

# FROM NEW ENGLAND TO THE LOW COUNTRIES

A COMPARATIVE TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF  
SUBSTANDARD LANGUAGE IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *DESIRE  
UNDER THE ELMS* AND ARNE SIERENS' *HET BEGEREN  
ONDER DE OLMEN*

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# I. Introduction

*“A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. [...] It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.” (Walter Benjamin, 1923, 260-1)*

The essential aspiration of the literary translator is to make a written work of art from a source culture accessible to a target culture, while recognising and remaining true to the work’s semantic and formal implications. This mediation may have various objectives, but generally serves to nurture or enrich the latter culture. Stated like this, literary translation may appear as a highly ambitious and challenging operation, so it should not come as a surprise that several scholars have argued for its impossibility. However, as translation has continually been practised since the Romans, let us assume it is not necessary to abandon the discipline altogether; it is mainly a matter of finding creative solutions to some particular sites of indeterminacy, which will be identified as ‘translation strategies’.

For the dramatic genre, which is central to the present study, the discipline may become somewhat more complicated. The medium is charged with a performative aspect, which means that, besides being read, the text is meant to be conveyed orally, and thus transcends the audience of remote, delayed readers to that of immediate, present onlookers. This inevitably bears far-reaching consequences for the adopted translation strategies. One specific problem of drama translation which deserves more academic attention than it has been given so far, is that of the manipulation of nonstandard language. Since nonstandard language is highly culture-bound, every such case of translation is characterised by unique sites of indeterminacy.

The challenge to find solutions and the singularity of each case is exactly what makes the translation of linguistic variation in drama such an exciting field of study. My initial interest for the topic was sparked during my exchange study period at Macquarie University, Sydney. I was highly fascinated by the course ‘Literary translation’, taught by professor Ilija Čašule. He radiated a passion for the subject which was contagious. In the very last class, theatre translation was discussed by means of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar named Desire*, in which Blanche’s grandiloquent speech and everything it stands for, is confronted with Stanley’s rather boorish slang. We were encouraged to reflect about the problems that the implications of and associations with those language variants could cause when translating to another culture. I saw this as an opportunity to combine my love for literature, linguistics and the stage in the writing of a master’s dissertation on this topic.

When it comes to academic research however, the translation of drama is one of the most neglected areas in Translation Studies as compared to poetry or prose translation (Bassnett, 2002, 123), and even less has been published about the treatment of written nonstandard linguistic variety (Lemmens, 2014). Although the literary use of the vernacular language from the nineteenth century onwards became increasingly popular in many Western cultures, only few researchers thought it sufficiently fascinating to look at how exactly an author deals with the manipulation of a spoken language into written form. That which has been examined, is largely confined to the verification of dialectological accuracy (especially so in Anglophone literature), rather than the role of a deviant code. In an attempt to reunite the disciplines of linguistics and literature, which – especially within

Dutch Studies – have gradually grown apart through academic research (de Geest, 2009), I want to examine the function of the literary form, in this case linguistic variation, in the service of the literary content of the drama, and how it is treated in translation.

The author in focus shifted from Tennessee Williams to Eugene O’Neill, who is one of the, if not the most inspiring American dramatist regarding the use of linguistic variation. He was a pioneer in the use of the American Vernacular, the language of the people, for dramatic dialogue. The target culture in question encompasses the Dutch-speaking areas of the Low Countries, namely Flanders and the Netherlands. A case-study on his play *Desire under the elms* serves to investigate how O’Neill’s particular ‘code-choice’, referring to the dramatic language constructed for this play, with its implications specific to the piece’s content and context, is transformed in translation for a Dutch-Flemish audience, as well as what the effects of this transformation are. The respective target text translation was written by Arne Sierens for theatre company Het Zuidelijk Toneel.

The method applied to answer this question, is based on a comparative analysis of the characteristics, dramatic implications and effects of the specific codes in both source (ST) and target text (TT). After having formulated them for both texts, a confrontation of the findings will lead to the identification of the applied translation strategies and their outcomes. The aim of the case-study is to gain better insight into the difficulties facing the translator of linguistic variation in drama and the possibilities for creative solution available to him/her. The primary sources employed for analysis are Eugene O’Neill’s play *Desire under the elms* (1924) and Arne Sierens’ translation *Het begeren onder de olmen* (1992). Of the latter, also an initial translation sample and a set of drafts are available, as well as film footage of the staged performance. Finally, an interview with dramaturge Klaas Tindemans as well as an introductory paratext to the published translation, elucidate certain obscurities about the translation process.

The study opens with a theoretical background on the difficulties of literary translation, devoted particularly to the dramatic genre (1.1.), the theatre context (1.2.) and constructed, substandard languages (1.3.), thus providing a terminological framework for analysis. Part 2 explores the intentions pursued with the ST language, with a view to O’Neill’s fight against the incredibility of the traditional, commercial theatre. O’Neill is situated in the late nineteenth-century American literary and theatre context (2.1.), after which the play at issue is introduced. An overview of plot, setting and themes is followed by an analysis of the phonological, grammatical and lexical characteristics of the constructed code (2.2.). Possible literary examples by which O’Neill was inspired are also briefly touched upon. Finally, the code’s effects on the reader/audience are taken into account (2.3.).

The third part is concerned with the translation. A background of the language problem in the Low Countries unfolds the complexity of the construction of a literary language for this area (3.1.). The choice for Sierens as a translator is accounted for (3.2.) and his approach of linguistic construction is discussed by means of the paratext and interview (3.3.). Analogous to the ST, literary models are presented briefly. Hereafter follows the comparative analysis between the respective ST and TT codes, as well as the handling of several cultural references which may impede the translation process (3.4.). Since the reception of the translated text (3.6.) is based on the staged and not the written version of the play, modifications in the performance as compared to the published text are documented first by means of the film footage (3.5.). A comparison of the features and effects of the constructed languages in both *Desire* and *Het begeren*, identifying translation strategies, makes up the final chapter (3.7.) before conclusion.





## **PART 1**

### **The difficulties of drama translation**

In translation, a play undertakes a journey of intersemiotic nature. First, it transforms from dramatic text in the source language (SL) into dramatic text in the target language (TL), and – in most cases – that TL text subsequently transforms into a staged performance in the target society. Since the cultural turn in Translation Studies, literary translation has become a profoundly interdisciplinary field of study (Bassnett, 1998, 3). The complexity of theatre semiotics, however, greatly contributes to the interdisciplinarity of drama translation studies. Aaltonen (2000) distinguishes at least five related disciplines: translation studies, theatre studies, literary studies, cultural studies and linguistic studies (28). When constituting a framework of drama translation for the present study, it is impossible both to disregard any of the above mentioned disciplines, as well as to expand on all of them equally. I will take a closer look at those considered most relevant to the translation of linguistic varieties in the theatre, which are translation studies, theatre studies and linguistic studies.

The first section examines how the text as a sign system relates to the meaning construction process in the theatre, and hence concentrates on the relationship between dramatic text and performance for translation. The second section explores the implications of the theatrical context for translation. Finally, narrowing down to the focus of the present study, the problem of linguistic variation in translation is linked to specific theatrical concerns. In order to form a status quaestionis, I will also briefly explore potential research on the translation of linguistic varieties in the theatre.

Building on the work of the most prominent researchers in the field, this chapter will present some of the major problems in the research on drama translation, and will hereby develop a conceptual framework to support further analysis. It will concentrate on translation as a search for equivalence in another language and context, and is therefore not concerned with imitations or adaptations, which openly seek to create a new play by adopting the idea or concept from the foreign work.

## **1.1. Theatre semiotics: the difference between theatre and drama**

Theoretical works on drama translation all seem to be drawing from theatre semiotics as a point of departure. Theatre semioticians were namely the first to attempt to define the role of the text in the totality of the performance. Under the influence of this discipline, drama translation has gained recognition within the broader field of translation studies as a genre to be studied individually. Previously, translation strategies for dramatic texts had usually been the same as those for poetry or prose.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1.1. Semiotics of theatre and drama: the relationship between text and performance**

Keir Elam's profound and complete study on *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) will form the first foundational element of this theoretical background. It commences with the earliest works on theatre semiotics, produced by the semioticians of the Prague School in the 1930s. One of them, Otamar Zich, considered the theatre to consist of "heterogeneous but interdependent systems", among which no special prominence was given to any of the components involved. Hereby, he was the first to refuse "to grant automatic dominance to the written text" (Elam, 6). Meanwhile, Petr Bogatyrev and Jiří Veltruský advanced the thesis of the "semiotization of the object". The idea

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<sup>1</sup> Drama translation is here discussed from the point of view of theatre semiotics, which implies that the play was written with a possible performance in mind. That is not to say that no dramatic texts have been produced for the sole purpose of literary reception; they are however not considered in the present study.

that "[a]ll that is on the stage is a sign" then becomes the first principle of the Prague School theatrical theory (Elam, 7-8). In the 1960s, Tadeusz Kowzan builds on these theories to propose a typology of thirteen sign systems, of which language only makes up two. He distinguishes between 'word' and 'tone', indicating that a set of extralinguistic sign systems (such as pitch, intonation, accent, etc.) detaches the written text from the spoken text (in Nikolarea, 2002).

Anne Ubersfeld takes a more radical approach when identifying the relation between text and performance:

Theatre is a paradoxical art. To go even further, we might see in theatre the very art of paradox; it is literary production and concrete performance at the same time. Theatre is both eternal (indefinitely reproducible and renewable) and of the instant (never reproduced identically). (1999, 3)

She writes that it is impossible to separate text from performance, the danger of this being to assign "privileged status to the text" and to view performance as "no more than an expression and translation of a literary text" (5). The fact that the text in itself, the 'language', is only one sign system interacting with numerous other ones on stage, has urged translation theory to consider the impact of all of the sign systems on this text for translation. This has encouraged theatre translation to be recognised as a separate genre within translation studies (Bassnett, 1991, 107; Aaltonen, 2000, 4), with its own translation strategies, no longer to be approached identically as poetry or prose.

In order to have a term of reference for the relationship between text and performance, I will introduce Patrice Pavis' concept of 'mise en scène' (*sic*). He defines it as "the bringing together or confrontation, in a given time and space, of different signifying systems, for an audience" (1988, 86). He states:

Instead of defining the relationship between text and performance as one of conversion, translation, or reduction of the one to the other, I will attempt to describe it as a way of establishing meaning and as the balance between opposing semiotic systems, such as verbal and nonverbal, symbolic and iconic, statement and utterance, or as the result of clashes between incompatible semiological principles, for the greater theoretical amusement of onlookers. (90)

Mise en scène is then perceived as the confrontation of the dramatic text and the performance, providing a context which will give meaning to statements.

### **1.1.2. Translation of theatre and drama: serving different needs**

It might have come to the attention that both the terms 'drama translation' and 'theatre translation' have been adopted so far. However, no distinction between 'theatre' and 'drama' has been drawn yet. Elam sought to explain this distinction by defining both concepts. He states that 'theatre' is taken to refer to "the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the system underlying it." 'Drama', then, is "that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions" (2). An interesting remark is also made on the kinds of 'text' figuring as the actual objects of analysis. Elam points out that two dissimilar types of textual material are at stake: "that produced *in* the theatre" and "that produced *for* the theatre". He considers this distinction to concern the theatre semiotician, as opposed to the

literary semiotician, and thereby confirms the need for an approach to theatre translation strategies necessarily distinctive from other forms of literary translation.

The above theories allude to an emerging dissolution of theatre from literature through the rise of theatre semiotics. Susan Bassnett has observed a parallel trend in the history of theatre translation studies. She distinguishes two principal modes of theatre translation which have existed next to each other since the seventeenth century. The first one focuses on translation for the page, to be perceived as a literary text. Translations of the Greek and Roman classics, and later the Elizabethans too, fall into this category as they have mainly been concerned with "finding suitable verse forms" (1991, 105), the performance dimension being totally absent. She is therefore inclined to assign this kind of translation to the history of poetry rather than theatre translation (105).

The other mode would have originated from the theatre boom in northern Europe and is described as "speedy hack translations that could be adapted for performance" (105), found in commercial theatre. Those translations tended to be less concerned with notions of 'fidelity': reshaping the text then often involved modifications based on basic, practical necessity, such as "audience expectations, amount of actors, limitations of time and space, etc." (105). This emphasizes how aspects of performability influence the literary text in translation. Both are contemporary modes of translation; however, the latter type seems to account for an increasing disparity between theatre and literature over time in the field of theatre translation studies. Theatre translations may thus satisfy different needs.

Aaltonen refines this classification by distinguishing three types of translations, based on the openness of their readings. Audience, mode of reception and life span form the main criteria for distinction. The first type is the 'introductory translation', written "for a large and diverse audience of readers and theatre practitioners" (2010, 107), possibly published as book, for no particular production intended, and with a long anticipated life span. The second type is the 'gloss translation'. Belonging hereto are open texts, targeted at playwright-translators who want to make "their own translations on the basis of a linguistic analysis of the source text" (107). The last one is the 'performance translation', meant for audio-visual reception in a particular theatrical context, with an undetermined life span. The intervention of theatre semiotics and the emphasis on theatrical context have already suggested that the current study will predominantly concentrate on the third type, the performance translation. To this threefold distinction can be added another kind of translation, namely the use of supertitles during the performance. However, as Carlson noted, they serve as "a presumably extra channel", operating "outside the actual aesthetic of the stage production itself" (2006, 17), and are therefore often omitted in discussions on theatre translation.

Under the influence of theatre semiotics, the dramatic text has ceded its dominant place in the theatrical performance, as well as its prominent position as a genre confined to the field of literature. The fact that text and performance are undissolubly linked in the *mise en scène*, and that types of translations may satisfy various needs, urges drama translation strategies to differ considerably from translation of other literary genres.

## **1.2. The theatre-specific context**

Context boundedness of a text is a principal consideration within literary translation. The difference between source and target cultures, languages and conventions first generates the problem of compatibility. The ephemerality of the theatrical performance, in which production and consumption happen simultaneously, adds an extra dimension to this context. In the following

discussion of the concept, 'context' will be considered a spatial as well as temporal notion, with space referring to both physical and social space. The different layers which constitute the theatre context and the ways in which they influence the selection of a play for translation as well as the process of drama translation, have been thoroughly discussed by Sirkku Aaltonen in *Time-sharing on stage: Drama translation in theatre and society*. The current literature study will depart from this work.

### **1.2.1. Transcultural theatre: compatibility, equivalence and cultural capital**

Aaltonen states that the theatre context differs from other literary contexts with regard to audience reception, due to its orality and immediacy. She explains that "[u]nlike readers, who can take their time in forming their individual reading of a text, a theatre audience functions as an item in a severely restricted time and place" (2000, 41). However, this restriction has not prevented plays from being translated and staged in other cultures, the result of which is called "transcultural theatre". Transcultural theatre relies on "a universality of the human condition" (13), whereby directors seek to grasp what the respective cultures have in common rather than how particular traditions diverge. This belief of a common ground often affects the selection of a text for translation, and so does the premise of 'compatibility' with the receiving system. Compatibility is described as "the discourses or discursive structures which either are in line with those in the target society or can be made compatible with them" (7). These discourses or discursive structures are tied to a culture's theatrical conventions, which help constitute the theatrical context. The common approach towards alterity is that cultures with a social discourse compatible with one's own are usually given priority in the selection for translation (58). However, to make a foreign text compatible with the target society, certain translation strategies can be applied. Acculturation, on the one hand, is the process of toning down the Foreign by minimising or eliminating the relationship to any specific culture (55). For several specific cultures in Europe, for example, it is possible to move to a more generic European image in order to minimise the play's relationship to the specific culture. Naturalisation, on the other hand, is an extreme form of acculturation. It "denies the influence of the Foreign, and rewrites the play [...] as if coming from the indigenous theatre and society" (55), as to disguise the foreign origin of the text. Both are ways of domesticating the source text. In the words of Venuti, who coined the term, domestication is, as opposed to foreignisation, a translation strategy aimed at fluency and transparency, whereby a cultural 'other' is made intelligible (1991, 127).

The idea of compatibility is closely related to the principle of equivalence, a controversial concept in Translation Studies. What once used to refer to the aim to transpose a text into another language, as faithfully as possible, has since the cultural turn been concerned with that text's context, history and conventions. Translations are namely never produced nor received in a vacuum (Bassnett, 1998, 3). Theo Hermans (2004) considers equivalence as 'being of equal value', whereby the TT displaces the original. If the memory of the original is erased, Hermans says, it can no longer be termed a 'translation'. Equivalence thus means the end of translation, the death of the translator. Although translation may pursue the illusion of equivalence, and consequently of the translator's invisibility, Hermans points out that, due to the unavoidable dilemmas the translator is confronted with, he constantly reminds the reader of the target text's genesis. In the process of translating, he comments on that translation. Therefore, the translator's invisibility is an illusion; it is impossible (3-18).

