Translating Taboo: Blasphemy in an Afrikaans Translation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the translator of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* into Afrikaans in the dual contexts of the ideological milieu that dominated the Afrikaans literary scene and of the literary theory that prevailed at the time. The bulk of the translation fell in the period 1960 to 1980, the heyday of Afrikaner nationalism. The prevalent translation theory in the 1970s and 1980s was Descriptive Translation Studies, with Gideon Toury as its leading exponent. This theory emphasised the need for compliance with the cultural norms of the receiving community, which, in this case, would have included observing a blasphemy taboo. The problem examined here arises from the fact that compliance with this taboo was in conflict with the cultural context of the source text. The translator's alternation between compliance with and resistance to the taboo is indicative of a translator's central role in the translation, which became the focus of attention in the 1990s with the rise of the "cultural turn", espoused by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere. For these theorists the emphasis fell on the translation *process*, as opposed to the translation *product*, the central concern of the Descriptive Translation Studies of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than viewing norms as determinative, binary options, it is their diachronic variability that merits priority, all the more so in contemporary South Africa.

Opsomming

In hierdie studie stel die skrywer hom dit ten doel om sy rol as vertaler van Chaucer se *Canterbury Tales* in Afrikaans te ondersoek in die tweevoudige kontekste van die ideologiese milieu wat die Afrikaanse letterkundige toneel oorheers het en die vertaalteorie wat in swang was. Die merendeel van die verhale is tussen 1960 en 1980, dus tydens die bloeityd van Afrkaner nasionalisme, vertaal. Die vertaalteorie wat in die 1970s en 1980s op die voorgrond was, was Deskriptiewe Vertaalkunde, met Gideon Toury as leidende eksponent. Hierdie teorie het die noodsaaklikheid daarvan beklemtoon dat die kultuurnorme van 'n ontvangende gemeenskap nagekom moet word, en dit sou in dié geval 'n taboe met betrekking tot godslastering ingesluit het. Die probleem wat hier ondersoek word, ontstaan as gevolg van die feit dat nakoming van dié taboe strydig is met die kultuurkonteks van die bronteks. Die vertaler se wisseling tussen nakoming van die norm en weerstand daarteen dui op 'n vertaler se sentrale rol in die *vertaalproses,* waarop die "kulturele wending", voorgestaan deur Susan Bassnett en Andre Lefevere, in 1990 die aandag gevestig het, in teenstelling met die *vertaalproduk*, waarop die Deskriptiewe Vertaalkunde van die 1970s en 1980s

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die klem laat val het. Eerder as om norme as determinatiewe, binêre keuses te beskou, is dit bevorderlik dat hul diachroniese veranderlikheid, veral in kontemporêre Suid-Afrika, voorrang geniet

1   Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine my role as translator in navigating between the Scylla of faithfulness to a source culture and the Charybdis of the demand for conformity imposed by the target culture. This will be done with reference to blasphemy in my Afrikaans translation of the *Canterbury Tales* (Boje), on which I worked from 1953 to the present day, but much of which occupied me in the period 1960 to 1980, the heyday of hegemonic Afrikaner nationalism. The translation theory that held sway at the time was Descriptive Translation Studies, with Gideon Toury as a leading proponent. Toury articulated the requirement that a successful translation necessarily complies with the norms of the receiving culture. One such norm that applied at the time was a taboo on blasphemy, but compliance with this norm in my translation was in conflict with the need to retain an essential feature of the *Canterbury Tales* and of its cultural context.

2   Translation Theory

In 1813, German theologian and classical philologist Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) noted: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward that author, or the translator leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards that reader" (qtd. in Munday 28). This contention is still a key text in translation practice. Schleiermacher favoured a "foreignising" approach that valorised the source text by moving the reader toward the author, and in this he was followed by several linguistically oriented theorists operating in an equivalence paradigm, but, as the discipline of translation studies developed, the emphasis moved to the target text and the culture in which it is embedded, an approach exemplified by Gideon Toury's norm theory, first advanced in the late 1970s (Martínez-Sierra 31). According to Toury, a translation that leans towards its source text displays "adequacy", while its essential reformulation in terms of the receiving culture is the measure of its "acceptability" (56-57). To be acceptable to the receiving culture it must conform to the norms of that culture, defined as "the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what is right or wrong, adequate or inadequate – into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations" (111).

