

# Imposing Eliot: On Translating *Agaat* by Marlene van Niekerk

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## Summary

Amongst the contributions to the special edition of the *Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif vir literatuurwetenskap* on the oeuvre of Marlene van Niekerk (Volume 25(3) September, 2009), the task of translating her works into English was discussed. This article adopts a critical focus on four instances of the presence of T.S. Eliot's poetry in the translation of her novel *Agaat* (2004) for the South African Englishspeaking reader by Michiel Heyns (2006).

## Opsomming

Die spesiale uitgawe van die *Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif vir literatuurwetenskap* 25(3), September 2009 oor die oeuvre van Marlene van Niekerk bevat onder andere artikels oor die taak om haar werke in Engels te vertaal. Hierdie artikel werp 'n kritiese fokus op vier gevalle van die voorkoms van T.S Eliot se gedigte in Michiel Heyns (2006) se vertaling van van Niekerk se roman *Agaat* (2004) vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Engelssprekende leser.

## Introduction

The art of translation invokes a semantic, syntactic, and allusive problematic so varied and wide that, in a work as detailed and as textured as *Agaat* by Marlene van Niekerk, not to mention as long – 718 pages in Afrikaans and 692 in English – the translation into English by Michiel Heyns evokes admiration. Heyns (2009: 124-125) notes his inexperience and “naivety” in the practice of translation, but if there were any “arrogance” on his part, it is the sort of courageous self-belief for which readers of the novel would find it difficult not to be grateful. In a discussion with the author and Leon de Kock in 2007, Heyns stated that the translation was “mainly for a South African audience”, and, with some amusement, noted that “if there is to be a British edition ... then perhaps that is the time to start worrying about the

word ‘vlei’” (de Kock 2009: 140). Indeed, “vlei” may be adequately explained in a glossary, as it is here, and it would, one conjectures, constitute a relatively minor concern for the reader of the later British edition, which, rather boldly, undertook the more significant alterations, including the change of the title of the novel to *The Way of the Women*, and the removal of the stress marks (Heyns 2009: 126).

But it is Heyns’s (2009: 124-125) self-deprecation, as well as the evident pleasure and enjoyment which he experienced when undertaking his task (de Kock 2009: 147), that – and one hopes that one is not misinterpreting these sentiments – may permit a space to be opened for commenting upon his work. If so, the following brief discussion is certainly not in the cause of proposing any revisions. Rather, this marginal inquiry endeavours to deepen the important task of widening the understanding and feel for literature in translation, literature that is, at once, foreign and exotic, and yet that also is able to lead its readers “through the unknown”, and paradoxically, “remembered gate” (“Little Gidding”). In addition, the dialogue which Heyns conducted with the author throughout the process might suggest that he would not take too unkindly to that dialogue being overheard and continued with and amongst those who have read his translation with a pleasure and enjoyment akin to his own, and yet might occasionally also have experienced some reservations. And it is one particular area of reservation that this brief article addresses.

## Instructive Eliot

In Afrikaans, the tactility of the gutturals, particularly the voiced *g*, which is close to the aspirated Greek guttural *x* (transliterated as *ch*) or the German *ch* as in “auch”, and the liquid *r*, the pronunciation of which is supplemented with the quality of an aspirated dental, and, in addition, when combined with the voiced labial *b* to form *br*, may also constitute a particular feature of a regional Western Cape accent,<sup>1</sup> are reasonably close to being “untranslatable” into many but not into all English dialects<sup>2</sup> as

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1. The phrase “may also constitute” is used advisedly in this sentence, because this is a general observation and not necessarily particular to this novel. The standard Afrikaans employed in the novel neither implies nor requires any recognition of a regional dialect by the reader. Nevertheless, with reference to the location of the novel, this form of pronunciation may be termed the “Overberg ‘brei’”, and many Western Cape English-speaking readers would be familiar with, what is known colloquially as, the “Malmesbury ‘brei’”.
  2. This is not the case, for example, amongst Irish speakers of English, who pronounce *gh* in a similar way to the *g* in “brug”

