

Dethroning Dante

Skopostheorie in Action



Tim N. Smith

Thesis submitted to Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in Literary Translation Studies

2016

Quel sorriso m'ha salvato da pianti e da dolori...

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Abstract

Dante's *Commedia* has been translated into English more than one hundred times. As a result, there are plenty of opposing opinions on how best to translate Dante's masterwork. One can mimic Dante's rhyme scheme (*terza rima*), utilize a more conventional English metre or rhyme scheme, or resort to a prose translation that abandons any attempt to reproduce Dante's poetics. It is the purpose of this study to demonstrate that all of these are, in the right context, appropriate translation strategies; no platonic ideal translation strategy exists. To provide a more tolerant approach to translations of Dante's poetry, I employ a translation theory called *Skopostheorie* (*skopos* theory). This theory argues that each translation has its own unique purpose (*skopos*); there are any number of (valid) strategies available to the translator. This theory is often seen as extreme, providing the translator with too much freedom to manipulate the text. Accordingly, this thesis first makes a case for the application of *Skopostheorie* in literary translation, attempting to defend it against its critics. Second, this essay exhibits how the theory may be applied in practice. To demonstrate its application, I look at three very different English translations of the first canto of Dante's *Inferno* published during the 1990s. These translations are by Seamus Heaney (1993), Steve Ellis (1994), and Robert M. Durling (1996). In doing so, I hope to identify the various approaches of these translators, to demonstrate the breadth of options available to translators of Dante's *capolavoro*, and to add to the discourse on the reception of Dante in the English-speaking world.

Acknowledgments

Above all, I must thank Dr Marco Sonzogni for his remarkable assistance and encouragement throughout my research. It was he who first ignited my interest in translation and translation theory. I could not have asked for more of a supervisor. Thanks to his encouragement, I was able to combine my interest in Dante and Italian poetry with translation studies. The present research strives to subsume these two interests. Indeed, I owe my interest in the former two subjects to the wonderful staff at the Italian department of the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University, namely Dr Sally Hill, Dr Claudia Bernardi, and Marco himself. I am obliged to them for the tremendous support and inspiration that they have provided over the years. My interest in Italian language and literature continues to grow thanks to their encouragement. Regarding my research, I also ought to thank the Victoria University Library—chiefly the Interloans department—for providing me with the resources that I needed to pursue my own unique avenue of research. A great deal of the books and articles that I required were not held by the library, and it is thanks to the unbelievable endeavours of the library staff that I was able to piece together my research.

I must also thank, without any hint of sarcasm, Marco (again) for the important distractions that he provided during my research. These distractions ranged from the many coffees at Vicbooks to translation and book projects. Indeed, I am extremely grateful to Marco for allowing me to take part in his *To Hell and Back* book project (John Benjamins, forthcoming), which serves to compile Dante's English translators in one concise, unique volume. I look forward to working with him in a number of exciting forthcoming projects.

The cover image of the present work is "Dante in Meditation Holding a Pomegranate", sketched by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (ca. 1852); it is public domain thanks to the Wikimedia Foundation.

A number of other people have aided me in my research over the past year. The Victoria Scholarships Office, naturally, has been very helpful, and I could not have managed this piece of research without their assistance. I ought also to thank those who provided anonymous references for me in my scholarship applications. I must also thank those with whom I have been in email communication to help me (nearly) to complete my table of translators (see Appendix), namely Stephen Wentworth Arndt, Leon Stephens, John Lambert, and, above all,

David Spooner and the Stirling University Library (respectively) for providing invaluable information about the nebulous Gilbert Cunningham.

The VUW Classics department has provided tremendous encouragement and assistance over the last couple of years. Their faith in me (despite my questionable loyalty and departure to the School of Languages) has been touching. I am most grateful to them for allowing me to continue to act as a tutor for them while writing my thesis, and for allowing me to present an analogous paper (on translating Virgil) at the Wellington Classical Association Postgraduate Symposium. Among the many wonderful staff members, I ought to thank Professor W. Jeffrey Tatum (for allowing me to tutor for his courses, and for luring me back into the Classics department), Dr Diana Burton (for teaching me Greek and employing me as a tutor), and Dr Simon Perris (for his faith in me as an editor). Equally, I must thank the team at Student Learning at Victoria, especially Ann Pocock, Jan Stewart, and Marie Paterson, for letting me stick around there for another year.

Above all else, I must thank Nikki, my sister Anna, and my parents, without whose support I could not have dreamt of embarking on such a project. The epigraph is taken from a Salvatore Quasimodo poem entitled “Lettera alla madre”. For what it is worth, this thesis is dedicated to those whom I love most in the world: Mum, Dad, Anna, and Nikki.