Toury's emphasis on the receiving culture as the locus of acceptability derives from Itamar Even-Zohar's concept of the polysystem, according to

which semiotic patterns of communication such as culture, language, literature and society function as systems, not as agglomerations of diverse elements (Even-Zohar 288). Any literary text is therefore dynamically implicated in a network of relationships, its reception dependent on the operation of the multiple intersections of the various systems. While Even-Zohar limits the concept to the literary polysystem, André Lefevere places it in its wider cultural context, insisting that "[t]ranslation needs to be studied in connection with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, with emphasis on the various attempts to shore up or undermine an existing ideology or an existing poetics" (Lefevere, Proust's grandmother, 10). This power and patronage is wielded by publishers, cultural organizations, political leaders, censors, academics, critics, reviewers and the book-buying public (Hermans, Norms of Translation 10-11; see also Gentzler 190). Therefore, as Pavel Medvedev points out, the prevalent "ideological milieu" may profoundly affect the literary polysystem (Lefevere, Beyond the Process 56).

3   The Afrikaans Literary Polysystem

Early Afrikaans literary works accorded comfortably with the steadily advancing tide of Afrikaner nationalism. However, the modes of expression of the generation of writers that came to the fore in the 1960s (the "Sestigers") differed from and were even antagonistic towards the prevalent ideological thinking. These writers were more outspoken with regard to politics, sex and religion (Kannemeyer 227) and their dissent incurred the wrath of church and state. They and those who followed in their wake were attacked on these three grounds.

3.1   Politics

In a secret report to the Broederbond, T.T. Cloete contended that André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach envisaged "the end of white minority rule in South Africa and even its violent overthrow" (Galloway 86-7; my translation). In the same document, Cloete also warned against "committed literature", a perspective widely shared by academics who were highly influential as university teachers, reviewers, critics and literary historians. With reference to Jan Rabie, A.P. Grové warned against "half-baked politicians" who sought to turn literature into propaganda (170). So too, Gerrit Dekker rejected the embitterment and rebelliousness of Adam Small's committed poetry (306), a perspective shared by J.C. Kannemeyer (*Die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur* II 297).

Brink's *Kennis van die aand*, "the first direct, oppositional political novel in Afrikaans" (Coetzee 352), was turned down by the publishers Human and

Rousseau for fear of censorship. It was published by Buren in 1973 and banned the following year (Brink 220). And as Brink says, "[c]ensorship does not happen in a vacuum" (226). He was harassed by the security police, his phone was tapped, his letters opened, and his home ransacked by intimidating policemen (226-231).

The role of patronage, defined by Lefevere as "any kind of force that can be influential in encouraging and propagating, but also in discouraging, censoring and destroying works of literature" (qtd. in Gentzler 141), can be illustrated with reference to the award of the prestigious Akademie Prize for Literature. J.P. Smuts concedes that political considerations have influenced the decisions made by the selectors (3). The tardy recognition of Uys Krige, Adam Small, André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach and the non-recognition of Jan Rabie are cases in point, and Kannemeyer goes so far as to describe the treatment of Krige and Rabie as treason against Afrikaans and the Afrikaner (qtd. in Smuts 5).

3.2 Sex

The social norm prohibiting any depiction of sex was a convenient means of discrediting dissident authors, and Cloete's second charge against Brink and Breytenbach was that they championed total sexual freedom (Galloway). In 1964, the Dutch Reformed Church's Synodal Commission for Public Morals called for works such as Brink's *Lobola vir die Lewe* to be banned because of their "morally deleterious and polluting character" (qtd. in McDonald 171). The force of the taboo is apparent from the absurdity of a clergyman who was offended by Etienne Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* "not only because of what is described on the pages, but most especially because of what one can imagine happening *between* the chapters" (Brink 212).