Besides universality and compatibility, motivation for translation may be deeply influenced by cultural capital. Importation of a play might for instance be indicative of a target culture's developmental stage, as to show that a nation can stage different cultures, or it can be a means to enrich the target culture's language (S. Aaltonen, personal communication, February 21, 2018). Bassnett even advocates a theory of translation as constructing cultures, when stating:

It is in the domain of cultural capital that translation can most clearly be seen to construct cultures. It does so by [...] devising strategies through which texts from one culture can penetrate the textual and conceptual grids of another culture, and function in that other culture. (Bassnett, 1998, 7)

That some cultures are largely self-sufficient when it comes to the production of theatre texts, while others predominantly rely on translations, depends on the attractiveness of other cultures' cultural capital. This leads to the creation of certain dominant cultures in theatre translation, which extends the matter into the political sphere. Dominant cultures are typically those with a text-centred theatre tradition, which explains the focus on Western (Euro-American) theatre in the study of drama translation (18). As theatre translation functions as a mirror to investigate our own society, whereby domestic issues are presented in the light of foreign texts (Aaltonen, 2000, 1), motives of cultural capital are also linked to questions of national identity. This involves not only the sense of identity of the audience, but also that of the characters on stage, with which the audience might or might not identify. This will especially be relevant to instances of linguistic variation, as the selected code may either strongly facilitate or hinder a feeling of identification respectively estrangement towards the play on the part of the audience, depending on their own linguistic backgrounds and on how the translator constructs the particular language.

### **1.2.2. The theatrical system in translation: a collaborative act**

The question of culture and politics prompts a need to regard the context of theatre as a system. Aaltonen defines the theatrical system as "a living organism coexisting in a symbiotic relationship with other social and cultural systems" (5), an idea which reminds of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and helps explaining the dependencies between text production and context. Even-Zohar proposed a theory for the literary system; however, a parallel can be drawn for the theatrical system. He identified the dynamic, organic and interactive nature of the literary system, for which changes are not only caused by relations within the literary system itself (intrasystemic), but also by its interactions with other systems within the general cultural system as a whole (intersystemic). Translations, bridging the literary systems of two languages, can be vital in the regeneration of the literature of a specific language and culture, and can even promote the construction of a national literature (Tarif, 2016, 38). The fact that these systems as well as theatrical conventions are time-bound and constantly change – they are ephemeral –, points out the need for continued retranslation (Bassnett 1985, 89). This is most important for the dramatic genre due to the use of dialogue: speech rhythms, literary conventions ranging from verse to naturalistic dialogue, and above all register, with changing norms of formality, colloquialisms and archaisms, require translations to be regularly reviewed and 'updated' as it were, in order to align with changing cultural and linguistic conventions of the receiving society.

The theatre translation process, then, is an essentially collaborative act, according to Aaltonen. Translators, directors, actors, technicians and set designers all contribute their individual

readings of the play, which finally accumulate into the translated play. Therefore, translators who work within these systems in a particular time and place do not operate in isolation (2000, 5). She proposes a theory of 'time-sharing on stage':

Readers are tenants who move into texts and occupy them for a while. [...] In translation, cultural, social, theatrical and linguistic systems work through the translators and in this way determine the terms of occupancy of the texts to be translated. All visits generate new texts just as the 'original' was once generated. (Aaltonen, 2000, 30)

She takes it even further by blurring the lines between translator and author, when considering a collective authorship (109), and takes into account the role of the dramaturge and the stage-director, who sometimes make adaptations to the text during rehearsals (97). Also actors may have a say in the eventual text as staged. Translator, dramaturge, stage-director, actors or any one contributing to the final product is considered to make a creative effort in the translation process. This indicates both how theatre translation does not terminate on the page and how translators engage in creative authorship rather than plain transfer, which would be impossible anyhow.

The relevance of the theatre-specific context for translation is marked in time and space by the ephemeral, transcultural and dynamic nature of the theatrical system, which causes retranslation and re-interpretation through collective authorship to be most necessary. A translator has to take into consideration the various implications of both source and target context very carefully when determining a translation strategy for the stage.

### **1.3. Code-choice and linguistic variation in the theatre**

Theatre translation is essentially a constant process of encoding and decoding, not only marked by a change of language, but also of medium. Therefore, another essential feature in relation to theatre context is 'code-choice'. André Belleau defines 'code' as "that which in a message (or in a text) is identified as a function of choice, an imposition of constraints of various kinds at various levels" (as cited in Aaltonen, 2000, 10). The term may have multiple implications, but is generally used to refer to language and its possible variations in type, variety, style, etc. Theatrical codes operate in various domains, such as the linguistic, the socio-historical, the cultural and the theatrical (2).

Code-choice in the play is a message: it can serve as a part of the story, of the character, of the identity. In translation, then, sites of indeterminacy arise with regard to the representation of source text codes in the target text. The problem often involves a choice between the familiar and the less familiar (Aaltonen, 2010, 105), between domestication and foreignisation as translation strategies. Most relevant to the current study is the manifestation of linguistic varieties used in dramatic texts and their performances.

#### **1.3.1. Substandard varieties on stage**

Linguistic variation consists of multiple layers: there is the linguistic form, the communicative meaning and the socio-semiotic value associated with the variety (Rosa, 2012, 75). Substandard varieties are regionally, socially or temporally determined, as opposed to discourse, which is situationally determined (78). These substandard varieties can be referred to as 'dialect' or 'vernacular' varieties. Rosengrant defines vernacular style as:

A special category of “substandard” or “common” usage that serves as a marker of class, regional, or age-group affiliation and that includes such speech-oriented lexical and grammatical features as colloquial formulas and epithets, slang, obscenities, and other vulgarisms, and certain kinds of allusive or elliptical morphological and syntactic arrangements. (1992, 16)

Bonaffini points out that the terms 'vernacular' and 'dialect' are not mutually interchangeable. Vernacular relates to style and is therefore suitable for American "dialects", but in Italy, as in most of Europe, "dialect is understood [...] as an autonomous linguistic system, historically determined through well-known mechanisms" (1997, 281).

Marvin Carlson's work *Speaking in tongues: Languages at play in the theatre* (2006) gives us insight in the functions, dynamics and effects of using different languages and varieties on stage. Carlson focuses on 'dialect' as linguistic variation, but parallels can be drawn for vernacular varieties. On the level of plot and character formation, various combinations of languages and dialects serve various purposes. Heteroglossia, in the form of a confrontation between dialect and standard language or between different dialects, may serve to create a comical effect by stereotyping characters according to their modes of speaking, as seen in the Italian commedia dell'arte (34). However, in Italy, "the role of dialect in the theatre had shifted from linguistic playfulness, comic juxtaposition, and social satire to an attempt to relate more directly and with greater verisimilitude to the social concerns of a dialect-speaking target audience" (92). This defense of literary realism promoted the development of 'dialect theatre', utilising one dialect throughout in order to ground the play in the community of its audience (63). Its aim was usually to "maintain itself within a culture as an alternative to and often in opposition to the regularizing mainstream theatre" (15).

The observation that dialects and vernaculars are attractive for creating a sense of realism, can be explained by their association with orality. In most cases, a substandard variety is indeed marked by the lack of codification; it only exists as a spoken language. To a great extent reliant on oral communication, the theatrical performance often particularly desires this impression of orality. Notwithstanding, the absence of a graphological system poses a problem for the author or translator seeking to represent that linguistic variety in the dramatic text. A frequently applied solution is to construct what is called a 'literary dialect'. Azevedo defines the term as "a stylized representation of speech by means of nonstandard, regional, social or even individual features" (1998, 28). However, as Sumner Ives point out, those constructions are inevitably incomplete, because "the author is an artist, not a linguist or sociologist" (1950, 138). Literary dialects should therefore be considered fictional, stylistic artifacts rather than accurate scientific representations of a linguistic variety.

### **1.3.2. Substandard varieties in translation**

When dealing with nonstandard language, Haywood, Higgins and Hervey identify the main problems facing the translator. First of all, s/he has to recognize the peculiarities of and have enough affiliation with the source text variety (1995, 112). The next problem is estimating how important the dialectal features are to the overall effect of the source text (112). Depending on whether or not the variety serves an instrumental function, the translator can opt to ignore it or attempt a translation. However, if the natural background atmosphere, for example the geographical environment, of the ST does not change, a possible TL dialect may tend to come across as artificial (Sánchez, 1999, 308). If the translator opts for translation of the variety, s/he needs to find a language "to accurately represent the ST variety's associations and connotations"



(Haywood et al., 112-3), its socio-semiotic value, in the target society. In the translation process, several shifts may take place along the continuum of standard languages, dialects and vernaculars. In some cases, if no available variety is deemed suitable as an equivalent, a translator might even choose to manipulate the language as to give the impression of a type of language, by adopting features of common vernacular or colloquial speech, not actually reproducing the dialect (Azevedo, 41).

As shown above, some research has been conducted on the role of code and linguistic variation in the theatre, as well as on the treatment of substandard languages in translation. Nevertheless, research on the translation of linguistic variation in the theatre is remarkably limited. The only case known to me that has been studied thoroughly and repeatedly is the English translation of the Quebecois vernacular 'joual' in Michel Tremblay's plays. The 'joual' is a vernacular variety of French spoken in Canada (more specifically in Montreal), usually associated with the working class, which bears multiple political and aesthetical connotations. Bowman and Findlay have translated the variant into Scots, owing to its capacity to render the suggestion of action in the language and the musicality pervading Tremblay's writing (Salter, 1993). Hancock, on the other hand, suggests that a translation into Newfoundland English would best represent the commonalities of both isolated dialects, the populations' feelings of inferiority towards the rest of Canada, and the position of the woman in both provinces, for the anglophone Canadian audience (2013, 111). However, every case of translated linguistic variation in the theatre is unique; it is therefore impossible to draw general conclusions from one case only. The present dissertation aims to contribute to this field of study by examining the case of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the elms*, as translated for the Dutch linguistic region of Flanders and the Netherlands.



## **PART 2**

**Eugene O'Neill and the American Vernacular:**

*Desire under the elms*

As made apparent in the previous chapter, the source text's socio-cultural context with its questions of national identity and compatibility plays a pertinent role in the motivation for and possible difficulties with translation. O'Neill's intentions with the code-choice in *Desire under the elms* are closely bound to the theatrical context in which the play was created. Its form, techniques and style are namely reflective of the author's concerns with the American theatrical and literary tendencies at the time. Therefore, the current chapter commences with an account of the American theatre scene and, to a smaller extent, literary scene in which O'Neill began his dramatic career. This is followed by a discussion of his artistic inspirations and aspirations regarding style, technique and content. When identifying O'Neill's idea of the theatre and his influential precedents, scholars are fortunate to rely on a vast record of personal letters and notes.<sup>2</sup> Then, the construction of the nonstandard code and its remarkable rhythm is commented upon, to conclude with an impression of how the play was received among the audience of readers and spectators.

## **2.1. Experimentation on the American stage**

### **2.1.1. The American stage in the early twentieth century**

#### **2.1.1.1. Discontent at the turn of the century**

Professional ambitions of the average late nineteenth-century American theatre maker were largely centred upon commercialism. Popularity was measured by box-office success, which significantly outweighed artistic merit in production. Genres with a high entertainment value – the vaudeville, farce and romantic-historical melodrama – were the most attractive to be staged, at the expense of serious drama (Kennicott, 2007, 105). From the 1870s onwards, encouraged by the construction of a transcontinental railroad network, theatre companies started to tour a single popular play, called the 'combination', with a view to increasing profits even more (Watermeier, 1998, 34). Responsible for the preservation and enhancement of this trend, was the power of the Theatrical Syndicate, founded in 1896. Also known as 'the Syndicate', it controlled bookings and theatres for touring companies and owned many theatres throughout the U.S. (Travis, 1958, 35). Developing into a profit-driven monopolistic business, the theatre practice of the time encountered resistance from several leading theatre professionals. In combination with direct and strong competition from other theatre owners, it caused the power of the Syndicate to break around the 1910s. Although touring began to lose popularity and theatre came back to Broadway, centralised in New York, it was still driven by commercial interests, prioritising entertainment value (Watermeier, 33).

A growing amount of opponents expressed their discontent with the consequences of this saleability for the quality of the plays. Just like Eugene O'Neill, dissatisfied critics denounced the unlikeliness of the conventional melodrama, as visible in plot and action, traditional character types, physical and spiritual background, and romantic dialogue – characterised by archaisms, complicated syntax and inadequate homogeneity in the rhetoric and idiom of all characters (Winther, 1959, 105). Also O'Neill's father, James, was embittered by the conservative audience and conventions of the old theatre in which he had been playing the same role for over twenty years (Shafer, 2011, 12). Minnie Maddern Fiske and her husband Harrison Grey Fiske were famous early champions of dramatic art, advocating realistic drama, as well as committed fighters against the Syndicate (22). Several other American dramatists attempted, though generally unsuccessfully, to turn the tide. A helping hand from the European theatre scene galvanized them into exploring the alternatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Many of O'Neill's letters are difficult to find in the original form; therefore, most quotes included here are cited second hand.

### 2.1.1.2. European influence

Nineteenth-century conventions of stage dialogue began to be challenged first in Scandinavia. In the 1870s, Henrik Ibsen was one of the first to reject the use of verse form in drama, and instead devoted himself “exclusively to the much more difficult art of writing straightforward, plain language spoken in real life” (Ibsen, 1965, 218). Prose drama developed as an alternative to the traditional verse drama. Furthermore, he used drama to attack the public hypocrisy, and was therefore generally condemned in America as offensive to public morality, not in the least by critic William Winter. If staged altogether, the plays were cut drastically until only the approved passages remained. America had however its ‘Ibsen Movement’, although it did not aim at a fundamental change of the theatre, but merely widened its scope to welcome realism within the conventional method and sentimentality of the traditional genres (Bucks, 1946, 314). Eventually, from 1906 onwards, revolutionary European drama texts were to be published in America, which promoted the spread of alternative theatre significantly among American playwrights. Moreover, in 1911, the visit of the Irish Players in New York, performing the works of among others Synge and Yeats, opened O’Neill’s eyes to “the existence of a real theatre as opposed to the unreal [...] theatre of my father in whose atmosphere I had been brought up” (O’Neill in Barnes, 1957, 49). However much the American dramatist began to be inspired by the European forms and techniques, the language and style was still very British. There was a need to create a profoundly ‘American’ theatre.

### 2.1.1.3. American Language Movement

In 1788, the Philological Society of New York was founded. As Noah Webster stated in *The American Magazine*, its express purpose was “ascertaining and improving the *American Tongue*.” “Since the separation of the American States from Great-Britain,” he writes, “the objects of such an institution are become, in some measure, necessary, and highly important” (as cited in Read, 1934, 131). The propagation of a local American language had both political and patriotic motives. The first attempts to use a colloquial variant in literature were made from the 1820s onwards, the most prominent authors among them being James F. Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Around the 1880s, Walt Whitman turned the language movement into a true campaign for the sake of American literature. He makes a cause for the use of native idiomatic words of the American continent – as opposed to British English – “words that would be welcomed by the nation, being of the national blood – words that would give that taste of identity and locality which is so dear in literature” (as cited in Howard, 1930, 451). His effort to free the American writer from European models was concerned with an ideal of honesty of style and artistic integrity, as well as with moral claims about the freedom of American democracy. By using the vernacular, he urged American writers to become more rooted in the local landscape of the New World. Finally, the study of the American language had become a respectable branch of scholarly study, as proved by the foundation of a specialist magazine, *American Speech*, in 1925. Academic research thus provided a foundation for the representation of the local speech in literature, and thereby promoted the realisation of the movement’s literary ambition to step away from the British traditions of style and idiom, in order to distinguish the American culture from that of the ex-coloniser’s.

#### **2.1.1.4. Glory days of the American stage**

In response to the events and ideas from Europe, an independent theatre movement emerged in America. It arose out of dissatisfaction with the commercial theatre and consisted mainly of amateur and non-profit theatre groups which came to be known as the 'Little Theatres'. The most prominent ones were the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players; the latter was founded by George Cram Cook in 1916 and was the first Off-Broadway theatre (Monroe, 1918, 205). It sought to give American writers the chance to "give plays not likely to be produced elsewhere" (Glaspell, 1926, 202) and as a consequence, the plays produced were resolutely experimental and aspired to high standards of dramatic art. Finally finding an audience for his plays, O'Neill became a prominent member of the group. All of his plays were staged by the Provincetown Players. After its dissolution in 1921, he founded the 'Experimental Theatre, Inc.' together with stage director Robert Edmond Jones and critic Kenneth Macgowan (Monroe, 205-6).

Not only the independent theatres, but also periodicals such as the *Theatre Arts* magazine spread and promoted modernist ideas and practices in European and American theatre. The major influences coming from Europe were the introduction of naturalism and symbolism in drama. Although symbolism in Europe arose as a countermovement to realism, in America, several decades later, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary texts were published simultaneously.

The Teens and Twenties have proved to be the heydays of the American stage, even called America's 'theatrical Renaissance' (Watermeier, 49). They were marked by unprecedented growth, made possible not only because of economic prosperity and an expanding middle class, which paved the way for invention and change (33), but foremost by the impact of radical theatrical transformations in Europe. In combination with an audience and critics increasingly open to experimentation, this formed the perfect climate for O'Neill's theatrical ascent.