List of Abbreviations in the Present Work

Due to frequent use, or for the sake of brevity, the following works are cited by use of these abbreviations.

Abbreviations of Dante Alighieri's works:¹

<i>If</i>	<i>Inferno</i>
<i>Pg</i>	<i>Purgatorio</i>
<i>Pd</i>	<i>Paradiso</i>
<i>Cv</i>	<i>Convivio</i> ²

Reference works:

<i>AEIt</i>	Giacomo Devoto. 1968/1979. <i>Avviamento alla etimologia italiana</i> . Milan: Mondadori.
<i>Dant. Enc.</i>	Richard Lansing (ed.). 2000/2010. <i>The Dante Encyclopedia</i> . New York: Routledge.
<i>Enc. dant.</i>	Umberto Bosco (ed.). 1970–6. <i>Enciclopedia dantesca</i> . Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana. 5 vols.
<i>ILET</i>	Robin Healey (ed.). 2011. <i>Italian Literature before 1900 in English Translation: An Annotated Bibliography 1929–2008</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
<i>LSJ</i>	H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott. 1843/1977. <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> , H. S. Jones (rev.). Oxford: Clarendon.
<i>OED</i>	OED online. Oxford English Dictionary, 3 rd edition, December 2011. Retrieved from www.oed.com

Translations of Dante's *Inferno*. Used only when citing the translated text:³

<i>DIf</i>	Robert M. Durling. 1996. <i>Inferno</i> . New York: OUP.
<i>Elf</i>	Steve Ellis. 1994. <i>Hell</i> . London: Chatto & Windis.

¹ Consistent with those provided in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*. All editions of the *Commedia* are from Giorgio Petrocchi's *Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata* (1966). These references are employed only when referring to the Italian text.

² 1995 edition, edited by Franca Brambilla Ageno. Florence: Edizione Nazionale.

³ Paratext, which constitutes the translators' own original words, will be cited in standard APA format. For example, Ellis's translation of *If* I 1 will be cited thus (*Elf* 1). The "1" refers to Ellis's page number. However, if I were to cite Ellis's explanation of this passage (Dante is "at thirty-five years of age"), I would cite it thus (Ellis 1994: 1). The latter format applies for introductions, prefaces, footnotes, endnotes or any other form of paratext.

<i>Hlf</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1993. In <i>Dante's Inferno</i> , edited by Daniel Halpern, 3–15. Hopewell: The Ecco Press.
<i>HHlf</i>	Robert and Jean Hollander. 2000. <i>Inferno</i> . New York: Doubleday.
<i>Jlf</i>	Clive James. 2013. <i>The Divine Comedy</i> . London: Picador.
<i>Mlf</i>	Mark Musa. 1971/2003. <i>The Portable Dante</i> . London: Penguin.
<i>Nlf</i>	J.G. Nichols. 2005/2014. <i>The Divine Comedy</i> . London: Alma.
<i>NoIf</i>	Charles Eliot Norton. 1891/1920. <i>The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri</i> . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
<i>SaIf</i>	Dorothy L. Sayers. 1949. <i>The Comedy of Dante Alighieri</i> . Harmondsworth: Penguin.
<i>ScIf</i>	John D. Sinclair. 1939/1948. <i>The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri</i> . London: John Lane.
<i>SgIf</i>	Charles S. Singleton. 1970. <i>Inferno: Italian Text and Translation</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press.
<i>Zlf</i>	Elio Zappulla. 1998. <i>Inferno</i> . New York: Pantheon Books.

Other poetic works:

<i>FW</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1979. <i>Field Work</i> . New York: Faber and Faber.
<i>SA</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1983. <i>Sweeney Astray</i> . London: Faber and Faber.
<i>SI</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1984. <i>Station Island</i> . London: Faber and Faber.
<i>HL</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1987. <i>The Haw Lantern</i> . London: Faber and Faber.
<i>ST</i>	Seamus Heaney. 1991. <i>Seeing Things</i> . New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
<i>BT</i>	Seamus Heaney. 2004. <i>The Burial at Thebes</i> . London: Faber and Faber.
Verg. <i>Aen.</i>	Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i> . Oxford Classical Text.
J.D. <i>Ded. Aen.</i>	"Dedication of the <i>Æneis</i> ". In John Dryden. 1697/1958. <i>The Poems of John Dryden</i> , James Kinsley (ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
J.D. <i>Sylvae</i>	John Dryden. 1685. <i>Sylvæ: or, The Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies</i> . London: Jacob Tonson.
G.L. <i>Opere</i>	Giacomo Leopardi. 1956. <i>Opere</i> . Vol. 1. Edited by Sergio Solmi. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Dante's *Inferno* has been translated into English with extraordinary frequency over the last two centuries. It was first translated in full in 1782 by an English civil servant called Charles Rogers, about whom very little is known.¹ The *Inferno*, however, did not work its way into the mainstream of English literature and translation until the nineteenth century, when Samuel Taylor Coleridge presented a series of lectures on Dante.² Partly due to Coleridge's praise, it was Henry Francis Cary's translation (1805–06, 1814) of the *Commedia* that got things started (De Sua 1964: 26; Crisafulli 2003: 145). It became immensely popular in its day, and thenceforth one begins to see an explosion of interest in translating Dante:

Cary's translation has enjoyed a popularity far beyond any of its nineteenth-century rivals [...]. Throughout these hundred years a large proportion of English-speaking students of Dante made their first acquaintance with him through Cary; in many cases chance acquaintance with [Cary's translation] proved to be the spark from which a great flame followed.

(Cunningham 1965: 20)

This metaphorical flame has become something of a wildfire. Over 120 different translators have rendered at least one full canticle of the *Commedia* in English since Cary's *Inferno* was first published; it has been attempted by established poets, scholars of Italian, and amateurs alike.³ The reception (and translation) of Dante into British and American culture has thus become an extremely rich topic.

¹ Cunningham (1965: 13–14) provides the briefest of biographies.

² De Sua (1964: 22): "Coleridge was largely responsible for raising Dante's reputation to the height it still [occupied in 1964]". Tinkler-Villani, conversely, has made the claim that Dante's popularity in England was due, to a great extent, to "eighteenth-century English culture" (1989: 8), while Bassnett (2014: 99) has (without basis) argued that it "failed to have any impact on English literature". But the point stands that Dante did not gain traction in English literature until the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century.

³ This is, of course, excluding the vast array of translations of single cantos, which would be almost impossible to quantify.

But this essay is not a story of Dante's influence on English-language literature, nor is it a detailed history of translating Dante into English.⁴ A great deal of attention has already been paid to Dante's influence on English poetry in the nineteenth century (on Romantics like Blake, Coleridge, etc.) and early twentieth century (on Modernists like Pound, Eliot, etc.). Somewhat less has been written on the reception of Dante in the post-war period. This dearth is somewhat counterintuitive, especially when we realize that Dante has been translated at an even greater rate from 1945 to 2016 than from 1782 to 1945.⁵ This essay, then, will hope to open up the discussion on the reception (and, specifically, the translation) of Dante in the late twentieth–early twenty-first centuries.⁶ In earlier translations of Dante, there is something of a “backdating” tendency: “a tendency which corresponds to a sense of the poem as a curio from a more or less superseded world” (Griffiths & M. Reynolds 2005: xxi).⁷ This seems to have changed in recent decades. The archaizing tendencies of pre-war translations ensured that there was not a significant variation in the English that Dante was made to speak. The vast growth in translations of the *Commedia*, coupled with a gradual shift in translation norms, has resulted in a greater variety of translation strategies. Gilbert Cunningham, writing in 1966, was perhaps a little too tentative in his hypothesis that “the translation of the Divine Comedy will continue during the remainder of this century at much the same rate as that recorded for the recent post-war period” (1966: 280). If anything, it has increased.

But this essay is not just about Dante; it is also about translation theory. Before discussing a handful of recent translations of the *Inferno*, I provide a framework with which to study them. This framework is based on *Skopostheorie*, devised by the German translation scholar Hans J. Vermeer (1930–2010) in the late 1970s.⁸ I contend that *Skopostheorie* is a perfectly valid approach with which to analyse literary translation (descriptively), and to advise literary critics on how to assess the quality of a translation (prescriptively). This is the subject

⁴ Many such studies have been published in the last few decades, with especial focus on Dante's early (pre-1900) influence. The classic works on this subject are Toynbee (1921), De Sua (1964), and Cunningham (1965, 1966); we have, however, seen a recent resurgence in interest in the subject, especially from scholars of English literature: see, among others, Ellis (1983), Tinkler-Villani (1989), Wallace (1993), Milbank (1998), Griffiths & M. Reynolds (2005), and Havely (2014). For a unique view of Dante's influence in the United States, see Looney (2011).

⁵ See Appendix.