3.3 Religion

Cloete's third charge was that Brink and Breytenbach "reject Christian worship and morality and even blaspheme against God" (Galloway). Given the fact that the vast majority of Afrikaans speakers were adherents of the Dutch Reformed Church(es) and heard the prohibition of the abuse of God's name proclaimed week by week, one can understand that blasphemy was an accusation that carried enough weight to secure the banning of Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein*, *O Magersfontein* in 1978. At the time, Ilse Feinauer noted that Afrikaans-speaking people people accord "'n besonder hoë taboewaarde aan die ydellike gebruik van Godsbenaminge" (40). [1]

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1.   "A particularly high taboo value to the abuse of terms relating to God".

The rejection of translation theories based on equivalence served to high-light the importance of cultural difference. Kanyi Kitamura uses a scale based on the perceived significance of individualism, as opposed to collecti-vism, to demonstrate the vast distance between American and Japanese culture, as a result of which a sentence such as "She is a real individual", though linguistically flawless in translation, is an insult in Japanese. If one were to take blasphemy as a touchstone, Afrikaner-nationalist culture would prove very remote from Middle English culture in this respect. Toury ranged norms from tolerated to mandatory (Munday 115) and mandatory clearly applied to the avoidance of blasphemy. In the imposition of mandatory norms "we recognize the hierarchical power structures of most socio-cultural systems. Power relations are inscribed in all the multiple norms and conventions operative in societies" (Hermans, *Translation in Systems*, 82).

4   Compliance with the Norm

Having grown up in a Calvinist Afrikaner environment, with its magisterial proclamation of religio-cultural values ("Die gemeente luister met die verskuldigde eerbied na die voorlees van die Wet van die Here …").[2] I internalised the blasphemy taboo and in some instances, especially in the earlier stages of the translation, used the self-censoring "manipulation" (see Gentzler 190) to which translators of contentious material typically resort (See Sanz Gallego 141; Karjalainem 55-64). When I encountered the Wife of Bath's use of "Christ" as an expletive, I submitted to the "performative instruction" that a direct translation was inappropriate, as the occurrence of "Christus" as a swearword in Afrikaans is "baie naby aan sero, omdat die taboewaarde uiters hoog is"[3] (Feinauer 201). The passage in question could indeed be domesticated, retaining the flavour of enjoyment and pleasing reminiscence without direct translation of the Wife's swearing:

> But – Lord Crist! – whan that it remembreth me
> Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
> It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.

<div align="right">(CT, III. 469-471)</div>

> [Ag, hemel toggie, as ek aan die tyd
> weer terugdink van my jeug en joligheid,
> dan kittel dit my hart van lekkerkry.]

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2.   "The congregation will listen with due reverence to the reading of the Law of the Lord …".

3.   Very near to zero as its taboo value is extremely high.

In the Miller's Tale, in place of an oath "By God", the Afrikaans euphemism "Genugtig" with its triple velar fricatives aptly captures the shock of near disaster:

> Aleyn up rist, and thoughte, "Er that it dawe,
> I wol go crepen in by my felawe,"
> And fond the cradel with his hand anon.
> "By God," thoughte he, "al wrang I have mysgon."
>
> <div align="right">(<i>CT</i>, I. 4249–4252)</div>

> [Alein staan op en dag: "Voor die daeraad
> moet ek weer 'n slag gaan inkruip by my maat;"
> maar hy loop hom teen die wieg vas onderweg.
> "Genugtig", dag hy, "nou verdwaal ek sleg …"]

And in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, the substitution of "maggies" linked by alliteration with the informal "man" captures the canon's pretended bonhomie and the "nee" prefixed to "maggies" contributes a show of exasperation:

> And to hym spak, and thus seyde in his game:
> "Stoupeth adoun. By God, ye be to blame!
> Helpeth me now, as I dide you whileer ...".
>
> <div align="right">(<i>CT</i>, VIII. 1326–1328)</div>

> [Toe't die kanunnik hom gul toegevoeg:
> "Nee maggies, man, ek het jou nou genoeg
> gehelp; nou's dit jou beurt: kom help vir my …."]