sound – examples of the former include the *g* both in the title of the novel, *Agaat* (2004), and also in the word “brug”, and an example of the latter is the *br* in the word “brug”. For those with access to Afrikaans, one would be hard-pressed not to claim that, in an Anglo-American translation, the loss of these auditory effects for many readers would be almost “irreparable”, to appropriate Heyns’s (2009) term, but this is not so for the South African English-speaking reader who pronounces “Agaat” as in Afrikaans.<sup>3</sup> That the loss of that sound would be “irreparable” is because, not infrequently, the “rugged roughness” of these sounds conveys in their very articulation the experience of life and of the physical context of the *plaasroman*, even if Olivier’s (2012: 322; also see 317 & 321) perspicacious observation must be noted,<sup>4</sup> namely that “*Agaat* is an extended wake at the deathbed of the farm novel”. But lest one concur with the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004, Elfriede Jelinek, who denied the very possibility of translating works from one language into another,<sup>5</sup> it may be claimed that the practice of translation does rescue otherwise inaccessible literary deposits for readers without access to the original languages, and permits, at least, “their partial escape from silence” (Steiner 1998: 416), which may comfort any further mourners for that almost tactile loss of sound as evocative of place. Moreover, a translation may itself contest the restrictions of the limited horizon of its readers, and if “charged with an *energy* similar to that of the source text, will ... prove to be experimental and open new horizons in the target culture” (Serpieri & Elam 2002: 5).

Therefore, given both the obstacles to, and the promise of, translation, the attempt to transport the foreign reader to rural South Africa, and to expose the reader to the “smells” and “tastes” of the local soil, to the sensations of the earth that are known to all, and yet are experienced as present in a unique way in *this* place, must also be endeavoured by other means. These include adverting to the images present in the target culture of the audience, and yet concomitantly colouring those images, in order not merely to signify

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3. Although the context does not make it clear, surely Heyns’s claim (2009: 125) that “English people can’t pronounce *Agaat*” is a comment I heard (and still hear) more often than I care to recall” is applicable to “English people” in or from England, and to speakers of English in the United States of America, but not to South Africans whose mother tongue is English?
  4. It is interesting to note that Olivier (2012: 321) includes within the broader ambit of the South African “farm novel” J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999), and to which one may suggest that *Kings of the Water* (2009) by Mark Behr, which includes the problematic challenge to traditional sexual mores by a form of an alternative sexual identity in the farm setting, may be added.
  5. Amongst Jelinek’s comments was the following: “Each language has its own face and its own fingerprints, which are not identical with any other language” (*The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, 27th November, 2004).

what is known and familiar, but to make what is commonplace and appropriate to them “strangely familiar”, and, as a consequence, to ensure the disclosure of an element of estrangement present in that which is recognisable and known. This broadening of the literary worlds of others allows the spectrum of the perceptions of their own habituated refractions of colour, range of sounds, and quality of emotional responses not simply to alter to some degree, but to intensify.

However, such an undertaking constitutes an arduous and exacting task. In this respect, the erasure of the stress marks in the British edition of *Agaat* is to be regretted, because, one may claim that, in this particular novel, it is a contributory factor in evoking the impact of the rhythmic contours of place. However, there is a further loss, because these markings also disclose the mood and the manner in which the characters, often from different social strata, interact with one another through the changing cadences of speech patterning, and where not simply a different vocabulary may be employed depending upon the addressees, but the emphases used in the utterances are also changed and modified depending upon the interlocutors and their emotional dispositions. Thus, with the removal of the stress marks, an aspect of characterisation, as well as something of the textural depth of sensation has been excised.

With respect to the latter, it was Eliot who noted that “the first condition of understanding a foreign country is to smell it” (Howarth 1965: 112-113), and, for Eliot, the sensations of a place or the emotional tenor of a situation are retained by discovering their precise “objective correlatives” (Eliot [1919]1975a: 48; Montale 1978: 113),<sup>6</sup> so that the words encountered on the page appear to the reader to be “automatically released” (Eliot[1919]1975a: 48). In this respect, the book on symbolism in literature by Arthur Symons (1899), which Eliot picked up in the Harvard Union Library in December 1908, profoundly influenced his poetic endeavours (Ackroyd 1984: 33-34; Cotsell 2005: 81). In it is contained the details inherent in the sequential and unfolding process by which Mallarmé experiences the generation of a poem: first, the sensations; second, the rhythms of those sensations; third, the exercise of concentrated thought which attempts to preserve the initial rhythmic sensations; and, then only finally, the words are formulated and attached to the thought through the rhythms of the initial sensations (Howarth 1965: 104). Thus, through testing the words as to their adequation as “correlatives” of the experiences, the sensations are inherent in the final words, and just as van Niekerk’s use of “argaïese woorde en onbekende boerderyterminologie” is not simply about “taal-‘verryking’” (Burger 2009: 154), but simultaneously is concerned with “sound” and “texture”, so she notes her approval when Heyns, with some industry, discovers English

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6. It is notable that the term had a painterly provenance (see Pamuk 2010: 103-104).

“correlatives” (de Kock 2009: 146), which attempt to replicate the complete experiences.