⁶ Havely's eighth chapter (2014: 260–83) encouragingly discusses more recent translations and adaptations of the *Inferno*, while De Rooy (2003, ed.) is perhaps the best discussion of (some) recent translations currently in print. Some post-war translators have received a bit of coverage, especially Sayers (1949), Heaney (1979, 1993), Pinsky (1994), and Carson (2002), but a holistic study of recent translations (such as that of Cunningham 1965, 1966) does not currently exist.

⁷ This attitude seems to have pervaded translation practice in general; see Bowra (1966: 216) on this “consciously archaic” style.

⁸ Also known as “*skopos* theory” or (less frequently) “*scopos* theory” (with or without italics; with or without capitalization). In this essay, I shall use only the German spelling of the theory (with nominal capitalization): “*Skopostheorie*”.

of Chapter Two. *Skopostheorie* is an inherently flexible and tolerant theory of translation that allows and justifies all manners of translation in any genre. It is a so-called “target-oriented” theory.⁹ Such an orientation means focusing study on the target text (the text that has been translated) “and its position in the target culture” (the culture that receives and reads the translation) (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997/2014: 165). Or: “translations [should] be regarded as facts of the culture that would host them” (Toury 2012: 18). There is something of a trend towards such “target-orientedness” from the 1980s onwards, arguing against previous (source-oriented) theories that were “mainly preoccupied with the proclaimed protection of the SL [source language: the language in which the ‘original’ was written] rights” (18).

Skopostheorie, then, encourages us not necessarily to judge a translation by its relationship with the source text (or the ‘original’), but by its function in the target culture. Ignore the source text for a moment, it recommends. Look at what the translator’s purpose was, and evaluate the translation not on its relationship with the source text, but by its ability to meet the stated aim. This ‘stated aim’ is known as the *skopos* (plural *skopoi*), from the Greek σκοπός, meaning aim, end, or object.¹⁰ It has also come to mean (in Vermeer’s formulation) purpose or function, and can refer either to the target text or the translator: texts have functions, translators have purposes; but both have *skopoi*. Vermeer coined this as a (pseudo-)technical term to signify the translator’s intention in the production of a translation. The theory hinges on this term. The translator, according to the theory, need not be constrained by the source text, and is “at liberty to reconfigure a text in accordance with the [target culture] norms” (Bassnett 1980/2014: 84). This obviously provides the translator with a great deal of freedom: “translators may make any adjustments to a text that they deem appropriate” (84).

As a result, the theory has received its fair share of criticism over the years. This criticism boils down to two main threads of thought. For some, *Skopostheorie* is too tolerant: it allows translation strategies that are unethical and turns the translator into a kind of “mercenary” (Pym 1995a: 338). A second view holds that *Skopostheorie* states the obvious, and does not really offer much to the field of literary translation (Pym 2014: 49). So, there is some work to be done towards justifying the use of *Skopostheorie* in a study of the translation of a literary text. As such, following a detailed discussion of the premises of *Skopostheorie*

⁹ This term was popularized by Toury (1980), though perhaps first coined by Katharina Reiß, though the term has since been frequently applied to Vermeer’s contemporary approach to translation. See Toury (2012: 19) for acknowledgement of Vermeer’s target-orientedness, even though “the two of us were practically unaware of each other’s work” at the time. Similarities between the two scholars’ approaches are discussed at section 2.2.

¹⁰ Note that this sense was primarily metaphorical in ancient texts. See *LSJ* 1614 (s.v. ‘σκοπός’ II 2).

(2.1) and a description of other “target-oriented” theories (2.2), I examine some of the central criticisms of *Skopostheorie* (2.3).

Despite a number of issues and (especially) vagaries, I contend that *Skopostheorie* is a useful approach with which to evaluate and to describe translations. Admittedly, it fails to provide a coherent framework of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) and, if taken as dogma, could encourage translators to go about their work unethically. I accordingly impose a few limitations on *Skopostheorie* in my essay (2.3.3). Nevertheless, it has two central interrelated functions, first for the translator, second for the critic:

1. It justifies both creative and scholarly approaches to translation; it reassures the literary translator that there is no objectively superior translation method.
2. It instructs critics and lay-people alike that there is no ‘better’ way to translate a single text; as a result, translations ought to be assessed not necessarily on their relationship with the source text, but on their adherence to their professed *skopos*.

As a retrospective (not didactic) study, this essay is focused more on the second axiom. But at a broader level, the tolerance that the theory espouses, uniting these two axioms, encourages us to accept all manner of translation strategies.