#### **2.1.2. O'Neill: overturning the conventions**

Eugene O'Neill's (1888-1953) aspirations as a playwright arise from his exasperating frustrations and deep concern with the lack of new interpretations and experimentation in the New York theatres at the time. Contact with the European novelties in theatrical expression opened his eyes to the existence of alternatives, and the emerging independent theatres gave him the chance to develop his own style. He was firmly determined to pursue artistic quality in his own work and willing to take risks in order to overturn the conventions.

##### **2.1.2.1. Indebtedness to European revolutionary dramatists**

O'Neill openly acknowledged being inspired by his European precedents in finding an alternative mode of dramatic art. Ibsen, staging a language "as spoken in real life" was only one of them. O'Neill's own letters refer to George Bernard Shaw, Émile Zola and especially August Strindberg, whose ideas were remarkably influential on O'Neill's experimentation with form and style.

From Shaw, first, he adopted the ideal of stylistic purity. Shaw renounced the use of technical tricks to entertain the audience, as a means to mask the playwright's poverty of artistic ingenuity. O'Neill, too, insisted on letting the facts speak for themselves in his dramatic technique. Also Zola's writings stimulated O'Neill to reject the fixed codes and structures governing current theatre practice. His perception of naturalism as a scientific portrayal of reality based on observation, for which he became widely known, can be considered a radical form of realism. What

particularly resonates with O'Neill, is Zola's appreciation of 'the truth'. O'Neill believed life truthfully depicted to have the power "to stir unusual depths of human compassion", and articulated his struggle to express his own "real significant bit of truth" (Chiothia, 1979, 29). Not only did this search for truth apply to his characters, it also applied to the audience. His conviction that truth reaches man through his emotions rather than thoughts (Törnqvist, 1969, 40) reinforced Zola's renunciation of the intellectual pursuit of balance and symmetry in rhetoric on the stage.

'Truth' is however interpreted differently in O'Neill's definition of realism than in Zola's, when he writes: "Damn that word, "realism"! [...] I meant something "really real," in the sense of being spiritually true, not meticulously life-like – [...] an intensification of human lives into clear symbols of truth" (as cited in Törnqvist, 31). This interpretation transcends Zola's naturalism, but instead inclines towards what O'Neill ascribed to Strindberg's work and named 'super-naturalism'. The term expresses his rejection of naturalism as an end in itself, but advances the naturalist depiction as a technique to reflect the underlying symbolism of the play. The technique is therefore concerned with 'the truth behind the real' rather than 'the real' as such, which brings O'Neill to coin the term 'behind-life' (Hartman, 1966, 216). It refers to an almost mystical pattern beyond the words and actions of the characters, signifying the hidden forces behind life, because "the secret and true meaning of life lies buried beneath its exterior expression" (Winther, 110). O'Neill had an almost obsessive preoccupation with the tragic philosophy of life determining man's fate. He was interested in man's inner life of subconscious conflicts, reflected by outward actions. It comes as no surprise then, that he was frequently believed to promote Freud's psycho-analytic theories, although O'Neill himself persistently denied this in his letters: he praised Strindberg as his master in representation of the subconscious (115).

#### **2.1.2.2. Balance between form and content**

O'Neill's main concern then was to develop a technique to reveal this hidden tragedy in dramatic action (110). In the beginning stages of his career, he struggled with the creation of a dramatic unity of form and content. Only when the relationship between technical devices, structure and language on the one hand, and their implied messages on the other, was well-balanced, the super-naturalist technique successfully reflected the underlying symbolism. In this process, O'Neill attached great importance to the theatre of the mind, the so-called "imaginative theatre":

What do I mean by an 'imaginative' theatre? [...] I mean a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as a Temple where the religion of a poetical interpretation and symbolical celebration of life is communicated to human beings, starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily struggle to exist as masks among the masks of the living! (O'Neill in Cargill, 1963, 121-2)

His works were almost without exception provided with meticulously detailed stage directions, aimed at facilitating the "poetical interpretation" of both reader and actor, in order to accurately communicate the "symbolical celebration of life". O'Neill thus wrote both for the page and the stage.

#### **2.1.2.3. Classical and modern myths**

The echoes from Greek mythology in O'Neill's work are undeniable. Not only Oedipus or Elektra, but also Medea and Phaedra can be distinguished among the characters in his plays. However, for a modern audience no longer receptive to belief in gods or the supernatural, O'Neill proffered the

subconscious to find an equivalent for the Greek sense of fate. Margaret L. Ranald praises O'Neill for his modern transmutations of ancient myth and thereby identifies him as "myth user rather than myth maker" (1998, 67).

The other myth he anxiously sought to bring on stage, was that of the American Dream. From the middle of the 1920s onwards, this theme recurred in almost all of his plays. His characters deal with the loss of spiritual identity and potential greatness as a consequence of their inexhaustible desire for possession (Miller, 1964, 190). The theme culminated in his writing of *A Tale of Possessors Self-dispossessed*, a cycle of around eleven plays aimed at demonstrating the nation's fatal split identity of success in achievement and failure by estrangement from the human soul. It was linked to his concern to create a profoundly American theatre. O'Neill was however cautious to deliver the message implicitly in order to convince, by not only staging his characters as outstanding examples but also as symbols figuring in the tragic myth of the American Dream.

#### 2.1.2.4. O'Neill criticism

O'Neill's work has been the source of much controversy. As one of the early American dramatists employing prose instead of verse form in his works, his language was deemed an indicator of incompetence as a playwright by several critics (e.g. Mary McCarthy, J.H. Raleigh, Ruby Cohn). As Nicoll stated it: "we remember his scenes but not the language in which they are couched" (1949, 881). His inventiveness became however gradually welcomed with praise, not in the least by his friend Arthur Hobson Quinn. Quinn marks O'Neill's "profound imaginative interpretation of aspiring humanity, struggling upward, even through sin and shame" (1926, 368), as well as his concrete expression of mysticism (369) and his ability to break theatrical rules without ever breaking dramatic laws, owing to his creative genius (371). Hugo Von Hofmannsthal then, celebrates O'Neill's masterly dialogue. Besides stylistic and literary quality, he writes, O'Neill's dramatic dialogue possesses the most important quality of theatrical language: the quality to be suggestive of movement and mimetic action, even of the metaphysical being of the character. When a new character enters the stage, it affects the atmosphere in the room. According to Quinn, O'Neill's dialogue manages to charge the atmosphere with this tension (1923, 39). The critic therefore praises O'Neill's work as being "essentially of the theatre" (38), thereby exceeding literary merit.

However controversial he may have been, O'Neill has been termed "America's first important dramatist" right from the start of his career in 1918 and was moreover the first and only American playwright to win the Noble Prize of Literature. He has not lost this epithet until today, and in his aim to bring the high seriousness of the European theatre to America, he inspired many after him. Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Sam Shepard are only some of the dramatists who acknowledged their profound debt to him (Manheim, 1998, 1).

## 2.2. Code-choice in *Desire under the elms*

The play *Desire under the elms*, first produced in November 1924 and published in January 1925, is usually categorised as the last and culmination of O'Neill's 'early plays' (Ranald, 65), a phase in his career characterised by experiment with form and content. It was staged for the first time by the Provincetown Players, off-Broadway at the Greenwich Village Theater, and directed by Robert Edmond Jones. After two months, it transferred to Broadway until its closing date in October 1925,



good for a total of 420 performances (Internet Broadway Database, n.d.). From 1952 onwards, several revivals of the play were produced both on- and off-Broadway.

Being the culmination of experiment with form and content, this section examines how O'Neill's theatrical ideas and occupations as identified above are reflected in the language of *Desire under the elms*. First, we will analyse the play's setting in both physical and social space as well as its major themes. The aim is to determine to what extent they are tied to their American context, and therefore may cause problems to the translator. This is followed by a discussion of the peculiar code O'Neill constructed for his characters. As discussed earlier, he was not the first author to experiment with the vernacular language in literature, so it is opportune to discuss Mark Twain's groundbreaking *Huckleberry Finn* as a model. O'Neill's dramatic language demonstrates his supernaturalist technique, overturning the "unlikeliness" of the traditional dramatic conventions. An identification of the code's particular linguistic features, comprising phonology, grammar and lexicon, serves to determine its evoked associations as well as its significance with regard to themes and setting of the play.

## **2.2.1. Plot, setting and themes**

### **2.2.1.1. Plot**

It is the year 1850. Ephraim Cabot runs a farmhouse in New England together with his sons, who all hate him. Awaiting their father's death to inherit the farm, Simeon and Peter are kept from joining the gold rush to California. Eben, their half-brother, in his turn claims to be the rightful heir to the farm which Ephraim allegedly stole from his mother. He hates his father for having abused her and seeks revenge. When Ephraim one day decides to marry a young widow, Abbie Putnam, whose only interest is to gain hold of the property, Eben buys out his half-brothers who leave for California. Both coveting Ephraim's wealth, an uncanny tension of desire and hatred looms between Eben and the sensual and seductive Abbie. To secure her hold on the shares, Abbie seduces Eben, seizing the opportunity to avenge his father, into impregnating her. Ephraim, who believes the child is his, celebrates the birth of the new heir to the property. Eben then understands Abbie's love – by now genuine – to have been delusive and despises her for it. Raging with despair, Abbie kills the child to win back Eben's trust. First having informed the police, Eben eventually realises his love for Abbie and confesses his complicity to the sheriff, who arrests them both.

### **2.2.1.2. Setting**

The dramatic text is preceded by a detailed description of the temporal and geographical setting of the play, and especially of the stage design. Written in a highly visually expressive prose style, the descriptions of the farmhouse and its surroundings clearly transcend practical objectives of guiding stage designers, but are also concerned with promoting the by O'Neill so highly appraised poetic interpretation of the reader. They even go beyond the purely observational, and hint at symbolical implications of the farmhouse's appearance: the house's walls are "sickly grayish", "the green of the shutters faded" (O'Neill, 1925, 202). The elms framing the house are ascribed anthropomorphic qualities:

Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the

life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles. (202)

However well the stage designer renders the visual features, the symbolism as explicated in the prosaic stage directions remains implicit to the viewer as compared to the reader.

The opening sentence sets the play in New England, in the year 1850. It was the time of the gold rush to California. Miners from all over the world aspired to settle there after the discovery of gold in early 1848. It is no coincidence that New England, an ethnic name for a geographical sub-region of the North-Eastern United States, is situated at the exteriority of the American continent opposite to California: the “East” versus the “West”, an opposition Peter and Simeon repeatedly articulate. It reinforces the symbolic disparity between the worlds of dream and reality, as will be discussed below. The New England region was characterised by devout Puritan religion and work ethic at the time, as a consequence of the colonisation by the British.

The social setting of the play can be described in terms of the characters’ profession as farmers and its implications. They live in a rural landscape near a small village. The stage directions point out that “[t]he action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse” (202), which induces an isolated impression. Their farming knowledge, transferred from father to son, is sufficient for them to earn a living, which results in a poor background in formal education. As a consequence, the characters almost exclusively talk about their own immediate environment or reality, devoid of any political, historical or cultural references. This portrays them as narrow-minded figures in a small-scale, traditional lifestyle marked by routine; they live in a closed world. Their peripheral location, unsophisticated background, humble homestead and the physical labour – however self-employed – of the farming profession, situate them in the lower middle classes of mid-nineteenth-century American society.

### **2.2.1.3. Themes**

The setting and stage design bear a symbolism prospective of the play’s major themes. The miserable and seemingly hopeless condition of the family members at the beginning of the story is connected to father Cabot’s Puritan morals and philosophy of life. The family being the corner stone of society in Puritan religion, the family structure is patriarchally oriented in order to secure its stability and protection. On the Cabots’ farm, this protection takes the form of captivity, as seen in the characterisation of Eben: “Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce repressed vitality about him” (203). However much the sons seek to free themselves from their father’s suppression, they cannot avoid resembling him, being like him “dead spit ‘n image” (211); this expression recurs as a motif throughout the play. History is repeated in multiple ways, as made apparent through the character of Minnie, a woman whom Ephraim as well as all three of his sons have had sexual affiliations with. Another aspect of this captivity is caused by the Puritan work ethic and discipline: the Cabots are caught in a “sickly grayish”, dreadful routine of toil and drudgery. Moreover, the Puritan connection to earth required man to be thankful for the land he was assigned by God; relocating to more appealing areas – like California – was considered a grave sin. His belief in the Puritan God had urged Ephraim and his sons to accept their miserable fate and suppress their lurking desires to escape the male-dominated “cage” in search for wealth.

The arrival of Abbie however shatters Ephraim's Puritan illusion. At that point, the formerly suppressed desires for both materialistic possession as well as passionate lust become more apparent than ever. On the one hand, the dream about the mythical wealth of the "Golden West" (218) – the success myth of the American Dream – becomes a possible reality for Simeon and Peter thanks to Eben's financial intervention. The gold rush in California is one of the most extreme examples of materialistic possession, as is the dispute about the claim to Cabot's farm. The desire for carnal lust, on the other hand, breaks Ephraim's patriarchal authority on the part of Eben: he seeks revenge on his father by responding to the passionate feelings he fosters for Abbie. Although desire for possession and the disparity between this desire and reality may well be considered a universal human disposition, the Puritan illusion broken by the American Dream proves the play to be truly American in themes and matter.

### **2.2.2. A literary model: *Huckleberry Finn***

O'Neill's search for supernaturalism and "likeness" on stage urged him to construct an idiom for his characters utterly different from the ones governing at the time, namely those of the romantic dialogue – loaded with archaisms and complex syntax in order to establish an intellectual demonstration of balance and symmetry in rhetoric, thereby inducing a preposterous impression. Not only the characters' individual idioms, but also their use of a substandard American variety had to be developed. As mentioned previously, O'Neill was not the first American author to attempt a literary construction of the local language: under the influence of the American Language Movement, use of the vernacular in literature was promoted heavily. Several writers had previously pursued to represent Americanness in literary dialogue and used low-colloquial varieties to root their characters in their respective regions and cultures. Also the verisimilitude of spoken discourse was sought to be represented in fictional dialogue. A code apt for representation of both Americanness and spoken discourse was mainly found in substandard varieties and colloquial language, because of their desired impression of orality. The absence of a graphological system for the local varieties caused diverse systems of constructed literary dialects to emerge.

One of the most developed and well-known forms of a constructed literary American vernacular language before O'Neill, are the codes employed by the characters in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884. It is almost incontestable that O'Neill drew inspiration from the features characterising the orthography of spelling and grammar in these fictional dialects. An explanatory note by Twain preceding the novel clarifies for the reader the foundations, motivations and considerations to bear in mind when interpreting the several dialects created for different characters:

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary "Pike County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding. THE AUTHOR. (Twain, 1986, 6)

The objective of the present study is not to make a deep analysis of the distinctive features of these dialects, nor is it to verify the dialectological accuracy of the New England variety as represented by O'Neill. It is however useful to identify certain devices applied by Twain to create a

graphological and, more importantly, literary system for nonstandard language representation in fictional dialogue, which O'Neill adopted in his own work.

David Carkeet conducted a study on the linguistic features of the literary representation of dialect in *Huckleberry Finn*, and distinguishes phonology, grammar and lexicon as criteria for analysis. In order to construct the impression of an American vernacular on the page, Carkeet points out, Twain applies phonological adaptations in the form of deletion (represented by apostrophe), vowel and diphthong shifts, cluster reduction, assimilation and epithesis. More important even, is the implementation of so-called 'eye dialect': nonstandard spellings for standard pronunciations. Carkeet gives the example of *uv* for 'of' and *wuz* for 'was' (1979, 317). This is employed in order to enhance the impression of the nonstandard. When it comes to grammar, Carkeet distinguishes the deletion of copula, the -s suffix for non-third-person present-tense verbs and major changes in personal and possessive pronouns (*ye* for 'you', *his'n*, *hern* and *yourn* for 'his', 'hers' and 'yours'). Lexical choices then, are reminded not only to be reflective of a dialect, but also of personal idiom. Also exclamations and expletives fall in this category. Carkeet however reveals an inconsistency in Huck's phonology and grammar, and thereby points out again how important consistency is, rather than linguistic accuracy, for a successful suggestion of a particular variety and its associations.

### 2.2.3. Markers of the specific code

So far, we have found that O'Neill envisaged to overturn the unlikeliness of orality in dialogue and to create a profoundly American theatre in his dramatic work. Thereafter, the play's social and geographical setting and general themes were introduced. This section goes on to examine how exactly O'Neill goes about developing an idiom for his characters in order to fulfil this pursuit of credibility on the stage in both setting and themes, as well as in spoken dialogue and American identity. It demonstrates his struggle to establish a dramatic unity of form – in this case, the language – and content.