If, with respect to this aspect of translation, Heyns has succeeded admirably under “the anxiety of Eliot’s influence”, it is the more obvious presence of Eliot that, one suggests, may demand scrutiny. Bloom’s (1973) term – “anxiety of influence” – is not without instructive import here. For Bloom (1973: 5-16; 1994: 7-12), poets labour under the burden of their precursors, but in a manner more unknowingly than of Eliot’s ([1919] 1975b) “individual talent”. Therefore, in responding to, and augmenting, the “tradition”, “misprisions” occur, which are “creative misreadings and misinterpretations” as a result of those “influential anxieties” (Bloom 1994: 8; Eco 2003: 114). In contrast to Bloom’s (1973) disclosure of the almost unwitting presence of the influences of a writer’s forebears, Heyns, to state it forthrightly, has wittingly foregrounded Eliot in the English translation of *Agaat* (2006), in a manner that is, at best, “misprisioned” in the original Afrikaans text. In fact, amongst the “influential anxieties” in van Niekerk’s (2004) note on the second page of the original text, T.S. Eliot’s name does not appear, but it is decidedly included in the translator’s note on the second page of the English edition (Heyns 2006; van Niekerk 2006). Heyns (2009: 131-132) acknowledges the interpolation of Eliot, relying on van Niekerk’s agreement that *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* “had in fact been very much present to her in writing *Agaat*”, and he admits that these “references to Eliot ... underlined *Agaat*’s [the novel’s] place (and *Agaat*’s [the character’s] place) in a different tradition, of what one might call ‘formal culture’”. With respect to the degree of freedom that van Niekerk allowed her translator, Heyns, it may be observed that, although she stated that she was “entirely *gerymd*” with “a whole lot of his structures and machinery of erudition .... [i]t was at some points quite explorative in its sentences and quite improvisational in its development of certain thoughts” (de Kock 2009: 137).

## The Use of a “Cultural Filter”

If the author of the original novel accepted the “congruence” (de Kock 2009: 137) of the quotations from the poetry of Eliot, then what are the reasons for a sense of unease experienced by this reader, who is not alone (see Swart 2009)?

First, as Scarpa (2002: 147) has observed, even the putative “objective” and specialised texts of science and technology are embedded in “the conceptual system of a culture and the metaphors that structure it”, and *a fortiori* is this evident in narrative fiction, which, more usually, purposefully locates its action within specific social and cultural arenas. Therefore, when translating fiction, or, for that matter, scientific texts, one important aim is

to adapt the narrative of the source text so as to render it culturally and metaphorically meaningful to the target audience (Bühler 2002: 72). The differences between the culture and the metaphors of the source and target readers are facilitated by employing a “cultural filter”, which essays “to accommodate in a patterned way the target group’s different presuppositions about cultural norms and conventions” (House 2002: 107; & passim). But that accommodation depends upon the cultural distance between the source text and the target reader. It is contended that those cultural and metaphorical distinctions in the translation of an Afrikaans text into a South African English text are different in degree from the distinctions that are demanded in the translation of an Afrikaans text into an Anglo-American English text, because, in the former instance, the cultural space is largely a shared space. Therefore it is difficult to resist at least questioning whether the distance between the source text and the target reader is increased rather than decreased for the South African English-speaking reader by the addition of the Eliotic references, since it may be conjectured that, unlike the more immediate recognition of the intertextual citations and allusions for the Afrikaans readers, for many South African English-speaking readers, that former and local allusive intertext may well be more familiar to them than the latter and less proximate one. And it is not as though Heyns (2006) is unaware of the “tenor” of the text, which includes

the author’s temporal, geographical, and social provenance ... intellectual and emotional stance ... *vis-à-vis* the content s/he is portraying and the communicative task s/he is engaged in .... [and] ... the social role relationship ... between fictive characters in the text as well as the “social attitude” adopted

(House 2002: 97),

nor, indeed, does he claim to be presenting a “resistant” rather than a “fluent” translation, where “[r]esistancy seeks to free the reader of the translation, as well as the translator, from the cultural constraints that ordinarily govern their reading and writing and threaten to overpower and domesticate the foreign text” (Venuti 2008: 263). That is both a broader and a deeper task. Nevertheless, in the very limited focus of this article, it is suggested that Heyns (2006) endeavours to achieve a degree of both “domestication” and “resistancy” that may be not only unwarranted for the South African English-speaking reader of *Agaat* (2006) but also distracting. In this particular aspect, it is contended that the appropriation and insertion of Eliot’s poetry foregrounds a certain unevenness, so that, as Swart (2009: 70) has observed, it may be asserted that Heyns’s (2006) “vertaling is plek-plek oëvert en plek-plek kovert”, where an “overt translation” reveals itself as such, but a “covert translation” conceals its practice to some extent (House 2002: 98-100).