This is particularly important in the case of translating Dante into English. Few, if any, texts have been translated more frequently into English than the *Commedia*. The rich variety of translations has often been viewed as evidence of the failure of previous translators, and of the so-called ‘untranslatability’ of Dante’s sumptuous and complex Italian. How can anyone possibly translate Dante’s rhythm and rhyme (his famous *terza rima* rhyme scheme) while maintaining philological accuracy? some may ask. The answer, obviously, is that no one can. As Vermeer has persuasively argued: “a given source text does not have one correct or best translation only” (1989/2004: 234). Different translations are needed to fulfil different purposes to different readers. So, in Chapter Three, I demonstrate how *Skopostheorie* may be employed as both a descriptive and evaluative–prescriptive approach. I do this by studying three translations of Canto I of the *Inferno* published in the mid-1990s—by Seamus Heaney (1993), Steve Ellis (1994), and Robert M. Durling (1996)—through the lens of *Skopostheorie* (3.4). This will follow a brief description of the methodology that I am using (3.1), a legitimization of *Skopostheorie*’s place in contemporary literary criticism (3.2), and a discussion of recent trends in translation Dante’s *Commedia* into English (3.3).

The present study therefore has three main purposes; it may be approached from three perspectives, and makes three integral claims. First, it will be of interest from a translational perspective: it makes a case for *Skopostheorie*’s application as a tool for retrospective

translation criticism. Vermeer's theory has frequently been marginalized in the field of literary translation studies: it is often credited as an important theory in the development of translation studies, but its applicability in the field today is denied. I shall seek to redress this by narrowing its scope. Second, it may be viewed from the perspective of literary criticism. It advises us that there is no objectively 'better' form of translation to any given source text; it encourages us "to relative the frequent demand for 'objective correctness' in translation" (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 101). Every translation should be judged relative to its professed purpose (*skopos*). The present essay thus addresses readers within and without translation studies.

But, I have one other, more basic, purpose. For the sake of brevity, this purpose is, unfortunately, very much tertiary. My essay is also designed to bring to light three outstanding and culturally significant translations of the *Inferno* that were published in the 1990s.¹¹ Through the lens of *Skopostheorie*, we are able to garner a great deal of information about the translation, the translator, and the recipient culture. We are also able to build a picture of the beautiful variety and multiplicity of voices that have rendered Dante in English. I may use these translations as models for the application of *Skopostheorie*; but the sections that discuss them (3.4.1-3) may equally be taken as individual essays analysing the translations of Messrs Heaney, Ellis, and Durling. As I discuss towards the end of this essay (3.5), this variety ought not to be a cause for despair, but celebration. On a broader level, of course, this essay is designed to contribute to the nascent discussion of recent translations of the *Commedia*.

These closely connected purposes are encapsulated by the title of the present work: *Dethroning Dante*. There is a common, though perhaps diminishing, line of thought that holds Dante's *Commedia* to be a kind of sacred text. The translator inevitably does a kind of violence to the text if s/he fails to maintain certain source text elements, some argue. The translator must "be as faithful as possible", as the famed translator Mark Musa once argued (1971/2003: xxxvii). Countless different people have described what this perceived "faithfulness" means to them, advocating one approach over another. To give just one example, the Spanish translator, Ángel Crespo, argues that there is something special *within* Dante's poetry that prescribes the translator: "[Dante's] poetry is written with this fleeting vital, marvellous entity which is language [...] so that in summary I am convinced that poetic works must be translated by poetic methods" (1988: 384).¹² But such a view is incompatible with *Skopostheorie*. Dante's *Commedia* ought not to be seen as a sacred text that must be translated in a certain way out of

¹¹ As mentioned, I will be analysing their renderings of Canto I in particular.

¹² Crespo's article is, appropriately, subtitled "*terza rima* or nothing", coining Dorothy L. Sayers' famous assertion (1949: 56; herself paraphrasing Maurice Hewlett).

respect for the source text. There is no *best* way of translating the *Commedia*, as with any source text, prose or poetry.¹³ This is the critical assertion of the present work. Hans Vermeer famously wrote that his theory had “dethroned” the source text (1986: 42). I, somewhat provocatively, am therefore seeking to dethrone Dante: to demonstrate the great variety of (valid) options available to the prospective translator, and to celebrate this variety. This dethroning does not disrespect Dante; quite the opposite. It pays homage to a rich and diverse (source) text, to which no single translation can possibly do justice. Dante needs his myriad translators.