5 Resistance to the Norm

However, I also decided to retain some of the most virulent blasphemous oaths even though some of these occur in the tales translated in the early 1970s when B.J. Vorster was prime minister (1966-1978) and his brother J.D. (Koot) Vorster was the moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church (1970-1974), together forming a formidable bulwark of illiberality. In the Prologue to the Miller's Tale, I first encountered the problem and employed the alternative strategies of retention on the one hand and substitution on the other – even introducing a third (euphemistic) oath "waaragtig".

> The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
> So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
> He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
> Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,

But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
And swoor, "By armes, and by blood and bones,
I kan noble tale for the nones,
With which I wol now quite the Knychtes tale."
Oure Hooste saugh that he was dronke of ale,
And seyde, "Abyd, Robyn, my leeve brother;
Som bettre man shal telle us first another.
Abyd, and let us werken thriftily."
"By Goddes soule," quod he, "that wol nat I;
For I wol speke or elles go my wey."

<div align="right">(CT, I. 3120-3133)</div>

[Skoon bleekbesope was die Meulenaar
en hy kon nouliks op sy perd se rug bly sit;
hy sou sy hoed vir niemand afhaal; dit
was eerbetoon wat hy nie wou bewys.
In 'n Pilatus-stem het hy gekrys:
"By Christus arms, beendere en bloed,
ek kan die Ridder deur en deur vergoed,
waaragtig, met 'n oulike verhaal."
Ons Waard wis dat hy dronk was van die aal
en sê, "Wag eers, Robyn, my liewe maat,
gun 'n beter man geleentheid om te praat.
Wag eers; ons pak die ding behoorlik aan."
"Nee, allamagtig," roep hy, "vergeet daarvan;
ek wil my beurt hê of ek's uit die spel!"]

Three reasons for his deliberate decision may be adduced. Chaucer uses swearing as an indicator of class and character among the pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St Thomas à Beckett and their tales as described in the *Canterbury Tales*. Most of the pilgrims swear, but "[i]t is the vulgar characters who swear most and most profanely, with Harry Bailly well out in front, the Wife of Bath some way behind, followed by the Pardoner and the Miller" (Elliot 253). The Miller's very first words are "By armes, and by blood and bones" (*CT*, I. 3125), with reference to Christ's body, so that, as Horobin puts it, we are alerted to immorality before he even gets going on his Tale (162). Such anatomical oaths referring to the body of God the Son are used by the Host, the Miller, the Summoner, the Reeve, and the Pardoner, but not by the Wife of Bath, the Friar or the Shipman, so that as Elliott notes: "It is clear … that Chaucer distributed his oaths with a good deal of discernment among the characters of his later poems, and that the oaths themselves varied considerably in type and intensity" (253). Secondly, without egregious blasphemy, the strictures against dismembering Christ in the Pardoner's Tale and in the Parson's Tale (*CT*, VI. 708-709; X. 590) would make little sense, and the Parson's exasperated "*Benedicite!/* What eyleth the man, so sinfully to swere?" (*CT*, II. 1170-1171) would be ludicrously inappropriate if the Host's "gretteste ooth" was "Allawêreld!" Thirdly, and most importantly,

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oaths are fundamental to fourteenth-century culture and to the *Canterbury Tales* and should therefore be retained in translation.

"Trouthe" was a keyword of fourteenth-century morality. Its original sense was a covenant binding two people together ("and thereto I plight thee my troth"). Its semantic range came to include the moral quality of reliability, trustworthiness, integrity. "Trouthe", Arveragus insists, "is the hyeste thing that man may kepe" (*CT*, V. 1479). By the time Chaucer was working on the *Canterbury Tales*, it also signified a quality associated with God, and, because God was "the ultimate guarantor of all morality" (Green 210), he was invoked as a witness to any undertaking. Oaths were therefore fundamental to medieval culture. They were the means of securing relationships in feudal society: "Men swore a series of interlocking oaths of fealty to set up networks of land ownership, military support, and agricultural labour" (Mohr 113). Friendship, cooperation, commercial transactions, promises – all these were sealed by oaths. Even the legal system made use of compurgation, the practice of strengthening an oath of innocence by the oaths of witnesses to the accused's integrity (cf. Grant 2). The London Glosses on the Laws of the Anglo-Saxon kings, dating from the early thirteenth century, project the sworn brotherhood of the London guilds as a model for the state. The subjects' oath of loyalty to the king unites them as sworn brothers (*fratres conjurati*) committed to the protection of the kingdom (Heer 61).