Second, an author's imprimatur with respect to such indelible promptings (see Heyns 2009: 131-132), nevertheless, must be examined with great care before being employed in the translation. An example of such an immediate evocation for a translator occurs in the Swedish translation of Nadine Gordimer's novel, *The House Gun* (1998). At one point, Gordimer's text reads, "So he came back in love with a woman and brought her into the setup" (114), whilst the Swedish translation states, "[So he came back in love and crazy and brought a woman into the gang]" (122) (see Gullin 2006). Gullin (2006: 140) observes that the notion of "falling in love" immediately invokes a culturally embedded phrase from a 1980s Swedish pop song in the target language of the translator, and, as a consequence, "falling in love" seamlessly becomes "in love and crazy".

But by employing this phrase, Gullin (2006: 140) avers that it lacks a fidelity to the context of the novel, because it "suggests a teenage infatuation which takes us a long way from a South African drama – and from Nadine Gordimer's prose". Therefore, what may be evoked for the target-text translator requires closer scrutiny, in order to ensure that it does not misread the context of the source text. For Heyns (2009), any suggestion of such a misreading by his use of various quotations from Eliot's poetry is, if not rejected, then condoned, owing to van Niekerk's concession. But even with that authorial sanction, the automatic generation of various familiar phrases in, and images from, the target culture requires a consequent and additional examination by the translator.

Thus, third, even with an author's sanction of certain allusions that a translator then "potentializes and expands" (Heyns in de Kock 2009: 137), and also with a translator's satisfaction that additional evocations, amplifications, and insertions are faithful to the original, these compacts require further testing at the "grass-roots" level, which is a crucial supplementary task of some importance. Deibler's (1991: 203) empirical findings have demonstrated that the process of verifying translation adequacy also requires of translators – even when the target text is that of their own first language – to check the translation with *other target-language native speakers, and not only the source-language authors*, in order to ascertain how *other* native speakers comprehend the meaning of what they read. This is an undertaking that, without any evidence to the contrary, Heyns (2006) may appear to have neglected. Thus, Heyns (2006) bravely substitutes an existing embedded poetic intertext with another intertext, which both replaces the original and expands it. In this respect, and with reference to *Agaat* (2004; 2006), the translator, Christiane Nord, in an interview with Swart (2009), emphasises that those intertextual additions and allusions must resonate with the *target culture* of that text's audience. Nord (in Swart 2009: 137) goes on to caution against this practice of adding an intertext, because, although it offers "the target reader the idea of the target text entering this target text repertoire ... if there are allusions to another cultural

repertoire, they will be lost”, which, it is claimed, may be the case when employing lines and poetic images of Eliot in the South African translation of *Agaat* (2006) into English. To place this in House’s (2002: 101) rather too bold terms, one may be pressed to ask whether Heyns’s (2006) translation is short on “intersubjectively verifiable evidence ... [and therefore] ... amounts to a culturally inadequate translation”. In the *Skopos* translation theorists’ phrase, the “offer of information” held out to the reader of a translation must be assessed within the target-meaning context which receives the text, in terms of evocation, recognition, and function (Swart 2009: 138; Pym 2010: 49; Nord 1997: 12), an issue addressed again at the end of the following point. Furthermore, with reference to a complementary power exercised by the source text, Viaggio (1991: 177) asserts a method of translating for a wide variety of contexts, including that of the Security Council of the United Nations, which

assesses the specific communicative task for the specific text in the specific situation, understands the words, decides what weight to give to the specific form, makes out the sense, and re-expresses it in the most suitable form ... that can be found in the time at his [sic] disposal. In short, the translator makes the right extralinguistic sense in the right linguistic way.

(Viaggi 1991: 177)

Here the source text emphasis is influential in generating and checking the translation not simply at the literal or idiomatic levels, but also at the semantic and communicative levels, levels at which, it is suggested, the “extralinguistic sense” is somewhat destabilised by a “linguistic mode” that inserts the poetry of Eliot in the South African English translation of *Agaat* (2006).

Fourth, there is a burden that English-language translators bear that may be somewhat disproportionate in comparison to that borne by the translators of novels into other languages, and that is the extra responsibility to future translators. Grossman (2010: 58-59), a translator of the novels of Gabriel García Márquez, pointedly notes that

English often serves as the linguistic bridge for translation into a number of languages. The translation of texts originally written in other Western languages ... often requires an English version first .... [and] ... a considerable number of Chinese-language versions of Latin American literary works have actually been based on the English translations. Some years ago, French was the conduit language, and many Spanish-language versions of Russian books were actually rooted in French translations of the texts.

