

ZELFPORTRET VAN DE KUNSTENAAR ALS JONGE MAN, by James Joyce. Dutch translation by Erik Bindervoet and Robbert-Jan Henkes. Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2014. 336 pp. €19.99.

THEY WERE LIKE POETRY, by Elisabeth Tonnard. Leerdam: self-published, 2014. 68 pp. €18.00.

The first work of James Joyce to be translated into Dutch was *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, by Max Schuchart in 1962.¹ In 1972, Gerardine Franken and Leo Knuth published a second translation, more precise but less fluent than the first one.² Forty-two years

passed before a third translation was produced, this time by Eric Bindervoet and Robbert-Jan Henkes. In recent years, Bindervoet and Henkes have become a familiar sight at Joyce conferences all over Europe. Their connection with Joyce began in 1995, when they started working on the first Dutch translation of *Finnegans Wake*.³ The book was published in 2002, not as a *vertaling* (translation), but as a *her-taling* (reproduction in another language), thanks to Stephen Joyce.⁴ Undeterred, they next tried their hand at *Ulysses*,⁵ a book that had already been translated into Dutch twice before.⁶ To top things off, they have now produced *Zelfportret van de kunstenaar als jonge man*.

In the epilogue to the book, Bindervoet and Henkes discuss the first sentence of *A Portrait* and the way they arrived at their translation of it, revealing some of the principles they applied. Joyce's "moocow" (P 7), for instance, became "kakoetjeboe" in Dutch, "because we had that left from our translation of 'I Am the Walrus' by the Beatles."⁷ As one Dutch reviewer noticed, Joyce himself would probably have liked such an anachronism, because it yields a strange yet understandable little children's word.⁸ This is vintage Bindervoet and Henkes: at first glance, they might seem rowdy and not to be taken seriously, but at the end of the day they deliver the goods in a way that deserves much respect.

One small example indicative of the difference between the three translations is illustrated as follows. Towards the end of chapter 4, Stephen muses on his refusal to become a priest and remembers "a proud cadence of Newman," while "[t]he pride of that dim image brought back to his mind the dignity of the office he had refused" (P 165). The first Dutch translation by Schuchart renders this as "[d]e verhevenheid van die onduidelijke beeldspraak bracht de waardigheid van het ambt dat hij had afgewezen in zijn herinnering terug" (181). He needs thirty-seven syllables for a Dutch sentence that is still a bit obscure, and he misses part of the original meaning. The second translation, by Franken and Knuth, is more accurate but rather cumbersome: "De trotse luister van dit wazige beeld deed hem terugdenken aan de waardigheid van de levensstaat die hij geweigerd had te aanvaarden" (211). They require thirty-seven syllables as well, and words like *luister*, *levensstaat*, and *aanvaarden* have an archaic ring. Bindervoet and Henkes create a translation of the sentence that is both correct, short, and fluent: "De trots van dat vage beeld bracht hem weer de waardigheid voor de geest van het ambt dat hij had geweigerd" (194). Using only twenty-six syllables, none of the original meaning is lost, and the result is a normal sentence in contemporary Dutch.

Bindervoet and Henkes's translation of the last sentence of *A Portrait*, "[o]ld father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (P 253), also reveals an interesting detail. The final three words

are lost in the first two translations despite the fact that “to stand in good stead” has a perfect (albeit archaic) Dutch equivalent: “goed te sta(de) komen.” As the Dutch Joyce scholar Onno Kusters pointed out to me, because of their work in translating *Ulysses*, Bindervoet and Henkes are aware that the first word of that book, “[s]tately” (U 1.01), echoes the last word of *A Portrait*. Their choice, therefore, for the last sentence is a little artificial, but the echo remains intact: “Oude vader, oude ambachtsman, kom me nu en steeds goed te sta”; *Ulysses* then starts with the word “Statig.”

Insightful as they may be, isolated sentences are not the point; it is the translation as a whole that matters. After the *Wake* and *Ulysses*, *A Portrait* may not have been the challenge of a lifetime for Bindervoet and Henkes, with the risk of underestimation constantly lurking. They can, however, be proud of this particular work. *Zelfportret van de kunstenaar als jonge man* is an exemplary translation, restoring a measure of freshness to the book that had been lost in the previous Dutch versions.