Oaths called on God to confirm a verbal assurance, so anyone who practised deceit was guilty of blasphemy and would have to answer for it on the Day of Judgement. The consequences might also be more immediate. Thus the Norman Conquest was justified on the grounds that Harold was a perjured king because he had sworn fealty to William when a shipwreck placed him in the Duke's power (Sayles 162-3). During Chaucer's own lifetime, the capture of Richard II at Flint Castle was achieved by the breaking of an oath of safe conduct solemnly sworn on a consecrated Host (Brewer 205).

Legitimate swearing, the Parson says, quoting Jeremiah 4: 2, must be "in trouthe, in doom, and in rightwisnesse" (*CT*, X. 591). Because medieval Christianity was christocentric, oaths "by God" were commonly replaced by oaths "by Christ". In terms of the doctrine of incarnation, God was physically present in Christ on earth; in terms of the account of the ascension, Christ was taken up to heaven in bodily form; and in terms of the belief in transubstantiation, promulgated in 1215, he is physically present in the Mass. The introduction of tabernacles and pyxes in churches and the monstrance in processions led to an exaggerated emphasis on this presence (Tanner 90). Reinforced by preaching, iconography, dramatic presentations and Franciscan devotion to the wounds and Passion of Christ (Frank 145), a cult of his body and blood arose, reaching a high point in the fourteenth century. The institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 exemplified and advanced the adoration of his body and blood (Rhodes 88), an affective orientation characteristic of the popular religion of the time (Watson 79).

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Because the dismemberment of Christ's body in the crucifixion (and the Mass) was experienced viscerally, this gave rise to the most powerful oaths, by his passion and by different parts of his body. Because of the Athanasian insistence on the equality in the hypostatic union (Daniélou 85), such oaths commonly took the form of "God's wounds" or "God's blood". The Church's abhorrence of this kind of anatomical oath (Hudson 354) is reflected in graphic representations such as a mural dating to about 1430 in Broughton Church in Buckinghamshire. This painting depicts the Virgin Mary holding the mutilated body of her son. She is surrounded by men holding the parts of his body they have sworn by (Loomis 168). This abhorrence is echoed in the Parson's urging:

> For Cristes sake, ne swereth nat so sinfully in dismembrynge of Crist by soule, herte, bones, and body. For certes, it semeth that ye thynke that the cursede Jewes ne dismembred nat ynough the preciouse persone of Crist, but ye dismember hym moore.
>
> <div align="right">(CT, X. 590)</div>

> [Moet, om Christus wil, nie so sondig deur Christus na siel, hart, beendere en liggaam uitmekaar te skeur nie. Dit lyk asof julle dink die vervloekte Jode het die kosbare liggaam van Christus nie genoeg verskeur nie; nou wil julle hom nog meer verskeur.]

Of the three rioters in the Pardoner's Tale, we are also told:

> Hir oothes been so grete and so dampnable
> That it is grisly for here hem swere.
> Oure blessed Lordes body they totere –
> Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough –
> And ech of hem at otheres synne lough.
>
> <div align="right">(CT, VI. 472–476)</div>

> [… so kras en lasterlik was hulle ede,
> dis grusaam om te hoor hoe skeur hul daar
> ons Liewe Heer se liggaam uitmekaar –
> asof deur Jode nie genoeg geskonde –
> en hulle lag nog oor mekaar se sonde.]

The use of anatomical oaths was not unique to England. In 1491, a man called Hanneken van Uphoven suffered cruel punishment in Bruges

> omme dat hij ghecostumert es groote, zware, orrible en blammelicke eeden te zweerene, als bij den bloede, bij den hoofde, bij den vijf wonden, bij den

longhere, bij den pensen ende darmen van den almogende God[4] (qtd. in Van Sterkenburg).

So too, the Franks swore by the head, teeth, entrails and hair of God and we are told that one could list up to a hundred such oaths (Willems 8).