When scanning the first scene of the play, the contrast between the expressive prose of the stage design descriptions and the lines uttered by the characters is undeniably manifest. The 'specific code' then applies to the latter one, namely the language of dialogue. The markers of this specific code are used to mark the substandard quality of the language as well as the characters' particular idiom. Markers with regard to phonology and grammar, rhythm of speech and lexicon will first be identified and their effects subsequently interpreted. No distinction has been made between the individual idioms of each (main) character, because their speech is largely homogeneous. Note that when examining the markers of the substandard, the aim is not at all to verify how well the code represents New England rural dialect, because we assume the literary value rather than sociolinguistic accuracy of the constructed language: it is an artefact. O'Neill was concerned with creating an impression of a type of language, recognisable as being abstracted from one or more substandard varieties, rather than reproducing a particular dialect.

#### 2.2.3.1. Phonology and grammar

Similar to *Huckleberry Finn*, the substandard in *Desire* is to a large extent marked by the literary representation of phonology and deviating grammar. However, as phonology belongs to the faculty of spoken language, it is complicated and challenging to non-ambiguously render phonological markers by means of a literary language, i.e. without using the IPA but through spelling modifications. Therefore, there is not a ready-developed methodology available to analyse these

features. We will apply an observational rather than interpretive approach with regard to phonology, as analogous to the one proposed by Carkeet.

Appendix A shows a list of the most prominent and consistently used phonological markers, illustrated with textual examples and their standard forms. This list is evidently not exhaustive. We see that O'Neill, just like Twain, applies both vowel and consonant deletion by means of the apostrophe. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2006) point out that consonant deletion is common in a number of US dialects, especially that of [r] and [l] (82) as seen in the forms *he'p*, *wa'm*, *A'mighty* and *on'y*. They also refer to 'uns as in the expression *young 'uns* (82). Vowel deletion as attested in the forms *'bout*, *'ceptin'*, *'preciate* and *'pear* are examples of what they identify as the deletion of unstressed syllables at the beginning of a word, another commonality of many regional dialects (82). Furthermore, they discuss neutralisation processes such as *-ow* becoming *-er* and especially that of the 'dropped g' at the end of the word (as seen in *downin'*, *somethin'*,...), and also ascribe them to "vernacular dialects across the country" (74). These features thus mark the language as being distinctly American – through commonalities of many vernacular variants – rather than belonging to one specific dialect. As vowel and diphthong shifts are generally considered major indicators of deviation from the norm; their deployment here adds to the instrumental function of phonological markers in forming the impression of the substandard. The abundant use of eye dialect serves perfectly to enhance this impression.

In the same appendix, nonstandard grammatical features occurring in the ST are identified. Verbs seem to be the most prolific category of markers to play with, all the more so for the verb 'to be', due to its high frequency in attestation throughout the text. Moreover, verbs are greatly susceptible to adaptation in substandard language. Extended use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person form (see Twain), inadequate past forms and omission of the auxiliary verb are consistently deployed. In the conjugation of 'to be', variations (*I be*, *I air*) for a single standard form (*I am*) occur, which may be abstracted from the typically American vernacular habitual *be*. The same ground of frequency applies to the pronouns; they are however highly systematically and consistently used, just like in *Huckleberry Finn*. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes attribute the irregular past being marked by the regular *-ed* suffix to speakers of vernacular dialects, and because they are associated with ignorance of the grammatical rules, they are considered social rather than regional markers (86). One of the most conspicuous social markers within American English is however the double marking in negative concord (91), as also applied in *Desire*. Interestingly, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes label the *a*-prefixed gerund as obsolete except for a few Southern varieties (87), which does not correspond geographically to the New England region. The grammatical markers thus not only contribute to the American quality of the language, but are also redolent of a social background of poor education. The geographical setting as reflected by the code is therefore convincingly American as opposed to British, as much as the code is associated with the lower strata of society for a social setting. Phonology and grammar create the impression of the American and the vernacular, rather than of New England rural dialect – however more thorough dialectological examination would be needed to offer conclusive evidence of the latter. But the fact is that this is not the point. Given the background of O'Neill's artistic aspirations, he used the language as a dramatic instrument to render the American setting and to characterise the Cabots' social situation in a sufficiently credible way, promoting his supernaturalistic style. Chiothia states it as follows: "[t]he illusion of authenticity is more important than authenticity itself" (71). In order to do so, O'Neill seems to have constructed the language partly intuitively, from his own experience, and partly from the example already set

by Twain and others, maintaining a high level of consistency. The development of a literary vernacular tradition was taking place.

### 2.2.3.2. Lexicon

Lexicon is a third category influential to the localisation and symbolic value of the language. In order to form an idea of the code's register, I collected a list of lexical items which seemed to belong to a specific register, classified as informal, regional, literary, archaic, obsolete, colloquial or slang. In order to verify this intuitive evaluation, I consulted *Webster's New World dictionary of the American language*. Noah Webster's dictionary was and still is an established authority in the field of lexicography. However first published in 1951, the 1959 edition was the earliest version available to me. Earlier American dictionaries were deemed incomprehensive or difficult to access. A table was created (printed in appendix A), listing the lexical items and expressions which either were confirmed to fit a particular register or which were not included in the dictionary (indicated as NI). They were sorted alphabetically according to part of speech. Also expressions were included.

The first observation is that the majority of the items is labelled as colloquial in register. This promotes O'Neill's desired impression of orality on stage: the colloquial is associated with spoken language and therefore lends itself perfectly to dramatic dialogue. Some words are classified as dialect or even slang (*jiffy, spree, to light out*), which may contribute to the type of American vernacular language created by phonology and grammar. Indications as archaic, obsolete and specified historical usage in the label "18<sup>th</sup> century slang", may even hint at the temporal setting of the play, about 75 years anterior to performance, although the set of these items is not large enough to make conclusive claims.

Besides register, the ample usage of profanities deserves a few words of discussion. *Durn(ed)*, *damm(ed)* and *cussed* are the most common ones, but also *in tarnation* and *in hell's fire* belong to this category. In the first place, the habitual practice of cursing is highly suggestive of the vernacular the low-colloquial. It could however also hint at a feeling of frustration, found on the level of verbal expression. When considering the size of the characters' vocabulary in general, we notice that it is reasonably small and repetitive. Most apparent is this in the banality of the word "purty", called upon as a general word for about anything experienced as good-looking, pleasant sensation or desired emotion, recurring 31 times in total. It signifies the Cabots' verbal limitation; they do not possess a more specific vocabulary to express these experiences, running up against the limits of their own linguistic faculty. Their inarticulacy is underscored by the continual reiteration of the interjections *waal, mebbe* and *ay-eh*, occurring respectively 62, 51 and 44 times in the play. Dialogue like this is standard practice:

SIMEON. Ay-eh. (*A pause*) Mebbe—he'll die soon.

PETER. (*doubtfully*) Mebbe.

SIMEON. Mebbe—fur all we knows—he's dead now. (205)

The words are fillers which create a stalling effect on the characters. They seem unable to find the words to express their emotional responses, the world becomes too complex, their words falter and they start repeating themselves, generating an impression of verbal poverty, which not only symbolises the characters as uneducated, but also the limitations of the patriarchal cage in which they are caught, alluding to the play's central themes. What is truly revealing is then not what is said, but rather what remains unsaid.

### 2.2.3.3. Rhythm

Another significant aspect distinguishing the play's specific code from the theatrical conventions of the time, is that of its rhythm. This comprehensive term was chosen to denote certain textual qualities influencing the impression of orality, of spoken language. This section will identify what these rhythm-related features are and how they are used as dramatic instruments. First of all, let us take a look at a text fragment from the first scene:

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

The lines are numbered to facilitate analysis on the level of sentence structure. The dialogue's lines are strikingly short, composed out of words or phrases rather than sentences, as in (1)-(4). Line (5) is only an extension of the same principle; it is a sequence of fragments rather than a sentence. Other lines seem longer when chained together by conjunctions – almost exclusively coordinators – or dashes, as in (10) and (12). They prevent sentences from being clearly demarcated, but present them as a collection of tatters, along which characters swerve off topic without batting an eye, as seen in (8). The reference to spoken language could not be more obvious. The fragmentary rhythm of these phrase sequences is an eloquent illustration of how a thought gradually develops in the character's mind, how words are chosen on the spot; it creates the impression of spontaneity fundamental to spoken dialogue. The frequent use of exclamations expressing amazement or consternation, only contribute to the effect of spontaneity, of uninhibited emotional response reflected in language. Repetition on the level of sentence structure, visible in lines (10) and (12), adds to the impression of inarticulacy as discussed above. After every half a sentence, the characters seem to repeat themselves due to verbal constraints.

The rhythm specific to the play's code imitates the dynamics and fluency of dialogue through its fragmentary sentence structure, on the spot development of speech and spontaneity of exclamations, in order to establish verisimilitude in orality as opposed to the artificial prosaic dialogue of O'Neill's predecessors. Brevity of sentence structure perfectly aligns with the stalling interjections to symbolise verbal inarticulacy and depict language as an obstruction to the unfolding

of emotions, thus confirming the characters' social setting of poor educational background as well as the theme of their hidebound and insular everyday reality. This symbolic quality of the language in addition to the naturalistic advancement of conversational speech forms the purest example of how supernaturalism in form successfully reflects supernaturalism in content.

### **2.3. Reception: effects of the code in *Desire***

By the 1920s, the New York theatre was ready for a dramatist like O'Neill, i.e. earlier generations had paved the way for experimentation and modernism on the stage. *Desire under the elms* was an enormous success for the non-commercial theatre, and this, unlike most contemporaries, both artistically and commercially. It is often named as O'Neill's most successful play (Black, 1998, 11), or at least the culmination of his early plays. Stark Young writes: "It has less sentiment than his older piece and more passion; it is better written throughout; it has much tragic gloom and irony but a more mature conception and a more imaginative austerity" (1924).

Audiences were however not unanimously over the moon about the work. The playgoing population's sensibilities were offended by the themes of child homicide and incest. Initially, the play was banned in Boston – note that this is located at the heart of New England – on moral grounds and in Los Angeles, its cast was arrested for obscenity. In England, the play was blacklisted up until 1940. However controversial, the play was a great box office success and received copious critical acclaim.

Many critics make mention of the stage design of the 1924 run, designed by Robert Edmond Jones. The different rooms of the house are alternately brought to the forefront by removing sections of the wall, in order to draw attention to the controlling circumstances of the play. F. J. March, in his dissertation on the stage design of *Desire* (1968), attributes this to the nature of the play: "[t]he scenery could contribute to the closeness and limiting of the action if no shifting was involved, and if the audience was aware that the entire play takes place within the confines of the original stage picture" (8). The house's walls were placed as close to the audience as possible, which made several critics complain about an uncomfortable experience. This was of course yet another consciously deployed means to enhance the play's sense of realism.

Besides the catalytic role of the characters' 'vulgar' tongue in censorship of the work, comments on the language are fewer in number than might be expected. The fact that it was not O'Neill's first experiment with a literary vernacular, may account for this absence. At this stage, he was no longer judged on his use of prose instead of verse form. His dialogue in *Desire* was deemed "to be lacking in literary grace", but having "rude power in the theatre". However, Atkinson adds, "[i]t looks clumsy in print" (1952). This seems to confirm the importance of the language to the overall effect of the staged performance, and promotes its service to the impression of orality, of spoken discourse.

The discrepant responses to the play should be interpreted in the light of the intense audience experience. As J. W. Krutch writes: "[t]he meaning and unity of his work lies [...] not in a "message", but merely in the fact that each play is an experience of extraordinary intensity" (1924, 578). O'Neill managed to attain his objectives fairly well with this piece: he fought against the traditional, low-quality theatre and promoted artistic merit in prose drama. He evokes an immersive realistic effect that transcends the purely naturalistic and thereby moves the audience. Since indifference is hardly to be found among the comments, he seems to have succeeded with vigour. Although the language is not critically discussed as elaborately as it may have deserved, it is



undeniably prominent to the establishment of this multi-layered realism. Concerning the offensive themes, one can argue that pieces like Oedipus or Medea had been staged for centuries and thus no longer been deemed this problematic. However, it is exactly this refined realism and closeness to the audience, combined with the profoundly American character of the work that confronts the spectator in an “experience of extraordinary intensity”.



## **PART 3**

**To the Low Countries: *Het begeren onder de  
olmen***

Multiple translations of *Desire under the elms* have been made for the Dutch language area. Most of them were performance translations. Available to me were the translations by Dolf Verspoor (premiered in 1965) for Toneelgroep Theater, Arnhem; Wim van Rooy (premiered in 1974) for the Haagse Comedie, Den Haag; Arne Sierens (premiered in 1992) for Het Zuidelijk Toneel, Eindhoven and an anonymous one (s.a.) for the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Amateurtheater, Krommenie. The database of Theater in Nederland lists only one more Dutch professional theatre company which performed the play – this already in 1930, which is strikingly early – namely Oost-Nederlandsch Tooneel, Arnhem. Unfortunately, this translation could not be found. At first glance, only one of the available scripts seemed to have made an effort to adopt a language convincingly deviating from the standard: *Het begeren onder de olmen*, by Arne Sierens. The play premiered in Eindhoven on March 7 1992, and was thereafter staged on locations all over Flanders (Turnhout, Brugge, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Waregem, Heusden-Zolder and Gent) and mainly the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Etten-Leur, Haarlem, Nijmegen, Weert, Amstelveen, Arnhem, Bergen op Zoom, Den Bosch, Helmond, Leiden, Maastricht, Middelburg, Oosterhout, Oss, Roosendaal, Terneuzen, Tilburg, Utrecht, Zwolle, Breda, Den Haag, Eindhoven, Enschede, Groningen, Heerlen, Hoorn, Rotterdam, Tiel and Venlo). It was attended by a total of 27,150 visitors (Tindemans, personal communication, April 4, 2018). Ivo van Hove directed the play, Klaas Tindemans was the dramaturge, and the performing actors were Gerard Thoolen, Bas Teecken, Peter van den Eede, Peter van den Begin, Hilde van Mieghem and Joost van Es.

The literary language constructed by Arne Sierens for this translation will be the focus of the final part of this study, seeking an answer to the research question: “how is O’Neill’s particular code, with its implications specific to the piece’s content and context, transformed in translation for a Dutch-Flemish audience, and what are the effects of this transformation?”

First of all, the language situation in Flanders and the Netherlands will be briefly touched upon in order to disclose the main problems for the translator when choosing a model for the code. Then, theatre maker Arne Sierens will be introduced, with an emphasis on his artistic style and his role in the totality of the translation-production process of Het Zuidelijk Toneel. This is followed by an overview of Sierens’ translation approach as formulated by dramaturge Klaas Tindemans, and a short exploration of earlier examples of substandard literary Dutch. The comparative analysis of TT and ST will constitute the heart of the chapter, investigating how Sierens coped with the implications of on the one hand the specific code, on the other a number of cultural references in *Desire*. After analysis of the modifications between page and stage, an impression of the audience’s responses to the play will be presented, followed by a discussion of the applied translation strategies from source to target text.

### **3.1. Linguistic variation in Flanders and the Netherlands**

This section will clarify why exactly the translator faces a challenging task selecting the most suitable spoken language variety or varieties as a model for the construction of a literary nonstandard in the Dutch language area. At the same time, it demonstrates why s/he has such a broad panoply of possibilities at his/her disposal.

I do not intend to give a historical overview of the language situation in Flanders and the Netherlands, not only due to spatial limitations, but also because it is irrelevant. What is important to elucidate, is the terminological confusion related to the Dutch language and the geographical and cultural area where it is spoken. The confusion exists among Dutch-speakers themselves, but

all the more so in the rest of the world. Using English terminology here, complicates matters even more, because seemingly corresponding translations may not cover the same semantic content or may not be available at all.

What complicates the linguistic situation in the Low Countries (i.e. the Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium and the Netherlands), is the fact that it concerns a geographical continuum from North to South as well as West to East, and at the same time a continuum from dialect to standard language.<sup>3</sup> Especially in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (called ‘Flanders’), increasing dialect loss over the past decades has resulted in the emergence of what is called ‘tussentaal’ or ‘Verkavelingsvlaams’, characterised still by many substandard features but less regionally bound. The Dutch used in the Northern part of the Low Countries is distinctly different from that of the South, most remarkably so in spoken discourse. Not only pronunciation, but also vocabulary, proverbs and even syntactical structures may vary. Such lexical differences are not necessarily linked to cultural differences, i.e. referring to typically Belgian or Dutch customs, institutions or matters, and vary from being known although not used, to being unknown in one area or the other. Apart from language-inherent characteristics, also associations with and attitudes towards the language are noteworthy: Flemings and Dutchmen feel unmistakably different in language (Bakema, 2003, 7), which charges this language with notions of identity formation.