Dante may not have agreed with this. After all, he famously asserted that one cannot transmute a text from one language to another “*sanza rompere tutta la [...] dolcezza e armonia*” of the source text (*Cv* I VII 14). It is perhaps not possible to *retain* Dante’s sweetness and harmony in translation; but it is possible, as many translators have proven, to produce a different kind of sweetness, harmony (or whatever effect the translator is trying to convey) through translation for the benefit of Dante’s twenty-first century readers.

¹³ So Reiß & Vermeer (1984/2014: 124): “the many different translational purposes which are possible imply that there are many possible translation strategies for one text.” Cf. Vermeer (1989/2004: 238): “the source text does not determine the variety of the target text.”

CHAPTER 2

Skopostheorie and Its Critics

2.1 An Introduction to *Skopostheorie*

The primary aim (“skopos”) of translating is to design a target text capable of functioning optimally [...] in the target culture.

(Vermeer 1998: 50)

Hans Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie* is a delimiting theory of translation. It was formulated in the 1970s and 1980s, and its primary purpose was to provide an alternative to the purely linguistic translation paradigms that were prominent at the time, and to highlight the central importance of the translator’s work (the target text). Whereas much that is written on translation strives to reduce the translator’s options, *Skopostheorie* expands her/his possibilities. I begin this chapter by outlining the main points of the theory (2.1), and by describing its tolerant position towards translation. I then consider other similar approaches (2.2), and explain why I am using *Skopostheorie* alone (even if other theories and studies are applicable in analogous ways). Next, I go into detail on the criticisms that have been levelled against Vermeer in the last few decades (2.3), some of which have caused *Skopostheorie* to decline into (in some people’s view) a curious relic of translation studies from the 1980s. Recently, translation theorists such as Andrew Chesterman, Peter Newmark, and Anthony Pym have sought to rebut many of the claims made by Vermeer in order to diminish his theory’s application. As a general theory of translation, *Skopostheorie* has not entirely fulfilled its purpose, Chesterman contends (2010: 224). This chapter will provide a challenge to these criticisms. I do not intend to frame *Skopostheorie* as a perfect ubiquitous theory of translation; indeed, some concessions and compromises do need to be made. But it is my intention to demonstrate that *Skopostheorie* is not as archaic as some modern scholars make out; it has applications as both a prescriptive and descriptive theory of translational action, and may work as a model for any number of translations, literary or otherwise.

Skopostheorie has remained virtually unchanged since its first comprehensive elucidation in the 1984 work entitled *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, co-

authored with Katharina Reiß.¹⁴ Certain nuances have been drafted from some scholars under the marginally broader category of “functionalism” (in particular from Christiane Nord); however, aside from these slight additions and alterations, *Skopostheorie* propounds a simple and unaltered idea: that the way a target text (translation) is written is governed by its function in the target (recipient) culture, and not necessarily by the linguistic form of the source text or the conditions in which it was written. In this sense, Vermeer (in)famously claimed to have “dethroned” the source text.¹⁵

The central claim of *Skopostheorie*, and functionalist approaches in general, is that translations should be studied and evaluated from a target-oriented perspective. That is to say, the source text itself does not demand that the translator should translate in a certain way; rather it is up to the individual translator (and/or the commission)¹⁶ to decide how the target text should be written. The translator has a particular “*skopos*” (“a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation”; Vermeer 1989/2004: 227) and must remain faithful to her/his *skopos* throughout the translation process. Translating is a deliberate action, and every deliberate action must have a purpose.¹⁷ His thesis is remarkably uncomplicated. There are any number of *skopoi* available to the translator, and this number ultimately depends on the context. As a general theory of translation, it is not for *Skopostheorie* to decide how many goals are available to the translator (Vermeer 1989/2004: 234). In some cases, it may only be one. Furthermore, in some instances, the translator may strive to marry her/his intentions with those of the original author.¹⁸ In others, the translator may allow herself/himself a degree of creativity. The steps

¹⁴ The work was recently translated into English by Christiane Nord under the title *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action* (1984/2014). Note that, although the work was co-authored by Reiß and Vermeer, canonical *Skopostheorie* is Vermeer’s theory alone, as explained by Nord (1997a: 27). Even so, Reiß was demonstrably crucial to the theory’s development; as such I refer to her work as well as Vermeer’s. Some sections within the book are written by Reiß, others by Vermeer; this has caused no end of confusion to subsequent readers, so I shall endeavour to clarify whose opinion is whose in my citations.

¹⁵ Vermeer (1986: 42): “‘Der’ Ausgangstext kann also auch nicht Grundlage und Ausgangspunkt für ‘die’ Übersetzung sein (die es ebenso wenig gibt). *Er ist entthront*, die Translation dieser Fiktion enthoben.” My emphasis.