> The fact that gruesome punishment was not inflicted on blasphemers in England does not minimise the seriousness of the offence. Papal inquisitors on the Continent identified blasphemy with heresy, despite the perpetrators' protestations that they were orthodox in their beliefs and that their oaths were spontaneous and most commonly an expression of anger, often associated with gambling (Flynn 49). In England common law prevailed, and it was only late in the fourteenth century that Parliament agreed to statutes providing for secular cooperation with the ecclesiastical authorities in combating heresy.
>
> (Kelly 8, 27)

Paradoxically, the promiscuous swearing of the Middle Ages was a manifestation of a profoundly religious age. As Geoffrey Hughes puts it: "Just as Black Magic is a monstrous parody of orthodox religion, so blasphemous utterance is the obverse of an age of faith." (55) To quote Huizinga:

> The excesses and abuses resulting from an extreme familiarity with things holy, as well as the insolent mingling of pleasure with religion, are generally characteristic of periods of unshaken faith and of a deeply religious culture. The same people who, in their daily life mechanically follow the routine of a rather degraded sort of worship will be capable of rising suddenly, at the ardent word of a preaching monk, to unparalleled heights of religious emotion. Even the stupid sin of blasphemy has its roots in a profound faith. It is a sort of perverted act of faith, affirming the omnipresence of God and his intervention in the minutest concerns. Only the idea of really daring Heaven gives blasphemy its sinful charm. As soon as an oath loses its character of an invocation of God, the habit of swearing becomes mere coarseness.
>
> (156-157)

Blasphemy was used as a weapon in violent conflicts. It was "an integral part of a competitive masculine culture" (Schwerhoff 405-406), as the Parson recognises when he asks:

> What seye we eek of hem that deliten hem in sweryng, and holden it a gentrie or a manly dede to swere grete othes? And what of hem that of verray usage ne cesse nat to swere grete othes, al be the cause nat worth a straw?
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> (*CT*, X. 601)

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4. "Because he habitually swore great, weighty, horrible and reprehensible oaths, for example by the blood, head, five wounds, lungs, belly and entrails of God almighty."

> Wat kan ons sê van iemand wat behae daarin skep om te sweer en dit as edel of manlik beskou om growwe ede te sweer? En wat van hom wat uit pure gewoonte voortdurend growwe ede sweer, al is die aanleiding daartoe g'n strooi werd nie?

It was a means of asserting power and independence associated with threats, insults and physical violence, often provoked in the course of gambling (Schwerhoff 406). Significantly, there are two men in the foreground of the Broughton Church mural referred to above playing "tables", a form of backgammon, one of the chief means of satisfying "the national passion for gambling" (Pimlott 20). Machismo was also the context of the horrendous anatomical oaths of the three rioters in the Pardoner's Tale:

> "By Goddes precious herte," and "By his nayles,"
> And "By the blood of Crist that is in Hayles,
> Sevene is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and treye!"
> "By Goddes armes, if thou falsly pleye,
> This daggere shal thurghout thyn herte go!"–
> This fruyt cometh of the bicched bones two:
> Forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homicide.
>
> (*CT*, VI. 651-657

> [By Sy spykers en Sy dierb're hart, en by
> die Bloed van Christus in die Hales-abdy,
> jy't vyf en drie, en sewe is my hasard;
> by God se arms, ek deurboor jou hart
> met hierdie dolk as jy my probeer bedrieg' –
> dit is die dobbelsteen se oes: gelieg,
> gekul en woede, moord. ….]

But blasphemy was also a bonding device, as we see from the line "And ech of hem at otheres synne lough" (*CT*, VI. 472-476). Swearing (then and now) serves to integrate people from diverse backgrounds (Schwerhoff 406). This is surely relevant to the *Canterbury Tales,* for if oaths underlay the coherence of medieval society, they also provided the basis of the "felaweshipe" of the pilgrimage and of the relationships of the characters depicted in the tales. The pilgrims do not merely agree to the Host's proposals, they "othes swore/ With ful glad herte" (*CT*, I. 810-811). Palamon and Arcite swear brotherhood, as do the revellers of the Pardoner's Tale: "To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother,/ As though he were his owene ybore brother" (*CT*, VI. 703-704), and, ironically, so do the devil and the summoner in the Friar's Tale (*CT*, III. 1404-1405). Husbands and wives are sworn to fidelity, and members of religious houses to poverty, chastity and obedience. We would therefore be justified in concluding that much of the *Canterbury Tales* is about the breaking of oaths (although the Franklin's Tale hinges on the keeping of an oath), a blasphemy far more serious than the empty exclamations that proliferate in its pages.