However, the Flemish dialect continuum does not end at the Dutch border: the web page ‘Dialecten in de zuidelijke Nederlanden’ of Ghent University explains that ‘Brabant’ dialect is also spoken in the Dutch province of North-Brabant and ‘Limburg’ dialect is also spoken in the eponymous Dutch province. That is why the term ‘the Southern Netherlands’ was introduced: it serves to denote the linguistic area as distinct from the Northern Netherlands, with the terms Southern Dutch and Northern Dutch as linguistic entities ([www.variatielinguistiek.ugent.be/node/81](http://www.variatielinguistiek.ugent.be/node/81)). Having said that, confusion is still immanent between the linguistic labels ‘Zuid-Nederlands’ [Southern Dutch], ‘Belgisch Nederlands’ [Belgian Dutch] and ‘Vlaams’ [Flemish]. As Bakema’s *Vlaams-Nederlands woordenboek* (2003) explains, the first term seems to signify a linguistically coherent area, but may be misleading because of its lack of reference to Belgium. The second term does refer to Belgium, but seems to imply that one language is spoken in the whole of Belgium. It is usually used in juridical contexts to refer to exclusively Belgian concepts. ‘Flemish’, then, may have a limited scope due to its connotative reference to the ‘Old Flanders’, namely West- and East-Flanders, which is historically grown from a linguistically more homogenous and distinct area. In non-linguistic contexts, ‘Flemish’ is used as the adjective of Flanders: the five Northern Belgian provinces, and thus denotes a much larger area (6). ‘Nederlands’ [Dutch], finally, refers to the superordinate language of Flanders and the Netherlands, although one may argue that this language hardly exists, at least when it comes to the spoken form.

In the below discussion, I will seek to apply the above clarified terms as accurately as possible, although consensus on their exact definitions is not reached. The question will now be how Arne Sierens, a Flemish translator, constructed a substandard Dutch variety for a highly linguistically diverse audience, ranging from the Northern to Southern, Western to Eastern Low Countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Here should be repeated that the term ‘dialect’ in the Low Countries has a different meaning than in Anglo-Saxon contexts: it is understood as a language exclusively existent in spoken form, often of lower prestige than the standard and regionally determined. As Bonaffini wrote, ‘dialect’ is considered an autonomous and historically determined linguistic system (which is not necessarily so in Anglo-Saxon definitions) (1997, 281).

### 3.2. Het Zuidelijk Toneel: the choice for Arne Sierens as a translator

The choice for Het Zuidelijk Toneel to take up *Desire under the elms* in their repertoire, was not a self-evident decision, speaks Tindemans. The staging of a farmers' tragedy went against the intellectual refinement still expected in the theatre at the time. Van Hove cherished however a fascination for O'Neill's dramatic art, and directed a total of five of his works. *Desire* was the only one of them in which the deviant language was so remarkably prominent, which urged the need for a suitable translator, most likely different from the previous ones.

Tindemans was, as a dramaturge, in charge of the interpretation of the original play, and could thereby not possibly overlook the importance of the peculiar language to the overall meaning. O'Neill wrote in a regional language, an artificial and vulgar kind of American. He emphasises that the search for a suitable translator was aimed at authors rather than professional translators. Peter Verhelst (who had translated a.o. *Romeo en Julia* for Het Zuidelijk Toneel), as well as Erik De Cuyper (who had translated a.o. the company's adaptation of *A Streetcar named Desire*) were taken into consideration, although the latter favoured an all too poetic style, exactly what this piece sought to avoid.

Soon, his search led to Arne Sierens, an established and celebrated theatre maker, proudly identifying as born and raised in Ghent, who had been inspired by the phonology, grammar and lexicon of Flemish dialects in his dramatic language from 1986 onwards. Although it was far from common to use the substandard in the Flemish theatre scene of the late 80s, Sierens was certainly popular. Moreover, Tindemans says, the "toneelvlaams" [theatre Flemish], which pursued to resemble the standard language, had become discredited, and eloquence had become less prominent among theatre actors. Especially this generation of actors who had been trained by Dora van der Groen (where it had become common to implement 'local' influences in the language), disengaged from superficial eloquence and an affected theatre idiom. One can say that the Flemish theatre scene had been warmed up regarding the staging of substandard language.

Sierens' language was characterised by a seemingly spontaneous, although virtuosically composed rhythm and melody, be it harmonious or deliberately dissonant. This rhythm, creating a poetical effect, was ever at the service of the enacted performance, as though it suggested the gestural element. As the poetical rhythm evoked the performative faculty, the spontaneity transcends pure realism. Also with regard to theme, Sierens' earlier work befitted the play at issue. He had always been fascinated by the lower strata of society. Jans, Opsomer & Stalpaert (1998) note his 'theatre of poverty' as the most radical expression of the 'condition humaine', concerned with the fate of ordinary man (8). This poverty as a theme was reflected in the form and production process of his pieces, marked by purification, by reduction to bare essence (9). Sierens sought to reconcile theatre and realism but, as reminiscent of O'Neill's supernaturalism, he departed from this realism in an aim to transcend it, what he called 'transcendental realism' (11). His local and virtuosically rhythmic language, as well as his themes of poverty, tragedy, fate and the lower social class thus proffered Sierens as a most apt and qualified author for *Het begeren onder de olmen*.

### 3.3. Constructing a ‘regional language’

#### 3.3.1. A translation strategy

For more insight into the translator’s approach to the ST code’s multifaceted implications, we are very lucky to rely not only on an introductory note to the TT written by dramaturge Klaas Tindemans, but also on a personal interview with the same. The title of the note “Van ‘New England’ naar het ‘diepe Vlaanderen’” [From ‘New England’ to the ‘deep Flanders’] (1992, vii) is already revealing with regard to the target setting: the play is markedly set in Flanders, rather than an undefined, neutral place in the Low Countries. The first lines then reveal the TT code to be “Vlaams Nederlands” [Flemish Dutch] (vii). The challenge for the translator, it says, was to “discover” a Dutch dialect (vii), which captures not only the social position but also the emotional lives of the characters, covered by O’Neill’s region- and class-bound language. Tindemans refers to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century typically romantic-nationalistic literary need to express oneself in the American rather than English language, and draws parallels to that same period in Flanders in order to find a corresponding type of language. Sierens’ construction of the literary “streektaal” [dialect] (x), he writes, is based on the Flemish spoken in the old Flanders, west of the Scheldt river, as found in the work of Stijn Streuvels and Hugo Claus. Tindemans tells me in the interview that he made certain dramaturgical modifications to take out what he considered as “too distinctly Ghent dialect” during the translation process, and even more so in the translation from page to stage (as we will discuss later). However, Sierens himself emphasises in a newspaper interview that the language is *nó*t a dialect: indeed, it does not even exist. It is a mixture of Ghent and Antwerp dialect, with possibly even an invented word every now and then (Bliek, 1992). Consequently, he prevents us from trying to allocate the code to one of the manifold Low Countries dialects. About the objective with the particular code, Tindemans writes that the rural Flemish does not seek to depict an idyllic image of rural life, but exactly to portray the characters’ emotional and linguistic struggle, conform the realism Sierens usually pursues in his own works. When asking him about the possible creation of a feeling of identity among the audience, Tindemans’ response was negative. His argument was that the average theatre audience does not have much affiliation with a farmer’s family. Moreover, he said, the audience was to a great extent Dutch, but the language markedly Flemish. Therefore, rather than identification, a sense of alienation was expected to prevail among the majority of the audience.

#### 3.3.2. Literary models: Stijn Streuvels and Hugo Claus

In order to frame Sierens’ language, it is useful to explore how similar cases of literary dialect were dealt with and how literary and linguistic research goes about analysis of such peculiar codes. It is remarkable how little research is conducted on the function of linguistic variation within Dutch literature, in stark contrast to the abundance of articles published on Twain’s literary dialects (although most of these are concerned with verifying dialectological accuracy; Carkeet was an exception). Since the introductory note explicitly refers to the examples set by Streuvels and Claus for the construction of a literary dialect, a brief discussion of their style and approach to this problem may be of interest.

That both authors were born in the ‘deep, old Flanders’, namely West-Flanders, is not a coincidence. Stijn Streuvels’ (1871-1969) novel *Het leven en de dood in den ast* (1926) takes place in his native region. In the preface, Koen Peeters calls the work “een Oer-Vlaamse opera” [a pristine Flemish opera] (8), depicting the culture of Flemish rural life in a thoroughly naturalistic style. It is

not the idyll as found with Felix Timmermans for example, but it is the struggle of ordinary man, of the lower social class, with fate, misery, laborious work in a small, parochial environment, Peeters writes. The thematic parallels with *Desire* are striking, and so are their reflections in language: in Streuvels, we find the same limitation of the verbal faculty among the characters, an equally dissonant melody generated by a cooperation of lexicon and rhythm. It not surprising that Sierens drew inspiration from this approach for literary language construction.

Hubert Lemeire wrote an impressively comprehensive linguistic study on Streuvels' language, based on his entire oeuvre. He focuses on the lexicon, but mentions a series of phonological and grammatical deviations too. Especially the numerous phonological modifications based on some typically West-Flemish vowel and diphthong shifts, and the usage of apostrophe for deletion are worth mentioning. Grammatically speaking, many archaic constructions were retained, such as the diminutive form *-(s)ke*, the casus inflections of substantives and the archaic pronouns and articles. Certain rhythmic features such as the repeated dashes chaining sentences together, are reminiscent of O'Neill's language. Regarding the lexicon, a frequency of interjections signifying a release of emotions is found with Streuvels: besides edulcorated swearwords (*verdorie*, *verdikeke*), Lemeire lists in this context invocations of heavenly and demonic powers and natural phenomena, as similar to *Desire* and redolent of informal, colloquial language. The origin of the lexicon is based on archaic words as well as colloquialisms, but also numerous exclusively West-Flemish words are found. Also loanwords from French, which is a typical feature of West- and East-Flemish dialects, are, whether or not adapted in spelling, bountifully present in Streuvels' idiom. Lemeire thus concludes that the specific code is largely based on West-Flemish dialects. A glance at the lexicon in *Het leven en de dood in den ast*, with items as *effen aan*, *duts*, *pijken-zot*, *te kloffe* or *uitslieren*, seems to confirm this. Peeters concisely called it "een West-Vlaamse kunsttaal geïmpregneerd met Oost-Vlaams, breed opgesmukt met verouderde woorden uit een vergane werkelijkheid" [a West-Flemish artificial language impregnated with East-Flemish, widely adorned with archaic words from a reality long gone] (16).

Streuvels did however not write any drama. Hugo Claus (1929-2008) did, so we might expect his peculiar literary construction to be even more suitable as an example for *Het begeren*. *Vrijdag* (1969) was the first play written in this famous dialect-inspired literary idiom. Wendy Lemmens is currently writing a PhD on the register variation in Claus' literary prose. Although exclusively encompassing his prose, her article (2014) discussing the effects of the language in the novel *Het Verlangen* (1978) is a most useful source of information for the current section. First, she discusses the terminology used by critics and by Claus himself to label his register. Claus was experimenting with language in the 1970s, in an environment of linguistic purism. Critics thought his language was marked, and they labelled it 'colloquial', 'vernacular' and 'Flemish in register' (130). They acknowledged how it contributes to the atmosphere and authenticity of the story, as redolent of O'Neill. Claus himself called it "een Westvlaamse boerentaal" [a West-Flemish country parlance], "cafétaal" [pub speech] (131). Once he describes it as "een literaire taal, Nederlands met Vlaamse invloeden" [a literary language, Dutch with Flemish influences], pointing out its alienating effect (Dull, 1980), another time he calls it "een kunstmatig soort Vlaams, een gemaniëerde taal die bij een bepaald Vlaams dialect aansluit" [an artificial kind of Flemish, a mannered language which corresponds to a particular Flemish dialect] (Heyting, 1982). In the same article, he reminds us of the fact that Dutch originates from Flemish, which, according to Claus, still contains some of the ancient power of the Middle Ages, motivating its literary use for the sake of authenticity. We assume that Flemish here refers to the language of 'the old Flanders'. In the second part of the article,



Lemmens draws on a methodology proposed by Jane Hodson for the systematic study of linguistic variation in literary texts to examine Claus' mode. It is based on the categories 'sound' (both semiphonetical spelling and eye dialect), 'lexicon' and 'grammar', similar to Carkeet. A short analysis shows that mainly lexical markers are responsible for the impression of dialect. Lemmens also touches upon the rhythm of the language, characterised by repetition, lengthy, coordinated sentences and interjections. Both authors thus seem to make use of rhythmic indicators to enhance the impression of the colloquial. For the suggestion of a literary dialect, the most prolific linguistic feature is shown to be the lexicon.

### **3.4. *Desire* and *Het begeren*: a comparative analysis of transformations**

Tindemans' introduction has made apparent that Sierens was well aware of most of O'Neill's objectives with the code-choice in *Desire*. In other words, Sierens had identified the variety's instrumental function to the overall effect of the ST and opted to create a literary language which represents the ST variety's associations and connotations as accurately as possible. The Flemish-Dutch target context bears however a multitude of substandard linguistic variation. Sierens points out that he did not aim to represent any dialect veraciously or in a scientifically underpinned way. Rather, a new language was constructed for the exact purpose of this translation, with practically based considerations of compatibility with the target society (such as audience expectations) kept in mind.

This section examines the phonological, grammatical and lexical markers used in Sierens' translation to develop the characters' specific code. They are observed against the background of Streuvels and Claus' literary models and compared to O'Neill's linguistic markers. Also the treatment of the ST's rhythm will be discussed, as to soundly draw a conclusion on the transfer of the original dramatic functions of the code. Besides code-choice, also the ST's cultural references may induce sites of indeterminacy regarding their transfer to a new context; all the more so since the Flemish-Dutch target context is not culturally homogeneous. Within these culturally defined indeterminacies are included proper names, Biblical allusions and some essentially American concepts.

#### **3.4.1. Markers of the specific code**

##### **3.4.1.1. Phonology and grammar**

Analogous to the analysis of code in *Desire*, a table showing the most systematically applied linguistic features deviating from the literary standard, textual examples and their corresponding standard forms was added below (see appendix B). The phonological markers employed by Sierens represent reduced forms, consonant deletion and assimilations, as similar to both O'Neill's and Streuvels' markers. Note here that vowel deletion in the forms 't or 'k was in fact allowed according to standard codification of the year 1992, although usage was recommended to be reduced to a minimum (van Dale, xxxv). The reduced forms listed in the table, as well as omission of the final consonant in words like *goe* or *nie* and assimilations like *goei* or *ouwe* were and are still features indicative of colloquial language, which is a prominent quality of the ST to be maintained in translation. Assimilation of verb and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronominal subject by means of a 'd'-enclisis (*ziede, kunde, hebde*), then, is a regionally determined feature, common in southern Dutch dialects, in which *ge* and *gij* are used as personal pronouns (De Schutter, 1989). In order to convincingly suggest

linguistic deviation from the standard in a literary text, phonological consistency has shown to be a crucial criterion. The features chosen here are selected strategically, because they apply to words and structures of high frequency, thereby constantly reminding the reader/interpreter of the substandard quality of the language. These commonly occurring words and structures establish the impression of the nonstandard, while less frequent ones have the potency to enhance it.

The number of systematic phonological markers is however strikingly lower than in the source text. Also compared to Streuvels, numerous opportunities to phonologically establish the impression of dialect were not taken up. The main difference is the absence in graphology of vowel and diphthong shifts, which are typically major indicators of dialects. We can presume that this was a conscious decision in order to widen the region of accessibility to the language, because a systematic application of certain vowel and diphthong shifts would impose the choice for a specific dialect and thus geographical area, thereby narrowing down the region of audience intelligibility. Another significant absence as compared to the source text, is that of eye dialect: only two instances could be found. Here could also be added the spelling of “Californie-ah”: the ending is emphasized to create a sense of estrangement caused by the exotic name. In looking for an explanation for these cases of absence, we have to keep in mind that this text – in contrast to the source text – was written for interpretation on stage rather than publication as a work in itself. The graphology, the ‘visual’, was therefore of less importance for suggesting the substandard, to promote the “poetical interpretation” of the reader, because textual reception would mainly happen auditorily. Moreover, the standardisation of vowel and diphthong spelling allows the actors more freedom to accustom those speech sounds to their own accents, avoiding an affected or artificial diction. The overall effect of the selected phonological features is thus the creation of an evident and consistent nonstandard impression, as well as a reinforcement of the code’s colloquial quality. The emphasis on the regional is, out of practical necessity, rendered to a much smaller extent than in the ST.

A look at the table in appendix B shows that also when it comes to grammar, a smaller variety of features is systematically applied in the TT than in the ST. Where O’Neill exploits verb forms as his major tool to suggest the nonstandard, Sierens also opts for adaptation of the more common parts of speech and syntactical constructions, albeit not so heavily reliant on the verb. He manipulates the personal pronouns into their archaic equivalents *ge*, *gij*, *gullie* and *ullie* and employs remnants of the accusative in the old case system adding *-(e)n* to certain articles, pronouns or determiners – in the same way as Streuvels did – as is still a major characteristic of the spoken language both in Flanders and the Netherlands. In this list should be added the use of a few archaic verb forms (*zijt*, *waart*, *gezeid*) and that of the old diminutive suffixes *-(e)ke* and *-ske*, again inspired by Streuvels. In a literary text, the aforementioned features immediately induce an archaic, and in Flanders even colloquial impression. Although the terms may appear as contradictory, in this sense, they are mutually enforcing, because the archaic suggests colloquial authenticity as well as dialect, as opposed to the artificially developed codified literary standard. A typical characteristic of many southern Dutch dialects is the reduplication of the personal subject pronouns *ekike* and *-(d)e gij* (as thoroughly studied by van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen), although they do not appear consistently throughout the text. Parallel with the ST, the translator integrates the ‘false’ use of negative concord as far as it is common in colloquial Dutch, and also the typically vernacular existential constructions are retained in the TT. Again, a smaller selection of grammatical features is deployed than with Streuvels. In this respect should be mentioned that Tindemans adapted the language to do away with some features typical of the Ghent dialect, which he considered too

prominently present. The first sample draft presented by Sierens<sup>4</sup> shows a much more radically and consistently deviating language, as with Streuvels. The typical old-Flemish final *-e* was used in for example *zonne* (*zon*), *schone* (*schoon*), *wadde* (*wat*), *dadde* (*dat*), *vrouwe* (*vrouw*) or *ikke* (*ik*). Also the *-s* was attached to adverbs such as *zekeers* (*zekeer*) and *misschiens* (*misschien*), and archaic forms were more frequently present: *aan den einder* (*op het einde*), *koudvochtig* (*slecht, hard*) and *zere* (*snel*). The eventual translation thus renders a highly simplified version of this initially proposed code.