(Grossman 2010: 58-59)

This situation is not dissimilar to novels that are written in indigenous African languages, and for which both English and French serve as the main “conduit languages”, which, in turn, often become the primary language



editions for further translations. Therefore, it is not unlikely that Heyns's (2006) translation probably would approximate, if not constitute, the "primary source text" of *Agaat* (2004) for many future translations. Heyns's (2006) responsibility in this regard is considerable, and that responsibility is not simply to the source text and to the target audience, but also, with regard to the substantial authority he holds as the translator of a foreign-language text into English, to future translators of the work into other languages, and to their readers. If, and for the most part deservedly, Heyns's (2006) text is the source text for other foreign-language translations of *Agaat* (2004), how will the Eliotic insertions be dealt with? For even if these translators pay sufficient attention to the "Translator's Note" and to the "Acknowledgements" at the beginning and end of the text as they ought to do, it still remains for them to return to the Afrikaans text, in order to discover whether or not the translator has indeed "found English poetic equivalents" to the Afrikaans poetic insertions and allusions, and, moreover, where additional citations and amplifications have been inserted. And even if they are sufficiently aware of the poetic alternatives and, significantly, the additions that have been employed, will those future translators feel licensed to appropriate them, excise them, or, possibly, transpose them into poetic phrases from the work of the various indigenous poets of their target languages, and whose sentiments are judged to harmonise with those of Eliot – that is, if they are sufficiently familiar with Eliot's work to do so, and whether or not they are capable of assessing the degree to which those of Eliot's harmonise with the original novel?

These four issues and the questions they raise are the informants in examining four instances of Heyns's use of Eliot in his translation of *Agaat* (2006).

## Imposing Eliot

Heyns has prefaced his translation of *Agaat* (2006) with the familiar lines from the last of Eliot's *Quartets*, "Little Gidding":

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment  
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame  
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness  
Of things ill done and done to others' harm  
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

If initially these words seem appropriate to the story of Kamilla Redelinghuys/de Wet, whose body, rather than mind, is succumbing to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Stobie 2009: 61), and who records her story, ultimately they may appear to be less apt. Although Kamilla de Wet is entirely reliant upon her 48-year-old servant, Agaat Lourier, an abused child

whom she took to Grootmoedersdrift following a visit to her mother, the now uneven power struggle between the two women appears to continue until after her death, when still Agaat's "maker hou remote control. Six feet under" (p. 709). And this conflict ensues precisely because it is "the workings of power in intimate relationships" that provided the informing dynamic of the novel (de Kock 2009: 141), and, although Heyns disagrees, for van Niekerk, Milla is the most manipulative and exploitative (de Kock 2009: 141-142) in this "Game of Chess", to advert to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In this context it is unsurprising that, even in a moment of reflective pity for Agaat – "Arme Agaat" – Milla first asks: "Wat was *my* lewe?" before asking, "Wat was *haar* lewe?" (emphases added). She then ponders the matter of reward:

Hoe vergoed mens iemand daarvoor dat sy haar laat wegvat en invat en weer laat uitsit het? En laat maak en ontmaak en oormak het? Nie dat sy 'n keuse gehad het nie. Ek het haar tot 'n ander naam gegee.

(van Niekerk 2004: 224)

And if the reader is beguiled into assuming that Agaat will inherit Kamilla's estate because of the latter's own generosity or sense of gratitude (p. 650 & passim), Jakkie, the exiled son from Canada, disabuses the reader of that notion in the epilogue:

My testament is ten minste geskrywe by die prokureurs op Swellendam, die plaas oorgemaak aan Gaat. Sy kan dit bemaak eendag aan wie sy wil .... Sy is deel van die plek, van die begin af. Geëelt, gesout, gebrei, die meesters se lesse in haar ingegroef soos die wet op kliptafels, dieper en duideliker as wat ek dit ooit sou kon bewaar.

(van Niekerk 2004: 708-709)

However, if, possibly, this epigraph of the translator's initiates some disquiet, any sense of discontent is delayed until the end of the novel. For the nature of the epigraph is that of commentary upon the work and, as such, it is not necessarily embedded within the diegetic world of the novel. Rather, it is the more direct presence of quotations of Eliot that do occur within the body of the novel which now are the subject of discussion, and it is to four of them that one refers.