My decision to retain blasphemous oaths was taken in the early 1970s, when I translated the Miller's Tale, and therefore antedates Toury's (1978) establishment of the concept of norms. It was not theoretically determined, but derived from an experiential pragmatism "conceived as the ongoing process of reflective adjustment between various cultural needs and interests" (Norris 148) and serves to emphasise the decisive role that translators have to play in resolving translational dilemmas (Arrojo 127).

6   The Cultural Turn

In Descriptive Translation Studies the emphasis falls on the product of translation, rather than on the process. Once a process of translation is complete, a product has come into being which, according to Toury's precepts, needs to be acceptable to the intended target culture. This is achieved by adherence to the norms and socio-cultural constraints specific to that particular target culture and period. As an empirical statement of an observed reality, Toury's formulation is unexceptionable. The problem arises, as Andrew Chesterman perceived, from the fact that all norms "exert a prescriptive pressure" (qtd. in Munday 118). As a result, the translator is still confronted with the domestication-foreignisation dilemma identified by Schleiermacher in 1813 and others since then. This suggests that Descriptive Translation Studies does not go far enough in eliminating the binary of compliance or non-compliance with the target culture. The wider context of the "cultural turn", propounded by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere from 1990, and the insights of cultural studies are essential to avoid such binaries by confronting the issues of power in society at large. This provides a setting for Umberto Stecconi's reversal of Toury's descriptivism and starting from the conditioning of translation in real time and place (Hermans, "What is (not) Translation" 78).

The cultural turn encouraged theorists to reflect on how incongruence between core ideas and values of different cultures impact on translation. Aqel provides an interesting if extreme example of such incongruence. In a Western film dubbed into Arabic two men pretend to be homosexuals. Because the word "gay" is regarded as unmentionable in the target milieu, it was rendered as "confused", making nonsense of the plot (56). This incongruence also applies to the translation of the *Canterbury Tales*. If "acceptability" prevails, the criterion of "adequacy" is jeopardised. It is true that a source text exerts no further pressure on the product of translation, but its prestige asserts itself during the process of translation, giving rise to a plea on the part of Christiane Nord for a loyalty principle, which she qualifies as

> … not the old faithfulness or fidelity in new clothes. Faithfulness and fidelity referred to an intertextual relationship holding between the source and the target texts. Loyalty, however, is an interpersonal category referring to a social

relationship between people. It can be defined as the responsibility translators have toward their partners in the translational interaction. Loyalty commits the translator bilaterally to the source and the target side.

<div align="right">(94, her emphases)</div>

Although the context of this quotation is that of Bible translation, it does also articulate an essential aspect of a translator's approach to a major works of world literature where, in certain situations, the resultant tension obliges a translator to choose between adequacy and acceptability. Retaining blasphemous oaths despite a mandatory norm to the contrary therefore entails "deviating from native norms to stage an alien reading experience" (Venuti 69). In contrast to the common practice of dealing with the "untransla-tability" of a text that is unacceptable to the host culture by manipulating it into acceptability – as happened with the German translation of Anne Frank's Diary (see Lefevere, Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame, 59-72) – the translator "(visibly) resists the ideological dominance of the target culture by protecting the source text from it" (Westling 7). Translation therefore involves a rewriting of the source text and this heightens the presence of the translator who is seen to be at the centre of the process.