¹⁶ For the purposes of this study, the “translator” is frequently used as a generic, overarching term to describe all of the actors involved in the translation process. After all, Vermeer (1989/2004: 236) rightly states that “a translator may set his own commission”. The commission is often a crucial aspect of a translation project, and can affect the translator’s decisions (a translator commissioned by Penguin to translate poetry may have demands placed on him/her that a freelance translator of poetry does not have).

¹⁷ This claim has met some criticism in of itself, though Vermeer rebuts these strictures successfully in Vermeer (1989/2004: 230–3).

¹⁸ Vermeer (1989/2004: 229) has made the interesting claim that a translation “may also have the same function (*skopos*) as its source text”. I am inclined to disagree ever so slightly (*pace* Gentzler 1998: 270): the translator may *attempt* to replicate the purpose of the original author, but unless the translator and author are the same person, or the translator is in correspondence with the author, then there will surely be at least a minor difference between the *skopoi* of the two texts. Nevertheless, Vermeer seems to change his view slightly in a later study (1998: 52–3).

that the translator takes in order to achieve this goal are less important than the decision to focus the translation at a certain readership, hence Vermeer's infamous assertion that "the end justifies the means" (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 90).¹⁹

One common misconception surrounding this theory, which was particularly prevalent when it was first presented, is that it favours a certain type of translation. Edwin Gentzler, for instance, asserts that *Skopostheorie* insists upon the coherency, fluency, and naturalness of the target text (2001: 71).²⁰ But *Skopostheorie* does not "insist" even on this; as a matter of fact, it insists upon very little. It is only a prescriptive theory inasmuch as it frees translators from the shackles of the source text. One may decide to produce an "interlinear" translation that represents "the structural specificities of [the] language" (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 124). It is as legitimate an approach as a "creative" translation at the other end of the scale (125). And the translation should be judged not relative to other translations (if there are multiple translations of the same source text), nor to its relationship to the source text, but by its faithfulness to its *skopos*. As Vermeer himself wrote: "what the *skopos* states is that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some [*singular*] principle respecting the target text" (1989/2004: 234). The theory does not specify what this "principle" is: this much must be decided separately in each particular case. After all, "a given source text does not have one correct or best translation only" (234). It is up to the individual translator (and/or the commission or collaborators) to decide what the appropriate *skopos* is. Next, it is the translator's responsibility to remain as faithful to the *skopos* as possible.

The adequacy of a translated text according to *Skopostheorie* can be found not in some perfect "equivalence" between the source text and the target text, but in its adherence to its *skopos*. The translator, as Reiß explains:

[C]an only search for (and find) equivalents for certain characteristics of the text. In such cases, the guideline for the translation process will be that of achieving adequacy, i.e. selecting the appropriate linguistic signs for achieving the *purpose* with regard to the characteristics in question.
(1984/2014: 123; my emphasis)

Or, put more succinctly, "a translation is *adequate* if the choice made of target-language signs is consistently in line with the requirements of the translation purpose" (127; my emphasis). "Equivalence", meanwhile, in Reiß and Vermeer's formulation, is but one option in a range of

¹⁹ Or, in other words, "what we do is less important than the purpose of the action and its being achieved" (88).

²⁰ Cheung (2013: 8–9) has previously noted this common misconception.

options available to a translator. If the translator desires to produce a so-called equivalent to the source text (where the “skopos requires that the source and target texts achieve the same function”), and s/he succeeds, then the text will be deemed “adequate” (128). This concept of “adequacy” thus transcends linguistics.

One issue with this conception of adequacy is that it contrasts directly with other definitions of the term in translation studies. Take, for instance, Gideon Toury’s elucidation: “whereas adherence to source norms determines translation’s adequacy as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines acceptability” (1995: 56–7). Toury’s notion of “adequacy” seems to cohere with Vermeer’s concept of intratextual coherence (discussed below) more than Reiß and Vermeer’s “adequacy”. So, for Descriptive Translation Studies (Gideon Toury’s approach to translation) and *Skopostheorie*, “adequacy” means something completely different. This concept of adequacy has received perhaps less attention than Toury’s.²¹ But it is a crucial concept if one is to clarify the position of *Skopostheorie*. Nevertheless, Nord rightly points out that critics of *Skopostheorie* “score a goal [...] with regard to *skopos* terminology” (1997a: 115). The lack of precision, and overlap of conceptual terms, have not helped the popularity or reception of the theory in translation studies.²²