For Heyns, the task set before him was less than straightforward, because, in his estimation, *Agaat* "was drawing on a cultural tradition that was to a large extent unique to Afrikaans and grounded in a South African context" (Heyns 2009: 128). However, as repeatedly noted above, it is the extent of that otherness that, even for this English-speaking South African reader, may be debatable, because, until comparatively recently, those educated in English-medium state schools were compelled to study Afrikaans until matriculation, to read novels of the genre *plaasroman*, learn Afrikaans poems by heart, and also sing Afrikaans *volksliedere*. Therefore, when

Heyns claims to be “writing mainly for a South African English-speaking audience” (de Kock 2009: 140), it is questionable as to whether it necessarily implies that “the translator has to report back to people to whom the territory is not only unknown but foreign” (Heyns 2009: 125). Furthermore, if one adds de Kock’s (2009: 140) assertion that Heyns’s “translation is creating a book that straddles the language traditions, and that it can properly call itself ‘South African’”, that, in other words, there *is* access, albeit in varying degrees, to that “world” of *Agaat*, its mores and its territory, then the presence of Eliot is somewhat unsettling.

First, the initial meeting with Eliot within the text occurs in the Prologue, when Kamilla’s exiled son, Jakkie, returns to South Africa, after having received a telegram from Agaat about the terminal stage of his mother’s illness:

Pass under the boom, a red elbow. Parking disk in my hand, cold, smooth,  
 obol with lead strip. Fare forward, traveller! Not escaping from the past.  
*International Departures.*

(van Niekerk 2006: 4)

The original Afrikaans version reads:

Onderdeur die slagboom, ’n rooi elmboog. Parkeerskyf in my palm, koud,  
 glad, obool met loodstrook. Aljander deur die bos. *International Departures.*

(van Niekerk 2004: 4)

If the phrase “Aljander deur die bos”, which refers to a children’s game, both foregrounds itself and also presents a challenge to the translator, the insertion of the line “Fare forward, traveller!” from “The Dry Salvages” – in the singular rather than in the plural, although the exact punctuation is retained – is, for this reader, somewhat unsettling. And it is unsettling because, with the recognition of its provenance, which Heyns (2006) may or may not desire, is the awareness that the context of this third of the *Quartets* is one of sailors and the ocean, of rivers, ports, and promontories. Thus, the sense of the “bos”, the “bush” and “scrub” of the region, to which Jakkie is “voyaging” is erased, even if the remainder of the children’s rhyme echoes in the mind of the reader: “Aljander, aljander, al deur die bos/ jou mamma en pappa kook lekker kos”. Since it is the presence of the memory of playing this, or some similar, childhood game that the phrase “Aljander deur die bos” seems to evoke, the words in the English translation, “Not escaping from the past”, one suggests, form a rather inadequate “objective correlative”, and that the more usual English equivalent which is offered by Afrikaans dictionaries – “Oranges and lemons” – may be more appropriate, since, as a nursery rhyme it evokes childhood, and it is also likely to be more familiar to South African English speakers than the lines from “The Dry Salvages”.

Second, when Kamilla discovers that the paralysis has now affected her eye, a dreamlike sequence follows in which Agaat climbs into the automatically manoeuvred wheelchair:

Did I think it all up? Such a bare shoulder you could surely not dream up? Such a chair? There it looms in the middle of the room, a throne of black leather and chrome, the embroidery heaped up on the seat. The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne.

I am not dreaming now, I'm wide awake.

(van Niekerk 2006: 493)

The equivalent passage in the original reads:

Het ek dit alles uitgedink? So 'n kaal skouer kan 'n mens jou tog nie verbeel nie. So 'n stoel? Daar staan hy in die middel van die kamer, 'n troon van swart leer en chroom, die borduurwerk op 'n hoop op die sitplek.

Ek droom nie nou nie, ek is helder wakker.

(van Niekerk 2004: 510)

The insertion of the line more instantly recognisable, one suspects, for most readers from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (II, ii, l. 196) – the apostrophised “burnish'd” possibly unnoticed – than from “A Game of Chess”, the second section of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, raises the question less of its aptness than of its necessity. For Heyns (2009: 132) the reference is to Eliot first, and as a “chair” that “Glowed on marble” (*The Waste Land*, l. 78) rather than “Burn'd upon the water” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II, ii, l. 197), it may be a little closer to the wooden floors of the Grootmoedersdrift farmhouse than the Nile River. But, once again, why insert the line at all? The assertive and regal quality of the image is contained in both the original and the translation, and to interpose an already visionary sequence with another vision, and where this second vision is simultaneously compounded by another vision embedded within it – whether that initially is Shakespeare's or Eliot's – may, one suggests, burden the text with an allusion or allusions less than comfortably borne. Heyns (2009: 132) offers an explanation for the interpolation, by referring to his endeavour to create interpretive connections between cultures, and, one agrees that the translator's task is often inextricable from that of the interpreter. But, as noted above, Heyns (2009: 132) admits that such an insertion locates both the novel and the character “in a different tradition”, a tradition that, for this reader, alienates and estranges the local, and to some degree known, context at the expense of mining foreign treasures.