<div align="right">(Bassnett & Lefevere 123)</div>

A number of qualifications in Toury's theory mitigate the operation of prescriptive force. The first is that dominant norms may be subverted by a translator who is ready to accept the consequences of doing so. Although in a heavily ideologised environment, few translators will feel free to select strategies of their choice (Aqel 22), ideology resides, in the words of Tymoczko, "not simply in the text translated, but in the voicing and stance of the translator, and in its relevance to the receiving audience" (qtd. in Spies and Feinauer, 113). It was this perception that underlay a comment made in 1989 by the poet and critic Johann de Lange with reference to aspects of my Chaucer translation: "Beslis nie leesstof vir fyngevoeliges nie. En daarom méér as welkom in 'n tyd waarin daar júís 'n nuwe konserwa-tisme voelbaar geword het, en geveinsdhede in alle kampe botvier"[5] (De Lange). In this quotation, an audience other than the dominant elite is envisaged, and this accords with Toury's concession that the operation of norms is not restricted to a target culture as a whole, but may also apply to "that section of it which would host the end product" (56). The challenge that this section poses to hegemonic values in a situation of weak normative control (Hermans, "Norms of Translation", 13), such as that which prevailed in Afrikaans society from the eighties until 1994, is made possible by the fact that norms are constraints on individual freedom specific to a particular society and time (Chesterman & Wagner 91).

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5. "Definitely not reading matter for the squeamish. And therefore all the more welcome precisely at a time when a new conservatism is afoot and hypocrisy has free rein all round."

The theoretical framework of dynamic change in society elaborated by Raymond Williams is helpful in creating an understanding that it is not only the literary polysystem that is in constant flux, but society as a whole. The dominant culture contains residual elements from the past, such as organised religion and rural values, which are still operative among many speakers of Afrikaans (divergent though they may be culturally, socio-economically and politically), although by means of "traditions" they may be "reinterpreted, diluted and projected" by the dominant culture (Williams 122). But the dominant culture is also challenged by an emergent culture of alternative ideas and practices struggling for acceptance. In the words of Lee Patterson, hegemony "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modi-fied. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered and challenged by pressures not its own" (56).

A diachronic perspective makes it possible to view a Chaucer translation completed over more than half a century of radical change in South Africa not only in the context of Afrikaans culture during the period of Afrikaner nationalist hegemony, when the bulk of the tales were translated, but also in a milieu of emergent meanings and values, especially since the introduction of democratic government in 1994. For unchurched Afrikaans speakers who subscribe to the values of a multicultural, secular society, blasphemy as part of a conceptual framework to be safeguarded by cultural gatekeepers has lost its salience. For some professing Christians, the prohibition of swearing means more than the avoidance of "bad language". Rather, it is an injunction to trustworthiness (Mt. 5: 34-37). In line with this evangelical interpretation, not blaspheming cannot simply be equated with avoidance of certain combinations of letters or sounds, so that "God" or "Jesus" is forbidden, while "gits" or "jissie" is regarded as acceptable. Rather, for them the essence of blasphemy will reside in a disjunction between their profession and their practice. Thus a primitive taboo is transmuted into an ethical norm. For both groups equally, the "voortdurende afstomping van taboewoorde"[6] of which Feinauer speaks (43), accelerated by the massive cultural influence of English, has resulted in habituation and therefore to accommodation to blasphemy by fictional characters in a literary text from a bygone era.

7   Conclusion

The conclusion that emerges from the above discussion is that Toury's norm theory holds good as a generalisation about how societies predispose translators to operate. As a generalisation, formulated in antithesis to the long dominant equivalence paradigm, it tends to a determinism that under-cuts the creative role of translators, who are not always and exclusively impelled to

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6.   "the continuous erosion of taboo words".

conform to the acceptability norm, but also have a responsibility to ensure that it is the authentic source text that is reconstructed in terms of the receiving culture.

Toury's norms theory is a highly significant contribution to translation theory, but as Rosemary Arrojo contends, "the construction of a more symmetrical relationship between theory and practice" is the biggest challenge with which Translation Studies must contend (126). So too, Susan Bassnett argues that the "theoretical paradigms of the last two decades have ... run their course" and that there is an increasing tendency to turn to the trans-lator's experience and sense of self for insight into the practice of translation (24). It is to this development and the ongoing debate of which it forms a part that the present article seeks to contribute.

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   Idette Noomé, Senior Lecturer in English at that university, was his supervisor.

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