; ghy kont dit bedde maken / Uw middelpunt, des' muren uw rondom" (You deserve now ease of old age. Shine here, you shall bask as much as all, and warm the all; you could make this bed your center, the walls your sphere). Huygens chooses to make line 27 a syntactic unit and combines lines 28-30, thus slackening the command to the sun and the centrality of the bed-world relation. Neither does he collate the pronouns "she" and "I"; the lovers are only implied in his version since nowhere does he use the crucial pronoun "us," found twice in Donne's ending.

Huygens seems reluctant to translate Donne's hyperbolic allegations about the superiority of love and rejects as unacceptable its mystical, almost religious, qualities. Whereas Donne arduously prevents a gap from opening between the external world and the lovers by his compressed and intricate syntax, meter, and rhyme, Huygens permits the external world of kings, apprentices, and even schoolboys to intrude upon the lovers. The bed, extended by Donne to sleep all embodied in the lovers, remains a bed where the sun indeed can call upon the lovers "door vensters en gordijnen" (through windows and curtains).

In his dedicatory poem, Huygens tried to invert the hierarchical relation between original and translation by his claims that shadows have substance and that, as long as the translator chewed the marrow and kernel of the original, the reconstituted food would taste as spicy. Moreover, in the same poem he shifted the judgment of the relative value of his translation to the reader when he invited Tesselschade to his Dutch dinner, a reader who, like most readers of translations, had most likely little acquaintance with the original language. Huygens, however, knew that he had but "stammered" after Donne, and that his translation could not quite capture the soul of the original. In his translation of "The Exstasie," he translates "all minde" to "heel geest en heel verstant" (all soul and all mind). This broadening of "mind" to include "soul" is wishful thinking on Huygens' part and points surreptitiously to Huygens' handicap as translator of Donne: he might have been an equal to Donne on an intellectual level, but he could never quite distill Donne's soul into his version. Thus are underscored the difficulties inherent in any translation, that have plagued translators since the building of the tower of Babel when God did "confound [our] language that [we] may not understand one another's speech."

REFERENCES

- Donne, John. *The Elegies, and The Songs and Sonnets*. Ed. Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Hermans, Theo. "Images of Translation. Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation." In *The Manipulation of Literature*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 103-135.
- Huygens, Constantijn. *De Briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens*. Ed. J.A. Worp. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1911.
- Huygens, Constantijn. *Gedichten*. Ed. J.A. Worp. Groningen: Wolters, 1893. Nine volumes.
- Steiner, George. *After Babel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

The Sunne Rising

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
 Why dost thou thus,
 Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
 Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?
 Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide
 Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,
 Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the king will ride,
 Call country ants to harvest offices;
 Love, all alike, no seasons knowes, nor clyme,
 Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.

 Thy beams, so reverend and strong
 Why shouldst thou thinke?
 I could eclipse them with a winke,
 But that I would not lose her sight so long:
 If her eyes have not blinded thine,
 Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,
 Whether both the India's of spice, and Myne
 Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.
 Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday.
 And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.

 She is all States, and all Princes, I,
 Nothing else is.
 Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this,
 All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie;
 Thou sunne art halfe as happy 'as wee,
 In that the world's contracted thus.
 Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
 To warme the world, that's done in warming us.
 Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
 This bed thy center is, these walls thy spheare.

Aende Sonn

Oud, besigh geck; wat mooght gh'ons leggen schijnen
 Ten bedden uijt door vensters en gordijnen?
 Moet oock de tijd van Minnaers aen Uw rad
 Gebonden zijn? Schoolschijter, gaet en vatt
 Leerkinderen bij't oor, en winckel-slaven;
 Doet hoofsche Wey-lui uyt de bolster draven,
 En seght de Coninck vast naer buyten rijdt:
 Gaet roept land-mieren op, den oogst te schuren,
 Liefd', haers gelijck alom, kent stond noch uren,
 Noch dagh, noch maend; die lappen van den tijd.

Hoe mooght ghij op uw' stercke stralen stuyten?
 Ick hielpse doch, met maer mijn oogh te sluyten,
 In duijstering, waer't dat ick't beter licht
 Soo lang onbeeren kond van haer gesicht.
 Soo noch uw oogh niet blind en is van't hare,
 Gaet siet of Indien sijn gulde ware,
 Sijn' specerije noch besitt: Ick wedd,
 Taelt merghen avond hier naer all die schatten,
 Ghy sultse mij ten vollen sien bevatten,
 Besitten en beleggen in dit bedd.

Sij's alle Staten, ick ben all Heeren;
 Geen ander dingh en is: die't all beheeren
 Die spelen ons: all' eer is bij ons' eer
 Comedi-werk: all overvloed niet meer
 Dan Alchimie. Ghij Sonn in dit verkleenen
 Van's werelds groot, deelt half'tgeluck met eenen,
 U dient voortaan gemack van ouderdom.
 Schijn hier, ghij sult soo veel als allom blaken,
 En warmen 't all; ghy kont dit bedde maken
 Uw middelpunt, des' muren uw rond-om.

Aen Joff. Tesselschade Crombalch met mijne Vertalingen
uyt het Engelsche Dichten van Dr. Donne

'T vertaelde scheelt soo veel van 't onvertaelde dicht,
Als lijf en schaduwen: en schaduwen zijn nachten.
Maer uw 'bescheidenheit en maghse niet verachten;
Tzijn edel'Iofferen, 'tzijn dochteren van 'tlicht.