Third, towards the end of the novel, as Kamilla waits for Agaat to open her eyelids, she concludes an imaginative vision of the preparations for her burial, when she hears the sounds and observes the growth of nature around her, with a song about a child and a woman together, which ends:

the branch grows on the tree,  
the tree grows in the earth,  
and blooms in beauty –  
o tree!

(van Niekerk 2006: 645)

Then, following a line break, the English text reads:

In my end is my beginning. Now it's morning.  
A new sound!  
The new footfall of Agaat, as if she's lost weight overnight.

(van Niekerk 2006: 645)

The original reads:

die tak sit aan die boom,  
die boom staan in the aarde,  
en bloei so skoon –  
o boom!

Nou is dit oggend.  
'n Nuwe geluid!

Die nuwe voeteval van Agaat, asof sy oornag gewig verloor het.

(van Niekerk 2004: 669)

The final line from “East Coker” – “In my end is my beginning” – is inserted in the context of the circle of beginnings and endings, of the memories, the process of aging, and of impending death of which the second of the *Quartets* speaks. One conjectures that Heyns’s interpolation may also have been engendered by the “voeteval van Agaat”, which resonates with lines from the opening poem of the *Quartets*, “Burnt Norton”:

Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.

However, it may be proposed that such associations may be better left to the reader to make in his or her own act of enriching the text through lending meaning to meaning, rather than, and here particularly, in an apparent sententious and peremptory imposition. For, if one is following Heyns, is it not without some possibility that an insertion of the words “Ombra mai fu” following “o boom!” could be considered appropriate in the context of the preceding passage, when “’n groot koloratuurstem uit die berg” (p. 668)

sings the words cited above? This familiar aria of address to a tree from Handel's opera, "Xerxes", is written for a castrato, and although it is seldom heard sung by one, the reader is well apprised of Kamilla's musical knowledge.

The fourth and final cited example of Eliot's presence in the text is a matter of direct translation, and the incident is quite specifically situated:

Daardie week in 1953, middel Desember, Geloftedag. Die oes was af, daar was 'n blaaskans op Grootmoedersdrift. Jy wou weg van Jak af. Hy het weer die een na die ander oponthoud veroorsaak deur sy agterloosigheid met die combine. Jy wou weg van die rusies en die klappe.

(van Niekerk 2004: 679)

Here, whilst staying with her mother, Kamilla finds the abused Agaat and decides to take her home with her. She makes a telephone call to her husband, Jak, informing him of her decision and telling him to come and collect her and the child. Although Jak remonstrates, both he and Kamilla are aware that their conversation is being overheard by various listeners on the party-line in the district, and his voice trails off: "Ons praat later, Milla, jy het duidelik geen besef nie ...", to which she replies, "Toe nou maar, Jak, alles sal regkom ..." (van Niekerk 2004: 685). Heyns translates the final phrase as "all shall be well ..." (van Niekerk 2006: 661).

This phrase, as part of the longer sequence,

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well,

occurs twice in the final of the *Quartets*, "Little Gidding" (III and V).

Two issues arise. First, with respect to the translation itself, Kamilla is aware, even before Jak objects, that Jak will respond negatively to her decision, and that he will resist and obstruct her. And the reader is aware that something of the breakdown in their relationship centres upon Jak's perception of Kamilla's apparent cultural superiority. It may be claimed that the endeavour to bring Jak over to her side in this cause may be conveyed in a more literal and less literary translation of the phrase, either as "everything will be OK" or "everything will be alright". Her rather more elevated response in the English translation, one suggests, quite possibly could serve merely to alienate him further. Second, even if it may be claimed that Heyns's (2006) translation is not unacceptable *prima facie*, the manner in which he foregrounds Eliot's poetry does at least raise a certain disquiet. For the phrase cited does not, of course, belong to Eliot. Eliot is quoting from the "13th Shewing" or "13th Revelation" of the fourteenth-century mystic, Julian of Norwich (Warrack 1901: 56). Although Heyns would know that the expanded quotation as cited above is correctly rendered, one is, however, less certain that, if the part cited in the translation – "all shall be