In conclusion, the grammatical and phonological features which are systematically applied suggest respectively the archaic, dialectal and colloquial nature of the constructed code. Analogous to O'Neill's motivations for creating a profoundly local American language to move away from the British standard, the language here is also used to accentuate conversational authenticity as a move away from the literary standard. Moreover, the archaic grammatical constructions promote the play's 1850s setting, one and a half centuries before the date of performance. Besides sporadic inconsistency and a smaller selection of features, considering the practical impediments of the linguistic target context, Sierens made a largely successful attempt to transfer the archaic, dialectal and colloquial implications of the phonological and grammatical features of the ST code.

### 3.4.1.2. Lexicon

The register of the TT is, analogous to the ST analysis, evaluated by means of a dictionary and reported in appendix B. In this case, the *Van Dale: Groot woordenboek der Nederlandse taal* from 1992 was used, to have an idea of which impression the TT vocabulary must have made on the audience in the year of publication and premiere. Note that a remarkable statement is made in the explanatory introduction of the dictionary, saying that the domain of the *Grote van Dale* *also* comprises the Dutch in Belgium, of which the Flemish provinces belong to the Dutch language area (xx). It seems to imply that the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands is the 'default', the norm, while that in Belgium may deviate from that norm.

A selection of (mainly) register-marked words is rendered in the appendix. As we can see, the majority of the words are classified as "gewestelijk" [regional] by van Dale. With regard to this label, van Dale writes that dialect words are only registered in case they appear in (regional) novels and/or are spread over a wide area (xvi). The dictionary does however not specify the region (excepting the word *kieken*, which is labelled 'Flemish'). The complexity and long history of the language situation in Belgium and the Netherlands, being a geographical continuum of dialects rather than a demarcated division as well as a continuum from dialect to standard language, complicates a more exact localisation of the lexical items. An initial subjective evaluation by a (Hollandic) Dutchwoman provided me with a first impression of the (un)recognisability of the items (as rendered in table c) of appendix B). A more scientifically underpinned review is however desired, for which Bakema's *Vlaams-Nederlands woordenboek* (2003) was consulted. The aim of this dictionary is to develop an inventory of a part of the "Vlaamse" vocabulary, with a view to the differences with standard Dutch (8). Consequently, the words included are assumed to be either unknown, very rare or of a different meaning in the (Northern) Netherlands. For a large part of the words consists an overlap between the items labelled 'regional' (or not included) in van Dale and the items included in Bakema's dictionary: *amaai, gaarne, ieverans, afstrijden, bezien, bleiten, klappen, opdoen, peinzen dat..., rieken, stekken, trekken op, zeveren, kieken, kloef, kolere, miserie, notelaar, patat, prison,*

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<sup>4</sup> The sample draft was presented by Arne Sierens to Klaas Tindemans for feedback on February 6, 1991. It is now owned by Tindemans and was made available to me for consultation.

*schouw*, *zothuis*, *vort*, *'t is koekebak*, *'t zal nie pakken*, *gene klop doen* and *in z'ijn botten hebben* may well be considered to make an alienating impression on a (Northern) Dutch audience, which is in most cases confirmed by the intuitive evaluation. The items that are not included are assumed to be most regionally confined, especially so for the West- (and East-) Flemish item *totten* and the expression *gespogen en gescheten* [dead spit 'n image], a significant motif throughout the play. A handful of words is included in Bakema's dictionary, but not recognised as regional by van Dale. Most regionals occur in the categories of verbs and substantives: open parts of speech rather than closed ones. They are namely less common items in the text and are therefore less likely to impede comprehensibility on the part of a non-Flemish audience.

Apart from many Flemish/Southern Dutch items, also the presence of French loanwords (*salut*, *embrasseren*, *soigner*, *kolère*, *prison*, *mizerie*, *kontent*, *fameus*, *miljaardedju*) is significant. As seen with Streuvels, this is associated with 'old-Flemish' dialects, pointing again to West- and East-Flemish influences in the code. Where in O'Neill lexical features were to a lesser extent responsible for the suggestion of the regional than phonological and grammatical features, the opposite is true for Sierens' translation. This may be considered a compensation strategy, to make up for the scarcity of phonological and grammatical dialectal features.

Besides regional markers, van Dale also labels a series of words as 'archaic' (*anderman*, *gans*, *lijk*, *subiet* and *voort*). These are mainly frequently used words belonging to closed parts of speech. In the same fashion as with Claus, they certainly contribute to the suggestion of authenticity of the Flemish countryside. Colloquial and vernacular items (*anderman*, *vaneigen*, *asemen*, *zuipe*, *scheet* and *ten langen leste*) as well as informal and even 'vulgar' items (*efkes*, *salut*, *asemen*, *gat* and *smoel*), support the impression of the spoken language and the familial, intimate setting. Especially the copious profanities in all their possible variations (*verdoeme*, *verdoemd*, *verdomme*, *godverdomme*, *nondedomme*, *gedoeme*, *miljaardedju*, *naar de kloten*, *voor den duvel* and *van helse duvels*) seem to account for this. Invocations of heavenly powers also occur, but it is remarkable that many of those invocations in the ST have been translated into swearwords, which enhance the low-colloquial quality of the TT. The recurring fillers *waal*, *mebbe* and *ay-eh* have not been left out; however, they have been translated into many more variations than the original three items. *Waal* turns into a series of different interjections: *maar ja*, *alles (dan)*, *ja*, *kijk*, *en dan?*, *krijg nu de stuipen*, *wat peinst ge?*, *avel*, *gedoeme*, *kom* and *euh*. *Mebbe* is varied as *wie weet*, *misschien*, *mogelijks (wel)*, *'t kan z'ijn*, *dat zegt gij* and *dat kunde doen*. *Ay-eh*, finally, has only *ja*, *tuurlijk* and *goe geweten dat* as alternatives. Although the use of interjections is retained, the variations in the TT seem to lose the original effect of repetition, of the 'stalling' word. The word *purty* then, was more consistently translated as *schoon* throughout the text.

More than O'Neill, Sierens deployed lexical items to establish the regional character of the code. He sought to establish the illusion of authenticity in order to create the setting of the old, original Flanders as Hugo Claus pursued, reminiscent of New England as the 'original' America of the Founding Fathers. In an attempt to make the text as authentically Flemish as possible, Sierens had to create an estranging effect on the Dutch audience, although not at the expense of comprehensibility. As in O'Neill, the language was namely in the first place a dramatic instrument to support the setting and themes, rather than hinder them.

### 3.4.1.3. Rhythm

Sierens is known for his attention to rhythm and musicality in the dramatic text. It will not be of any surprise then that he was well aware of the ST's dissonant melody and fragmentary rhythm

created by the length and structure of the sentences. Let us take a look at the same passage from the first scene as used for discussion of the ST rhythm:

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

They are the first lines of the play and immediately set the tone for what follows. The same fragmentary sentence structure as in the original is retained in line (5): “Dat ze dood is” is not an independent clause, even though it is demarcated by an initial capital letter and a full stop. In this case, the translation accentuates the spontaneous and gradual search for words even better than the original line. The dashes are adopted too, as well as the commas, interjections and incomplete sentences. In some places, Sierens seems to have preserved the original structures meticulously: “‘Twould be hard fur me, too, to give up...” (205) is translated into “‘t Zou voor mij ook hard zijn, Mon, om ‘t op te geven...” (4). Because “‘t Zou voor mij hard zijn, ook,...” is grammatically impossible in Dutch, Sierens found an alternative to interrupt the sentence in more or less the same place by interjecting “Mon” instead. As we can see, Sierens was exceptionally perceptive about the halting and unruly rhythm of the ST. The fragmentary lines expressing the characters’ inarticulacy and the spontaneity of on-the-spot composed language is transferred very faithfully.

### 3.4.2. Culture-specific references

#### 3.4.2.1. Proper names

In the article *Culture-specific items in translation* (1996), J.F. Aixelá groups and explains all possible translation strategies applied to culture-specific items, which terminology will be referred to in this section. The treatment of proper names may influence the degree of foreignisation or domestication of the translation considerably. Especially if not adapted, they may induce an estranging effect. In line with the naturalisation strategies of the code, Sierens chose to naturalise the proper names referring to people. ‘Cabot’ remained ‘Cabot’, but ‘Ephraim’ became ‘Jozef’ in the script. Although the Dutch equivalent of ‘Ephraim’ would be ‘Abraham’, ‘Jozef’ is a much more common Biblical name in the Dutch language area. ‘Abbie’ is translated as ‘Bie’, reminiscent of ‘Bieke’, a common name as well, and ‘Minnie’ becomes ‘Mieneken’. In the ST dialogue, the name ‘Simeon’ is substituted by its hypocorism ‘Sim’, a shortened form typically used in more intimate

situations as a nickname or term of endearment, thereby enforcing the text's reflection of informality. However, Sierens substituted it by 'Mon', the alternative more familiar to a Dutch-speaking audience. Peter, or 'Pete' as he is called by Simeon, remains 'Peter', an ordinary name in Dutch too. The most interesting adaptation happens to the name 'Eben', who in translation is consistently referred to as "de kleine" by the rest of the family. Indicating the youngest one of the family, this is a very commonly applied feature in Dutch-speaking families, and would be called a substitution strategy of synonymy by Aixelá. Also at the party, figuring as a baby shower *avant la lettre*, all names are substituted by alternatives familiar to speakers of Dutch, as well as that of the sheriff, where 'Jim' becomes 'Jan'. When it comes to toponyms, Sierens applies conservation strategies. The name 'California' is mentioned repeatedly, but the exotic character of the name is emphasised by means of the phonology: 'Californie-ah'. The toponym 'New Dover' then, is 'dutchified' into 'Nieuw-Dover', or what Aixelá calls a strategy of linguistic (non-cultural) translation.

### 3.4.2.2. Biblical allusions

It may be worthwhile to have a look at how Biblical references were treated in translation. The ST was performed in 1920s' Puritan America, while the TT was performed in the 1990s' Protestant Netherlands and Catholic Flanders, in which the Church was gradually losing its central position. A citation like: "An' God hearkened unto Rachel" (235), is translated as: "En God verhoorde Rachel, zij droeg de vrucht!" (43), explicating her pregnancy. Aixelá lists the term 'intratextual gloss' to indicate this phenomenon. The translator must have assumed that the TT audience was not familiar with the Biblical passage on Rachel's infertility. A reference to Wormwood (238), a Biblical metaphor for things that are unpalatably bitter, was omitted in translation: "Dat maakte mij bitter en ondermijnde mij" (46). Moreover, in the ST, the contrast of the exalted, lyrical Bible verses with a vernacular phonology creates an estranging effect, as in: "Lord God o' Hosts, smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss!" (227). The translation does however not adopt this distorted phonology: "Here God Albeheerser – vervloek deze ongehoorzamen! Zendt hen uw zwaarste straffen" (33), losing the effect. Repeated allusions to Solomon's mines, the Songs of Solomon and his Rose of Sharon are conserved, although one may wonder to what extent the 1990s' Low Countries' audience was still familiar with them and their symbolical implications.

### 3.4.2.3. American concepts

That *Desire under the elms* is a profoundly American play, has become evident throughout the above discussion. It is therefore almost inevitable for the translator to deal with certain Americanisms, typically American concepts incorporated in either dialogue or stage directions. They will be identified, followed by an observation and interpretation of their treatment in the TT translation, in order to better determine the translator's strategy with regard to (in)compatibility of foreign elements.

The hickory is a tree native to and highly common in America, but is very rare to occur and – more importantly – rather unknown in Europe. It has three textual attestations. The first instance is found in the quoted citation by Ephraim "Damned like an old bare hickory tree fit on'y fur burnin'," (210). In this case, it is translated as 'notelaar', a regional word for a tree carrying nuts in general. The use of a hypernym is considered a limited universalisation strategy by Aixelá. It is however Flemish marked; the Dutch counterpart would be 'walnotenboom'. A neutral alternative functioning for the whole language area could have been 'notenboom'. In the second instance, the word appears in the simile "hard 'n bitter's a hickory tree" (222), and is then omitted altogether by

the translation “nen even harde kop” [as hard a head] (27), a colloquial expression indicating obstinacy. Also the last instance is a simile in which the reference was omitted: “I’m sound ’n’ tough as hickory!” (232), translated as “k sta d’er nog kloek en taai op!” [I’m still stout and tough] (39). The omission can be justified because the hickory tree does not have a lexical equivalent in Dutch, apart from its scientific name, and the cultural reference would most likely not be recognised anyways. The translator therefore chose to omit the actual figure of speech, with abstraction of its implications.

‘Preacher’ then, is not actually an exclusively American concept, although its translation into “dominee” deserves special attention. ‘Dominee’ is namely a function associated with the Protestant Church, and thus Dutch-marked in view of the Flemish-Dutch audience. The word ‘priester’ could have served as a Catholic equivalent, but for want of a neutral alternative, preserving the Protestant term seems to be the most straightforward choice. Offering up “prayers of thanksgivin’” (248) is also a typically American religious custom, which in translation changes into “om de maagd Maria te bedanken” [to thank Virgin Mary] (58), referring to Abbie’s alleged conception by Ephraim. Virgin Mary is however a much more prominent figure in Catholicism than in Protestantism, because she is granted very little mention in the Bible. We may regard this case therefore as a rather Flemish-marked adaptation. Religiously determined cultural concepts were thus naturalised, being either more Dutch or more Flemish in tone.

Although attested only once, the word “promenade” (250) may have caused an additional problem to the translator. It is namely a reference to the American tradition of square dancing, a type of social dancing. The event as depicted in the play fits the customs of the dance as described in *American dance: The complete illustrated history*: it is accompanied by a fiddler, the dance’s leader, who improvises square dance calls (Fuhrer, 35). Again there is no suitable counterpart in the Dutch-speaking area, but Sierens opted for a type of festive dance belonging to the Low Countries’ folk culture, typically associated with highly informal parties: the ‘polonaise’ (60). This type of dance, for which people form a string by placing the hands on the shoulders of the person in front, is not to be confused with the Polish polonaise. This is another instance of naturalisation. The most strikingly American concept is perhaps the sheriff. Because no equivalent capturing the same semantic content exists in the Low Countries, this reference remains unaltered. Sierens also preserves the American Dollar as currency in translation, enhancing the ties with the ST setting and culture.

In conclusion, Sierens only sporadically opted to either delete (and therefore avoid) or preserve the cultural reference. In most cases, he went with substitution. For proper people’s names, either naturalisation of synonymy was applied, for Biblical allusion mainly conservation or even explicitation, for American concepts substitution or omission. It is remarkable how naturalisation strategies repeatedly forced the translator into choosing between Flemish and Dutch culture. Because the majority of cases are either naturalised or omitted, the overall handling of culture-specific references should be considered domestication. There are only few examples in which the foreign undeniably filters through: with toponyms, the American Dollar and the sheriff.

### **3.5. The mise en scène: a textual comparison between the page and the stage**

Because the translation was created especially for the stage (what Aaltonen called a ‘performance translation’), an evaluation of the translation’s reception in the target culture should not be based

on textual reception, but on reviews on and reactions to the staged play. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the interaction between text and performance, Pavis' 'mise en scène', which describes this relationship as the confrontation of different semiotic systems.