En schaduwen zijn scheef, als 'taensicht inde Maen:
Soo dese dichten oock: maer, magh ick 'tselver seggen,
Gelyck aen schaduwen die lamm ter aerde leggen,
Men sieter noch wat trecks van 'trechte wesen aen.

En schaduwen zijn swart en duijster in te sien:
Soo dese dichten oock: Maer 'tzijn gemeene ooghen
Die door het swacke swart van schad'wen niet en moghen:
Wat schaduw soud' den dagh aen Tessels oogh verbien?

En schaduwen zijn koel, en op haer heetste lauw:
Soo dese dichten oock: maer 't'koel en is maer korst-koelt';
'Tvier schuyt'er in, gelijk 't in 's minnaers koele borst woelt,
En peper is niet heet voor datme'r 'tvier uyt knauw'.

En schaduwen zijn, niet; dat's droomen bijden dagh:
Soo dese dichten oock: maer 'tzijn gelijfde Nietten:
En slaet ghij 'tvoetsel gae daer uijt mijn' droomen schieten,
'K hadd pitt en mergh gesloct eer ickse droomd'en sagh.

Komt, koele Tesselschae, wel eer mijn gast op Yet;
Siet waer mijn' schaemte gaet: ick derv' uw' koelte terghen,
En uw' langhmoedicheit bij mij ter maeltyd verghen
Op schaduwen, op scheef, op swart, op koel, op niet.

Hoe lijvigh en hoe recht, hoe witt, hoe heet, hoe swaer
Waer't Engelsche gerecht, als uw vernuft kon dalen
Tot overzeesch gekook in Nederland te halen,
En all dit laff gedroom een Tesselschaduw waer!

Maer 'tzuyderlicker soet van Roomens schaduw-tael
Besitt uw besigh hert: Ierusalem langs Roomen
Op Tassos Lauwer-koets met Nederlandsche toomen
Te voeren daer ghij woont, bewoont v' altemael.

(Hoe langsaem loopt die huer! Wanneer will't besigh hert
Geleggen van die draght, en't machtighe bekeeren
Dat Circe niet en kost, den Alckemaerder leeren,
Daer door de schaduw 'tlijf, en 'tlijf de schaduw werdt?)

Soo viel mijn' taeck Noord-west: die gaf mij uw bevel.
Myn' onmacht beefde'r voor, en 'tkon mijn' hand ontroeren,
En, meend' ick, 'twas soo soet als qualick uijt te voeren;
Maer, 'tQualick, dat ghij wilt, werdt van uw willen, Wel.

Nu poch ick tegens mij, en vleij mijn selven blind,
En segh mij dat de hand die Tessels heeft getoghen
Geen misslagh machtigh was; en wentel in de loghen,
En vind mij sonder feil, mits ghij mij sonder vindt.

Is 'tlydelick gefeilt, treckt d'oude goedheid aen,
En van de dweeghe handt, die noijt en konde stryden
In Tessels wederwill, verdraegt in medelyden
'T onweerdighe bedrijf, om 'twillighe bestaen.

To Miss Tesselschade Crombalch with my Translations from
the English Poems of Dr. Donne

The translation differs widely from the untranslated poem,
As a body from its shadow - and shadows are nights.
But you modesty should not detest them:
They are noble ladies, they're daughters of light.

And shadows are crooked, just like the moon's face;
So are these poems: but let me defend them:
Just like shadows that lie inert on earth:
You can still see part of their true shape.

And shadows are black and dark when observed:
So are these poems: but common are the eyes
that cannot pierce the weak blackness of shadows;
What shadows would forbid the day to Tessel's eye?

And shadows are cool, and when hot, merely tepid;
So are these poems: but only the crust is cool;
The fire is hidden inside just as in a lover's cool breast,
And pepper is not hot till one chews the fire out.

And shadows are nothings, it's dreaming during the day;
So are these poems: but they are embodied nothings;
And if you look at the food whence my dreams come,
I had swallowed pit and marrow before I dreamed them.

Come, cool Tesselschade, once my guest to something;
See where my shame lies: I dare to provoke your coolness
And invite your tolerance to my meal
Of shadows, crookedness, blackness, coolness, nothing.

How embodied and how straight, how white, how hot, how heavy
Was the English meal, if only your intelligence could lower itself
To taste in Holland the meal from across the sea
And all this lowly dreaming became Tessel's shadow.

But the southern sweet of Rome's shadow-language
Occupies your busy heart; to lead Jerusalem via Rome,
To drive Tasso's laurel carriage with a Dutch bridle
To our own country, that is your total occupation.

(How slowly goes that rent! When will the busy heart
Finish this work, and change the mighty things
That Circe could not change, and teach the Dutchman
How the shadow becomes the body, and the body, the shadow).

My task lies North-West; you ordered me so.
I trembled in my helplessness, and it moved my hand,
And I thought that I could do it either poorly or well;
But if it is poor, it will become well if you will.

Now I boast to myself and flatter myself blind
And tell me that my hand, guided by Tessel's hand,
Cannot do wrong, and wallow in the lie
And think me without fault if you think me so.

And if I failed, look on it with kindness
And, from my meek hand that could not fight
Your wishes, suffer, in your pity
The unworthy result because I ventured willingly.