well ...” – were concluded – “and/ All manner of thing shall be well” – since it may echo in the minds of many readers (if not through Julian, then both through Eliot and more generally), the singular “thing” would not receive an appended “s”, and become “things”. Julian’s meaning, which, incidentally, is not inappropriate to the rural life of Grootmoedersdrift, is that when the “manner” of each “thing” fulfils its potential and occupies its own level and station, then the *pleroma* – the completion, fullness, and perfection – of “all shall be well”.<sup>7</sup> In a hierarchical social world, which Julian occupied, the “mode of each thing” throughout the created order, which included the different orders among men and women, each possessed its own proper status and position, which vividly was evident at the local level in the parish church – the local lord or squire with his own box pew at the front, then pews for the gentry, whilst the servants stood in their own order at the back.<sup>8</sup> Unlike in a democratic age, social positions were far less fluid, but for as long as each “thing” occupied the place proper to its station, so the well-being of the whole – the “all” – was maintained. Therefore, not only may it be conjectured that Jak would take umbrage at his wife’s phrasing in the English text, but not necessarily, one notes, in the Afrikaans text, one

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7. Taylor (2007: 164) states that

[p]re-modern social imaginaries ... were structured by various modes of hierarchical complementarity. Society was seen as made up of different orders. These needed and complemented each other .... They formed ... a hierarchy in which some had greater dignity and value than the others .... It is not just that each order ought to perform its characteristic functions for the others .... No, the hierarchical differentiation itself is seen as the proper order of things.

(Taylor 2007: 164)

8. Although writing of a later period, Strong (2007: 110; & passim) notes the continuity between Julian’s social and ecclesiastical setting and that evident during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I:

All over England in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods churchwardens were busy allocating seats according to “ranks”, “qualities” and “degrees” .... When the gentry entered the congregation stood up. In this way the post-Reformation parish church continued to define community in terms of hierarchy .... There could also be angry scenes as people jostled for seating if they thought that their position in the social hierarchy had been usurped.

(Strong 2007: 110)

Likewise, Maltby, drawing on research of rural English communities during the same period, observes that the occupation of the pews in “Myddle with its gentry at the front, husbandmen behind, and cottagers relegated to the south-west corner, no doubt reflects wide practice” (1998: 198).

also is doubtful that Julian's world view, which may well persist in many rural areas, would be understood in this way. If it is not, then a more colloquial translation seems appropriate; if it is, it leads to speculation as to what Heyns (2006) considers to be Kamilla's meaning in the translation, which, relying on the original, this reader takes it as "it will all work out". But Heyns's (2006) rendition may lead to the fertile suggestion that he, rather helpfully, is proleptically highlighting the role that Aagaat will play in the future hierarchical ordering of life both in and beyond Grootmoedersdrift as the narrative unfolds. However, that "spoor" appears to fall within the remit of an interpreter, rather than within that of a translator. And if that prolepsis is appropriated, then it may be proposed that, given the manner in which this reader understands the intention of the original utterance, the distance between the original and the translation seems to become somewhat wider, and that proleptic earnest also generates the significant matter of the responsibility of an English translator, as noted by Grossman (2010) above.

## Conclusion

Although it is appropriate that the major industry of interpretive and literary inquiry into novels focuses upon the texts themselves and, where undertaken, their translations tout court, it may not be inapposite to include a space for the discussion of aspects of translation in a multilingual country. For translation incorporates an interpretive endeavour, and where there is access, even if limited, to more than one locally employed language, and, perhaps more significantly, to more than one local register of "linguistic colouring" of, at least, a partially shared locality, then recording the stories told and the sensations experienced in such a context not infrequently is already articulated by speakers through an open yet distinctive vocabulary comprising linguistic borrowings and enmeshing. Within such a shared verbal arena, the remit of translation possibilities for readers whose own "worlds" coincide or overlap to some extent with the diegetic space of a novel may, one suggests, limit the activity of translation to that particular locale as far as might be possible. Therefore, perhaps it could be permitted to raise questions about estranging the variously familiar and known registers of proximate meaning extant in a shared context merely because a translation is being undertaken. However, these questions do not detract from the worthy achievements of Heyns's translation of *Aagaat* (2006), or, indeed, de Kock's translation of *Triomf* (1999), nor their recognition and place in the academic study of literature and the craft of translation, but, one hopes, rather serve to deepen their importance.

In this respect, Grossman (2010: 63) has rightly lamented the fact that, all too often, translation is "trivialized by the academic world" and that "there



are still promotion and tenure committees that do not consider translations to be serious publications". The translation under discussion in this article is but one which demonstrates the blind injustice of such an assertion. Nevertheless, if translations like this one deserve serious academic consideration, then their admirers and critics – invariably, the same people – must submit them to some level of scrutiny by the academy, as is the endeavour in these brief remarks on one aspect of Heyns's fine translation of *Agaat* (2006).

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