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

First of all, some important modifications have been made with regard to the actual 'word' (cf. Kowzan's concept). Omissions have been made, not only on the level of individual lines, but even of entire parts of a scene. A striking observation is that the omitted lines and passages contained a vast amount of typically regional lexical items; *bleiten, kloefen, kloek, koekebak, kolère, stekken, subiet, vaneigen, voort, zothuis* and the exclamation *dadde, mannekes!*, as well as the typically Flemish and moreover final word of the translated text *amaai* have disappeared in the performance text. Also certain items which may deviate too much from the desired informal and unsophisticated register are replaced by more according alternatives: *betraand* becomes *vol tranen*, the exclamations *krijg nu de stuipen* and *God den Heer Allemachtig* are replaced by respectively the profanities *godvermiljaardenonedju* and *godverdomme*, while *babietje* is substituted by *kinneke*, a colloquial synonym with archaic diminutive suffix, and *'k Mag u graag* by *Ik heb u graag*, which is less formal. The already culturally adapted name 'Jozef' was in performance replaced by its hypocorism 'Jef' and 'Peter' became 'Pe'. Other omissions or substitutions may well be motivated by cultural considerations. The abovementioned translation of the American hickory tree 'notelaar', for example, was eventually left out on stage. But more conspicuous and substantial interventions are supposedly made out of reasons of practical necessity and performability. The entire scene in which the neighbourhood residents visit the Cabots to celebrate the new-born baby has for example been discarded, or arguably compressed into a remarkably simplified version. An explanation can be found in the fact that the scene requires about ten bit parts who either have a few lines of dialogue or are addressed directly by the leading actors. The size of the company would possibly not have allowed this scene to be staged. The violist is the only character present, but all interaction with him is taken out. The modifications may thus be practically motivated, the consequences are however of a culturally significant nature. The promenade dance on the party as well as Cabot's dancing "lijk een indiaan" [like an Indian] (61), both with express cultural references, are as such omitted altogether. Also the reference to thanksgiving and proper names of the villagers disappear. With regard to the sheriff, another approach is advanced: the sheriff is not given shape by an actor, but by a silhouette projected on the background curtain, identifiable by his distinctively shaped cowboy hat and gun holster. The cultural reference is maintained, but the practical impediment of the actor is overcome.

There is yet another element to the text, namely that which only materialises in performance: that of Kowzan's 'tone'. It is concerned with what we now call 'diction', and mainly the aspect of accent differs for every actor individually, because it is related to his identity. Important to mention



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

Apart from omissions and substitutions, also additions have been made in the text as well as in actions and gesture. The first significant addition is the brothers crossing themselves before having dinner. The application of such a ritual is far more common in Catholic than in Protestant tradition, in which the Word of God in the Bible is the main source of authority and rituals are not a central part of religious praxis. This addition can be considered a form of domestication to the Catholic cultural context. However, the question has to be posed to what extent the reference is meant to be taken seriously: the actors namely mumble the recitation of the Trinitarian formula in such a comical way that the gesture conveys a farcical impression rather than a sense of cultural recognition. Also the song "Californie-ah!" is yelled, blared almost, by Simon and Peter, first while playing air guitar melodramatically, then while stomping around the stage and jumping on top of the dining table. Tindemans told me that this added humour was mainly influenced by the actors. The addition of conspicuous, obscene and 'improper' actions, such as spitting or even urinating on the stage floor, as well as the eye-catching and rather startling presence of five cows on stage during the entire performance, contribute to this comical effect. It can be argued that the shameless execution of these actions and stage design promotes the play's naturalism, as Van den Dries writes, wherein these actions reflect the emotional inner world in physical gesture, thus establishing a physical-demonstrative kind of theatre which transcends the realistic frame (1993, 46). In opposition can be argued that the humorous way in which they are performed rather diminishes its dramatic tension. Instead of advancing the play's likeliness in supernaturalism, they add to its implausibility, run the risk of turning the characters into caricatures and effectuate the exact impression which O'Neill sought to avoid with the language: that of a farce.

When it comes to costumes, little effort was done to create the impression of a 1850's American setting. Although the brothers and father wear suitable clothes for the time, Abbie's appearance, wearing sneakers, breaks the illusion. The stage design then, is much more minimalistic than prescribed in the original. A bed suffices to represent the bedroom, a table the kitchen, a carpet 'Maw's parlour', and the cows the barns. The TT does however not translate the ST's stage directions, or only very selectively, so the reference to the highly symbolic elms is lost in both the text and the visual stage conception.

In the process of the *mise en scène*, a collection of typically Flemish words have been left out, and in addition to the Antwerp and slightly Dutch accents of the actors, there is a loss of a homogenous dialect impression in the performance text. This effectuates a decrease of alienation on the part of a Northern Dutch audience. The substitution of vocabulary and expressions that were considered too formal, enhances the homogeneity of register, while the simultaneous utterance of lines contributes to spoken dialogue spontaneity and thus credibility. The staged

performance text induces a more colloquial impression than the translated dramatic text. A couple of cultural references have been left out, which somewhat acculturates the staged play, and matters of performability cause scenes to disappear and the stage design to change, with a loss of symbolism and fidelity as a consequence. Finally, the question whether the play's naturalism is retained or mocked through the addition of humour, will hopefully be answered by some newspaper reviews commenting on the experience of the spectator.

### 3.6. Reception: effects of the code in *Het begeren*

Almost 70 years after the play's original premiere, brought to the European continent, in a distinctly different language and context of theatre culture, we may expect comments on the transformed work to differ remarkably from those on 1924's *Desire*. Here, we do not find the audience disturbed by offensive themes. Obscenity is however denounced in another sphere, namely regarding the play's poster, showing a naked woman's upper body, leaving nothing to the imagination. Accusations of cheap sexism did not fail to make the news. Even more so, did the presence of the cows on stage. The headlines are revealing enough: "Meeslepend drama tussen duffe koeien" (*Het Parool*), "Koeien beheersen sober toneelbeeld" (*Eindhovenens Dagblad*), "Aards hooglied achter de koeien" (*De Gelderlander*), "Begeerte in boerenstal met acht bruine koeien" (*De STEM*) and "Zeven heuse koeien maakten toneel nog realistischer" (*Zwolsche Courant*) are just a few examples. The media attention, ranging from praise for the innovative and powerful realistic stage design to accusations of vulgar grandstanding and animal abuse, certainly attracted an even greater number of visitors.

What is most pertinent to the present study, are the responses to the staged language, which are strikingly more abundant than they were in America. Especially in the Netherlands, newspaper reviews make mention of what is in the majority of cases called "Zuidnederlands". *Algemeen Dagblad* (Bliek, 1992), *De STEM* (Mes, 1992) and *Zwolsche Courant* (Van der Veen, 1992) call it "Vlaams", while *De Gerlander* (Verbeeten, 1992) even uses the term "Westvlaams". *Trouw* opens the review with a translation of 'schoon', a word unknown in the Northern Netherlands, thereby hinting at the language barrier (Goedbloed, 1992). *Eindhovenens Dagblad* (Havens, 1992), *De STEM* and *Zwolsche Courant* also indicate having difficulties of comprehension, which is even further impeded by the actors talking at the same time. *Trouw* associates the language with the specific countryside poverty, social injustice and oppressive gloominess as found with Stijn Steuvels, Cyriel Buysse and Louis-Paul Boon, which demonstrates how the atmosphere, themes and settings of these authors are immediately related to the new play through its code. The effects of the language are described as creating an apprehensible reality (*De STEM*) and indicating an atmosphere rather than a geographical area (*Eindhovenens Dagblad*).

In Flanders then, geographical affiliations are rejected entirely in *Het Nieuwsblad*, stating that the language becomes a time- and placeless form of communication which underlines the universality of the matter (Vlaeminck, 1992). The estrangement effect is unsurprisingly less prominent in Flanders, but that does not mean that the language is perfectly well-understood in the whole area, which is evident from the reviews. *Het Belang van Limburg* writes: "De zonen voelen zich "gespoog en bescheten", en dat innerlijk armoedig gevoel en die innerlijke tragiek bepalen hun taalgebruik" [The sons feel "gespoog en bescheten", and this inner miserable feeling and inner tragedy determine their language use] (Devens, 1992). The expression "gespoog en bescheten" is here cited incorrectly and mistakenly interpreted literally as 'spit and shat upon', rather than as its

intended figurative meaning of ‘strongly resembling somebody’. This idiomatic expression is however used in western Flemish dialects, and the author must have been unfamiliar with it.

In conclusion, the language may be evaluated as at times obstructive to intelligibility, even in Flanders. However, the critics still praise O’Neill’s supernaturalism and, besides the recurring remarks about the cows, the play as a whole is not considered a farce. They acknowledge the importance of the language, its rhythm and melody to the naturalistic effect, and almost without exception give credit to Sierens, which is not as self-evident in the field of translation.

### **3.7. Discussion of translation strategies: the balance between domestication and foreignisation**

The following discussion seeks to link the theoretical framework to the observations of translation strategies made with regard to the current case. The problems for the theatre translator concerning the relationship between text and performance, as well as context and linguistic variation will be compared to their respective solutions as found in *Het begeren*. This will demonstrate to what extent the difficulties and the applied strategies for drama and theatre translation deviate from other forms of literary translation, and to what extent the literary and performance translations are either domesticated or foreignised.

First of all, let us take a look at compatibility as a criterion for translation. When it comes to theme, on the one hand, the universality of the human condition as an essential condition for successful transcultural theatre supports the translation of this piece. The inability to express emotions, social and verbal poverty, suppressed desires: they are universal phenomena and therefore compatible themes. On the other hand, the play’s subject matter on the American Dream cannot possibly be domesticated in a Flemish-Dutch target context. Since this main theme has to be preserved, it will always constitute an exotic element of the play.

The present study is mainly concerned with evaluation of the code-choice. Hereto, the problems for translation of a substandard language as outlined above (Haywood et al.) will be employed, in order to assess how they were overcome in the current case. The first problem is the recognition of the SL’s peculiarities. To state the obvious: Sierens was very aware of the deviant, marked nature of the ST code. One could however wonder how much affinity he had with the specific phonology, grammar and lexicon which characterise it. Herein, he is considered disadvantaged as compared to the professional translator, who is expected to have received a much better training in this field. We have concluded that O’Neill’s code is not as much regionally bound as it seeks to suggest the vernacular, the colloquial, and thus combines several vernacular features from different areas. It is incomplete, inaccurate and foremost artificial, suggesting a deviation from the standard. This facilitates the recognition of peculiarities somewhat for the translator, or, let us say: it makes it less necessary to localise certain features, because they are less region-specific than with a dialect, the latter having a complex and distinctive phonological and grammatical system.

The second problem, then, is to estimate the importance of the dialect for the play. Here, it is most apparent that the theatre translator takes a different approach than the translator of other literary forms: it is the dramaturge and not the translator, who plays the most important role at this stage, recalling Aaltonen’s concept of collective authorship. Klaas Tindemans’ job is to determine the function of the substandard code for the play. In the introductory note to *Het begeren*, he mentions the American Language Movement, the social and verbal poverty of the farmer’s family, and the inability to express emotions. He acknowledges the code’s socio-cultural relevance, but

also and especially the envisaged effect of literary realism, as well as the struggle for recognition of prose dialogue as artistically valuable. He was clearly attentive to the versatile role of this particular code as a dramatic instrument in support of theme, setting and character formation, as well as the larger socio-cultural American context. It escapes me how previous translations have failed to recognise this, which re-emphasises the importance of retranslations. When it comes to compatibility of the code, it is impossible to transfer all of these implications to the target context of the Low Countries: the period of linguistic identity formation was not similar to that of America, and also prose dialogue had already been recognised as a sophisticated and full-fledged genre. The focus would therefore be on the ST code as an instrument in support of the themes and social setting, by means of low-colloquial, vernacular and rhythmical elements, rather than on its contextual relevance.

The final and most important step is finding a language to accurately represent the variety's associations and connotations. After having determined its value on several levels, Sierens faces the task to find a Dutch-related language which would represent these connotations and implications as completely and faithfully as possible. Note that he seeks to write a performance translation: an autonomous dramatic work for a specific company with a well-known target audience. Moreover, in the face of the enacted performance, the translator takes the subsequent *mise en scène* into account. He decides to also employ a substandard variety – which, given the code's prominent function, is the sole correct decision – in order to create the colloquial, miserable and to a lesser extent regional, isolated character of the play. Because substandard varieties generally lack codification, the construction of a literary dialect, as defined above (Azevedo), was shown to be necessary. This construction involves the selection of linguistic markers while taking into account their respective associations. The regionally or socially bound language it is based on, will be partly determined by earlier literary models. Sierens' first strategy is thus to look at the languages created by Streuvels and Claus, to explore the possibilities. An additional advantage here are the – especially Streuvels' – themes, setting and atmosphere which perfectly align with the play. As these literary dialects are not codified, Sierens still faces indeterminacies when adopting it in a new translation. Also Sierens' own geographical descent is of importance: a solid affinity with the new code is required on the part of the translator. Fortunately, he is thoroughly familiar with the Ghent dialect, situated in the 'old Flanders' of Streuvels and Claus. Moreover, the setting of this area is historically most apposite to the suggestion of the poor and rural Flanders, as an alternative to the poor and rural new England. There is thus an area with similar socio-economical associations available in the target context to project the peculiar ST language onto, which is a major advantage and should not be taken for granted in every translation context. Both this fact and the translator's own affinity with the language, as well as earlier models, account for the selection of this region as a model for construction of the literary language.

Soon, it becomes apparent that the final product of the created code deviates considerably from both Streuvels' model and Ghent dialect, especially so after Tindemans' feedback, who did away with some of the dialectal features, both in grammar and phonology. The dialectal system thus became greatly polished, stripped of its most idiosyncratic features. The principle of consistency, which has shown to be of major significance to the impression of the substandard, is here possibly violated. However, as American critics did not report any issues of unintelligibility, we can assume that the ST code's vernacular features were more widely known in the American language area; for the TT audience, on the contrary, the threshold of comprehensibility was much higher. This explains the omission of too distinctly dialectal features: Sierens was, due to the heterogeneous

target language culture, forced to invent an alternative to actual dialect. He adopted a compensation strategy for the loss of phonological and grammatical markers, by focusing on the substandard, largely Flemish lexicon, as opposed to the ST code. It is still regional in register, but much less narrow in scope than Ghent or West-Flemish dialects. As the contextual factors of source and target culture differ, the approach of code-choice, too, should differ.

Still, reviews commented on the unintelligibility of the staged TT code. A solution to this problem is not readily available, since mediating between intelligibility and a marked, substandard code seems hardly possible. When it comes to Dutch, deviating from the standard means selecting a certain area. Sierens had no other option than to take sides: he could not possibly stage an 1850s' farmer's family in a credible and naturalistic way, while making them speak a widely comprehensible, non-ambiguous (standard) Dutch – assuming that this kind of language exists. As Flemish now causes an alienation effect on the Dutch audience, then standard Dutch would have alienated the characters from their social setting, and would have annihilated the ST code's colloquial qualities. We can conclude that Sierens made the right decision in order to preserve the play's intrinsic qualities, and at the same time create an autonomously functioning literary work.

Besides the substandard, Sierens also manages to transfer, and at times even enhance, the unruly rhythm and dissonant melody. This too, demonstrates how drama translation deviates from that of other literary genres: Sierens seems to 'tailor' the text's rhythm to the actors' gestures, he sees the performance enacted on stage, just like O'Neill did. The text as a work of art in itself does no longer take the most prominent role in the drama, but is at the service of the performance, endorsing the dissolution of theatre from literature. The fact that the actors, who embody the medium for text transfer in performance, have made textual modifications during the translation process, supports this idea. The distinctive accents of Antwerp and Dutch actors increases the divergence from the Ghent or West-Flemish dialects on the page, as did the omission of a vast amount of regional vocabulary during the *mise en scène*. The theatre scene in Flanders had become more and more acquainted with a substandard accent on stage, so in this respect, there is no additional estrangement on the level of audience reception. Although the modification of accents and lexicon may have distanced the text from its original regional tone, substitutions were made for anomalies in register and a compensation for the possible loss of the dialectal aspect in the code was made by means of simultaneous speech. The latter enhances the spontaneity of colloquial dialogue, and is a feature exclusively deployable in the performance medium, not on the page. The same actors were also responsible for the addition of humour, which increases their contribution to the final interpretation by the audience. The fact that affinity with the text's performative aspect is required, explains why the theatre maker/playwright, and not the professional translator, turned out to be most qualified for the job. The actors' (and of course director's) input in the final script emphasises the collaborative nature of theatre translation, also subsequent to the page.

If we draw up the balance sheet between domestication and foreignisation strategies, we encounter a problem with the definitions of the respective terms. They assume a notion of 'the target culture', which is, in the case of the Low Countries, especially with regard to language, not homogeneous. When it comes to code-choice, there is a naturalisation strategy for at least one part of the target culture: the ST code was markedly brought to Flanders, which effectuates the fluency aimed at in domestication strategies. In the (Northern) Netherlands, this will be perceived as estranging, although it may not actually be called 'foreignisation', since the 'foreign', here, is not related to the source culture, but indeed to a less familiar area of the target culture. Also for culture-specific references, mainly naturalisation strategies have been applied. If not, deletion was another

strategy to clear off any threats of foreignisation. The cases in which the references are retained after all, as found with toponyms, ‘sheriff’ and ‘dollar’, figure as anomalies and evoke a highly exoticising effect. Biblical references are largely preserved, but typically American religion-related notions as ‘preacher’ or ‘thanksgiving’ have been substituted by more familiar concepts, giving them a Catholic-Protestant rather than Puritan tone. In general, the references have been domesticated to a great extent.