A volume entitled *They Were Like Poetry* by the Dutch artist and poet Elisabeth Tonnard was also produced in Holland, and it takes *A Portrait* as its starting point. Tonnard’s corpus includes books on art, photography, and literature; she has published over thirty works that are included in numerous public collections, such as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art Library in New York, and the Tate Library and Archive in London.

They Were Like Poetry is a small book, “based on a suggestion by James Joyce.”⁹ The “suggestion” is actually one of Stephen’s thoughts while daydreaming about the sentences in his spelling book at Clongowes Wood College:

They were like poetry but they were only sentences to learn the spelling from.

*Wolsey died in Leicester Abbey
Where the abbots buried him.
Canker is a disease of plants,
Cancer one of animals.*

It would be nice to lie on the hearthrug before the fire, leaning his head upon his hands, and think on those sentences. (P 10)

“Which is what I did,” Tonnard comments dryly. She went online to look up the grammar text by Alexander Allen and James Cornwell, took a few dozen sentences from the book, and rearranged them into poems.¹⁰

The result is a fascinating exercise in what might be called “poetic

linguistics." Tonnard uses the sentences from the grammar as building blocks for new structures. By changing the context, she creates meaning, and at times even narrative, from the simplest of sentences:

The horse eats the corn.
The corn delights the horse.
The uncle bought the house.
The house pleases the uncle.
The boy wrote the letter.
The letter pleased the father.
The master frees the slave.
The slave is exceedingly thankful. (21)

Tonnard's book brings to mind Roman Jakobson's concept of the poetic function of language, where the main point of the message is not its content but the way in which this content is delivered.¹¹ This, in turn, can shed some additional light on Stephen's struggle with language in the beginning of *A Portrait*: he reacts to the beauty of the sentences without having an idea of their meaning.

While working on her book, Tonnard discovered that the rather ominous examples Joyce mentions ("Wolsey died . . .") were not even close to the text of the original grammar book and concluded that Joyce either made them up or quoted them from other sources. Although this small observation may be of only slight interest to Joyce scholars, *They Were Like Poetry* as a whole should not be underestimated. The collection is a reflection on the workings of language in general and, therefore, also on Joyce's use of it. Deceptively simple, it is an intelligent, sensitive, and highly original spin-off of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The edition consists of only one hundred numbered copies, so those interested in purchasing it should hurry.

Reviewed by Jack van der Weide

NOTES

¹ James Joyce, *Het portret van de jonge kunstenaar*, trans. Max Schuchart (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker, 1962). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Joyce, *Een portret van de kunstenaar als jongeman*, trans. Gerardine Franken and Leo Knuth (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1972). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, trans. Erik Bindervoet and Robbert-Jan Henkes (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 2002).

⁴ For a discussion of this *hertaling*, see my review in the *JJQ*, 40 (Spring 2003), 625-29.

⁵ Joyce, *Ulixes*, trans. Bindervoet and Henkes (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 2012).

⁶ See Joyce, *Ulysses*, trans. John Vandenberg (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1969), and *Ulysses*, trans. Paul Claes and Mon Nys (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1994).

⁷ See Bindervoet and Henkes's "Nawoord van de vertalers" (p. 300). They also translated all of the Beatles lyrics, and John Lennon's "goo goo g'choob" was transformed into "kakoetjeboe."

⁸ Arjan Peters, "Kakoetjeboe en bolle piccolo," *de Volkskrant* (2 August 2014), n.p.

⁹ See <<http://elisabethtonnard.com/works/they-were-like-poetry/>>. Further comments by Elisabeth Tonnard about this work will be cited to this website.

¹⁰ See Alexander Allen and James Cornwell, *A New English Grammar with Very Copious Exercises, and a Systematic View of the Formation and Derivation of Words* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1841), and <<https://archive.org/details/anewenglishgram00corngoog>>.

¹¹ Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. T. Sebeok (Cambridge: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), pp. 350-77.