At this stage, we note a disassociation between domestication of code-choice and culture-specific references on the one hand, and still foreign geographical location and themes on the other. As Sánchez stated above: when the play’s background doesn’t change, the dialectal code may come across as artificial. This intersection is where the translation process is most visible: the play may have been brought to Flanders in language, but impossibly so in themes and physical setting. The American roots are too strong to be discarded. Here, the illusion of equivalence is broken, the ties to the original are pertinent: however skilfully the translator develops a coherent and regional, recognisable and fluent linguistic system, however much culture-specific references are brushed aside, and however universal the themes of struggle with emotional expression and desire may be, the exotic, foreign element will remain present in the foundational themes of the gold rush, the American Dream and the New England background.

Even though we pointed out the TT’s foreign, and thus estranging, elements, and assumed that, especially due to the toponyms, the location had not changed, reviews seem to believe that the play was brought to Flanders, reinforced by the language’s associations with locations in Streuvels, Buysse and Boon. Here, one can see the influence of the regionally coloured code on the suggested setting. Geographical references do not turn out to compose the expected false note in the picture: although the audience undoubtedly acknowledges the play’s American origin and setting, it seems to think that it was projected onto a Flemish context after all. In reception, the universality of the theme of desire as opposed to miserable poverty, and the code’s associations with the old, rural Flanders seem to prevail over the play’s ties to the source culture.

## II. Conclusion

The present research into the translation of the code in *Desire under the elms* for the Low Countries, attempted to first elucidate the implications of this peculiar code. This happened on two levels: a) the intentions and contextual background of the ST author with regard to the code, and b) the code's function in the play's occupations with setting, character formation and themes. The code's specific markers were studied, as well as the audience's responses to the use of this unconventional dramatic language. The second part of the study was concerned with the play's translation for Het Zuidelijk Toneel in the Low Countries. A systematic comparative analysis investigated which problems the translator faced, and how they were overcome.

O'Neill's major occupation with language in the wider cultural context, was to go against the traditional, commercial, entertainment culture of the theatre of his time, in favour of artistic merit. European influences, in combination with the American Language Movement, made him moreover develop a code utterly distinctive from that of the coloniser, to emphasise America's autonomous identity. However, these contextual implications were no longer at stake in the target culture: theatrical experimentation with substandard language as well as the Flemish language movement had culminated long before. Therefore, this first level is not transferred from source to target context. The second level on the contrary, is focused on O'Neill's search for supernaturalism: a naturalist technique as a means to reflect the play's underlying symbolism. He was concerned with 'the truth behind the real' and sought to develop a unity of form and content. Transfer of this aspired supernaturalism would be the translator's main field of interest.

The formal component is most prominently found in O'Neill's code-choice. When comparing the markers selected in both ST and TT, it is impossible to just assess the transfer of individual linguistic features. One should depart from the respective language-specific systems as a whole. What is observed here, is that the ST code rather alludes to the vernacular through phonology and grammar, while Sierens – although the possibility was available in Dutch too – deploys the lexicon to a much higher extent. The original uses the most frequently occurring features as markers, while a marked lexicon is less prevalent. Nevertheless, Sierens manages to promote the substandard with only a handful of carefully selected (mainly) grammatical features. The motivation for this shift in emphasis of markers, is most likely urged by the aim for intelligibility. While O'Neill's vernacular markers were known and intelligible over a large area, finding such markers was much more difficult for the Low Countries.

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

The accusations of incompetence which O'Neill faced as a consequence of his unruly, unconventional prose dialogue, and of obscenity in language, were not at all encountered by Sierens. On the contrary: he was celebrated for his extraordinary use of a meticulously composed language at the service of a 'transcendental' literary and theatrical realism. The main criticism was concerned

with unintelligibility. The difference in audience responses between source and target culture is the result of differences in their respective time- and space-bound theatrical conventions.

So far for the major obstructions with regard to form. The successful transfer of linguistic markers and rhythm means a successful transfer of the play's social setting and character-specific idiom. But how about the theme? The references to the gold rush and the myth of the American Dream are copious; the theme is at the core of the play. Geographical references have thus been preserved, which is arguably detrimental to the vast amount of naturalised culture-specific items throughout the play. However, it was deemed impossible on the part of the translator to alter (domesticate) the play's foundational core. Its roots to the source culture are too pertinent and the limits of compatibility are reached.

Finally, a discussion of the applied translation strategies followed, with an evaluation of the mediation between domestication and foreignisation strategies. We see that there is a linguistic (and cultural) disparity within the Low Countries, which implies that the 'foreign' is experienced even within the target culture itself. In the Old Flanders, west of the Scheldt river, the constructed, Flemish-coloured code is met with familiarity and therefore deemed naturalised. However, in the Northern Netherlands, this same code is still perceived as estranging or even unintelligible. These two areas being the extremes of the continuum, various shades of comprehensibility were experienced in between. Also culture-specific references, which have largely been naturalised, urged the translator to choose between the Northern or Southern culture. The elements which have remained uncompromisingly American, tend to cause a breach in the play's coherence: the code may come across as artificial, which disturbs the illusion of authenticity and literary realism. The actors' addition of humour during the *mise en scene*, promotes this impression. Nevertheless, in audience reception, associations with Flemish literary locations seem to influence the setting in such a way that the ties to the source culture are severely diminished. Regardless of the disassociation between foreign themes and naturalised code, Sierens' outstanding effort to transfer the ST's social setting and the characters' idiom, and to successfully recreate a regionally and colloquially distinctive language, should be acknowledged. As opposed to previous translations, the ST code's value was here not only recognised, but also lived up to in transformation to another culture.

The current research is, as opposed to most dissertations, more extensive in width rather than depth. This is influenced by the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Several chapters deserved to be more elaborated than they are, especially so for the origin of certain linguistic markers, or the role of performability in dramatic translation. I have however aimed to focus on the aspects most relevant to the current research. Herein, I have demonstrated the importance of thorough exploration of the ST code's connotations and implications, regarding both content and context. It does not suffice to just translate a substandard code into another substandard, but it should indeed be exactly *that* code which most accurately transfers the implied functions into the TT culture. Thereby, the study seeks to contribute to research into the function of linguistic peculiarities as a dramatic or, more generally, literary instrument, especially within Dutch literature. In spite of (or maybe exactly due to) the complexity of the continuum from substandard and dialect, it has remained underresearched. Moreover, the study has shown why drama translation, and all the more so theatre translation, should be studied as autonomous fields within TS, since concerns and strategies differ remarkably from those of other literary genres, and therefore require an individual approach. There is the gestural, performative dimension to be taken into account, and



the multi-layered form of collective authorship, also subsequent to page translation, which characterise the medium.

Slowly, the gap in research in the neglected field of drama translation is being filled, but a lot of work still remains to be done. With regard to translation of literary dialect, further research should be conducted in the Dutch language area. It is important to recognise that the current study stayed within the confines of Western source and target cultures, with similar socio-economic, religious and theatrical conventions, as well as within the Germanic languages. It could be interesting to explore more disparate cultures and languages, in order to challenge the flexibility of transcultural compatibility, and to liberate more languages, imprisoned in a work, through re-creation of that work.

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## APPENDIX A: List of phonological, grammatical and lexical features in *Desire*

### a) Phonology

Feature	Occurring form	Standard form
Apostrophe for vowel deletion	's t' t' 'n' 'bout 'ceptin' 'preciate 'pear b'longs rec'lect b'lieve s'pose	as to it and about excepting appreciate appear belongs recollect believe suppose
Apostrophe for consonant deletion	o' he'p wa'm A'mighty on'y wa'n't 'un 'em	of help warm Almighty only wasn't one them
Assimilations	Injuns idjit fust wust	Indians idiot first worst
<i>-ng</i> changes into <i>n'</i>	downin' somethin' drivin' thinkin' thin's bein' turnin' 'ceptin' doin'	downing something driving thinking things being turning excepting doing
<i>-o(w)</i> changes into <i>-er</i>	swaller yaller foller arrer motter piller	swallow yellow follow arrow motto pillow



<b>Vowel/diphthong shifts</b>	fur hum druv tuk luk hull p'int pizen bile jine heerd afeerd (for)git agin kin yit shet jest sech tech jedgment whar thar har fa'r settin' 'arned agen diskiver allus skulp	for home drove took look whole point poison boil join heard afraid (for)get again can yet shut just such touch judgement where there here fair sitting earned against discover always scalp
<b>Eye dialect</b>	figger pictur minit wisht holt likker frens pore hev laffin'	figure picture minute wished hold liquor friends poor have lauging

## b) Grammar

Feature	Occurring form	Standard form
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person verb form for all persons in present simple tense</b>	I does they says I yells we knows they likes they comes we 'bolishes I smells we does the cows knows we cares	I do they say I yell we know they like they come we abolish I smell we do the cows know we care
<b>No or non-standard past simple tenses</b>	I come I give he knowed we was	I came I gave he knew we were
<b>Irregular conjugations of 'to be'</b>	I be I air yew be yew air he be she be we air yew 'n me is they be	I am I am you are you are he is she is we are you and me are they are
<b>Negation of 'to be'</b>	I hain't he hain't we hain't	I am not he is not we are not
<b>Omission of auxiliary verb 'to have'</b>	she done he done I seen we got I been	she has done he had done I have seen we have got I have been
<b>Personal pronouns</b>	ye yew yer yew	you you ( <i>emphasis</i> ) your your ( <i>emphasis</i> )
<b>Possessive pronouns</b>	your'n his'n her'n our'n	yours his hers ours
<b>Non-standard existential constructions</b>	they's they was they'd	there is there was there would
<b>Negative concord</b>	won't never didn't never not no one	will never did never not anyone

	never no never none don't no don't never hain't never none hain't don't nothin' never noways nor nothin' nuther	never never don't never is never none is does nothing never anyways not anything either
<b>a-[gerund] to express progressive aspect</b>	a-comin' a-rizin' a-thinkin' a-goin' a-stayin' a-creepin'	coming rising thinking going staying creeping

### c) Lexicon

Word/expression	Meaning	Register (Informal/regional/literary/ archaic/obsolete/colloquial)
<b>Adverbs</b>		
afore long	soon	archaic, dialect
leastways	at least, anyway	chiefly dialect
nary	not any	colloquial
way (down)	away, far, at some distance	colloquial
<b>Verbs</b>		
to end sb	to kill sb	obsolete
to heft	to lift or heave	colloquial
to let on	to pretend	colloquial
to reckon	to think, suppose	colloquial or dialect
to slick up	to make smart, neat or tidy	colloquial
<b>Substantives</b>		
critter	creature	dialect
elbow grease	vigorous physical effort	colloquial
jiffy	a very short time, instant	early 18 <sup>th</sup> century slang; colloquial
spree	a drinking bout	late 18 <sup>th</sup> century slang
swig	deep draft, especially of liquor	colloquial
vittles	victuals	dialect
<b>Adjectives</b>		
cracked	crackbrained	colloquial
peckish	hungry	NI*
pert	in good spirits or health, lively, brisk	dialect

pesky	annoying, disagreeable, troublesome	colloquial
slick	clever in deception or trickery, smooth	colloquial
<b><i>Expressions</i></b>		
dead spit and image	perfect likeness	colloquial
fair and square	with justice and honesty	colloquial
to get hitched	to marry	colloquial
to hoof it to somewhere	to walk, tramp	colloquial
to light out	to depart suddenly	slang

\*NI: not included, or at least not in this form

## APPENDIX B: List of phonological, grammatical and lexical features in *Het begeren*

### a) Phonology

Feature	Occurring form	Standard form	Translation
Apostrophe for reduced forms	‘t d’ ‘k g’ ‘m w’ z’ t’	het de ik ge hij/hem we ze te	it the I you he/him we she/they to
Omission of final consonant	goe nie iet niet	goed niet iets niets	good not something nothing
Enclitic forms (of verb and 2 <sup>nd</sup> person pronominal subject)	gade kunde wilde ziede wete hebde durfde	ga je kun je wil je zie je weet je heb je durf je	you go/you will you can you want you see you know you have you dare
Assimilation of vowel and consonant	goei ouwe/ouwen kouwen	goede oude koude	good old cold
Eye dialect	mizerie vanzeleven	miserie van zijn leven	misery never

### b) Grammar

Feature	Occurring form	Standard form	Translation
Remnants of old case system	den ne/nen enen diene/dienen gene/genen zone mijne/mijnen uwe/uwen zijne/zijnen hare/haren	de een één die geen zo’n/zo een mijn uw zijn haar ( <i>possessive determiner</i> )	the an one that no ( <i>indefinite pronoun</i> ) such a my your his ( <i>possessive determiner</i> ) her ( <i>possessive determiner</i> )
Remnants of old diminutive suffixes -(e)ke and -ske	koekskes oogskes haakskes manneke lammeke plaatske	koekjes oogjes haakjes mannetje lammetje plaatsje	cookies small eyes brackets little man little lamb spot

	meisken jongske totteke	meisje jongetje kusje	(little) girl (little) boy little kiss
<b>Dialect/archaic verb forms</b>	zijt waart gezeid	bent/zijn ( <i>2<sup>nd</sup> person</i> ) was/waren ( <i>2<sup>nd</sup> person</i> ) gezegd	are ( <i>2<sup>nd</sup> person</i> ) were ( <i>2<sup>nd</sup> person</i> ) said ( <i>past participle</i> )
<b>Dialect/archaic 2<sup>nd</sup> person personal pronouns</b>	ge gij gullie ullie	je jij jullie ( <i>subject form</i> ) jullie ( <i>object form</i> )	you ( <i>singular</i> ) you ( <i>singular, with emphasis</i> ) you ( <i>plural, subject form</i> ) you ( <i>plural, object form</i> )
<b>Doubled personal subject pronoun</b>	‘kik/ekik [zie]de gij	ik zie jij	I you see
<b>Non-standard existential constructions</b>	‘t zit ‘t moest ‘t staat	er zit er moest er staat	there is there had to it says
<b>Negative concord</b>	nooit nie niemand nie	nooit niemand	never no one

### c) Lexicon

Sorted from most closed to most open parts of speech:

Word/expression	Meaning	Register (Informal/regional/literary/ archaic/obsolete/colloquial)	Flemish?	
<b>CLOSED PARTS OF SPEECH</b>		van Dale Groot Woordenboek	Intuitive evaluation	Vlaams-Nederlands woordenboek
amaai	exclamation of surprise or disappointment	Flemish, informal	x	x
anderman	iemand anders	archaic, vernacular		
efkes	even	NI*; 'effe': informal		
gaarne	graag	formal; 'gaarne zien': regional		x
gans	helemaal	archaic		x
helegans	helemaal	regional		
ieverans	ergens	regional	x	x
lijk	zoals	archaic, regional, literary language	x	
salut	dag, tot ziens	informal	x	
subiet	straks, zo dadelijk	archaic, regional	different meaning	
vaneigen	natuurlijk	vernacular	x	x
voort	weg	archaic		
<b>OPEN PARTS OF SPEECH</b>				
<i>Verbs</i>				
afstrijden	loochenen, tegenspreken	regional	x	x
asemen	ademen	informal, regional, colloquial		
bezien	bekijken, aanzien	regional		x
bleiten	huilen	NI	x	x
embrasseren	omhelzen	NI	x	

klappen	praten	regional	x	x
opdoen	opmaken, in orde brengen	regional	x	x
peinzen dat...	menen/denken dat...	regional	x	x
rieken	ruiken	regional		x
schreeuwen	huilen	regional		
soigneren	verzorgen	standard		
stekken	vastgrijpen	regional	x	x
tieren	roepen	standard	different meaning	
totten	zoenen	NI	x	
trekken op	lijken op	NI	x	x
zagen	voortdurend zaniken	standard	x	x
zeveren	onzin verkopen	regional		x
zuipen	alcohol drinken	vernacular		
<b>Substantives</b>				
gat	achterwerk	informal		
kieken	kuiken	Flemish, regional	x	x
kloef	homp, kluit	regional	x	x
kolère	woede	NI; 'kolere': regional	x	x
mizerie	ellende	NI; 'miserie': regional		x
notelaar	notenboom	regional		x
patat	aardappel	regional	x	x
prison	gevangenis	regional	x	x
schouw	schoorsteen	regional		x
smoel	gezicht	vulgar		
sukkelaar	sukkel, stakker	standard	x	
tot(teke)	zoen	NI, 'toot': regional	x	
zothuis	gekkenhuis	regional	x	x



<i>Adjectives</i>				
fameus	veelbesproken	standard		x
kontent	tevreden	standard		x
vort	gemeen, corrupt	regional	x	x
<i>Expressions</i>				
't is koekebak	het is weer zover	NI	x	x
't zal nie pakken	het zal niet lukken	regional	x	x
dat g'er goed op staat	dat je (fysiek) sterk staat	NI; 'op zijn poten staan': regional	x	
effen staan	gelijk staan	standard	x	
geen scheet	helemaal niets	vernacular		
gene klop doen	helemaal niets doen	regional	x	x
gespogen en gescheten	helemaal gelijkend op	NI	x	
goe geweten dat	wees maar zeker	NI	x	
in zijn botten hebben	binnen hebben (van drank)	NI	x	x
ten langen leste	ten laatste	vernacular		
zijne kop leggen	sterven	NI	x	

\*NI: not included, or at least not in this form