In any case, adequacy represents an essential limit in an approach that is otherwise, for the most part, delimiting. A similar formulation to adequacy is the term “intratextual coherence”.²³ According to this principle, the success of the conveyance of any linguistic message depends on its being understood by the receptor. To narrow this to translation, the translated text must be coherent with its readers’ expectations of the translation. As Vermeer says, the people interpreting a message must be “interested in relating it to their reality” (1984/2014: 99). The quality of the translation therefore also depends on its coherency to the

²¹ Adequacy was first propounded by Reiß, not Vermeer; but it appears frequently in Vermeer’s subsequent works: Vermeer (1996: 77–8): “A translation need not necessarily be retrospectively ‘equivalent’ to a source-text interpretation, but should be prospectively ‘adequate’ to a target-text *skopos*.” Cf. Vermeer (1998: 45, 51) for his occasional reference to adequacy. This concept of adequacy is also implicit throughout all of his writings. “Accomplishing the *skopos*” is the crucial final stage in the translation process according to canonical *Skopostheorie* (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 92). Cf. Vermeer (1989/2004: 237): a “translation must function in such a way that the given goal is attained”; Vermeer (2007: 28); and so forth.

²² Cf. Chesterman (2010: 213) on the confusing diverging use of the same terminology. See Windle & Pym (2011: 17) on the *Skopostheorie*’s decline in popularity.

²³ This concept bears certain similarities to Reiß’ “adequacy”. Intratextual coherence deals directly with target culture norms and its acceptance of the translation, whereas adequacy pertains to the translator’s ability to fulfil his/her *skopos*. Compare Reiß (1984/2014: 127): “a translation is *adequate* of the choice made of target-language signs is consistently in line with the requirements of the translation purpose,” and Vermeer (1984/2014: 101): “an interaction [and, by extension, a translation] is successful if it is interpreted by the recipients as sufficiently coherent with their situation.” That is, it is successful if it is intratextually coherent.

target situation. So, the translator must assess her/his readership in order to settle on a *skopos*.²⁴ Let us look at the case of translating Dante into English. There are many different readership communities (on whom, according to Reader Response Theory, the interpretation depends),²⁵ with many different needs and demands from a text. It is thus fair to say that no single translation of Dante could satisfy every single reader. Moreover, according to *Skopostheorie*, there is no inherent value ascribed to any particular translation strategy. So, the student of Italian studying Dante would ascertain that their teacher demands a stilted crib in English that exhibits their knowledge of the Italian grammar, whereas a translator commissioned by Penguin Books might try to domesticate²⁶ the original to make it read like a twenty-first century novel (for example). Neither of these translation strategies is objectively better than the other. Either is appropriate *in the right context*. The translator is not circumscribed by the intentions of the source-text author.

In Vermeer's formulation, the *skopos* rule is the most important. Above all, it is crucial that the translator should have a *skopos* in mind, and translate in accordance with this *skopos*.²⁷ This is what Reiß labelled "adequacy". Secondly, there is "intratextual coherence" (making the translation understood by its readership). Last in Vermeer's hierarchy is "intertextual coherence", which presupposes the linguistic relationship between the source and target texts. Thus, of greatest importance is adequacy (the translator's ability to stick to a brief), followed by intratextual coherence (the reception of the translation), followed by intertextual coherence (the relationship between the source and the target text). The optimal translation, then, is first judged by the translator, and secondarily by her/his readership.²⁸

By way of an example of *Skopostheorie* in action, let us look at one of the most beautiful passages of Dante's *Inferno*: the final line of Canto V in which Dante faints from the sadness of hearing Francesca's tragic story of her adultery and death.

E caddi come corpo morte cade.

(If V 142)

²⁴ Reiß & Vermeer (1984/2014: 91): "a *skopos* cannot be set unless the target audience can be assessed."

²⁵ See Tyson (2006: 169ff.) on the basics of Reader Response Theory. The similarities between *Skopostheorie* and Reader Response Theory are discussed at 2.3.6.

²⁶ To adopt a "fluent, transparent style [...] to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text" (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997/2014: 43–4).

²⁷ This is axiom one in Vermeer's general rules of translation (1984/2014: 107).

²⁸ Cf. Pym (2012: 93–4) on Vermeer's hierarchy.

Robert M. Durling renders this in straightforward, literal, unpoetic terms in his 1996 prose translation:

And I fell as a dead body falls.

(*Dlf* 93)

The verbal repetition is maintained (*caddi* becomes fell, *cade* becomes falls), which is in line with its purpose to help the Anglophone reader to understand the Italian. Compare John Gordon Nichols' beautiful, subtle recreation of the poetic effects (without the same rhyming scheme)²⁹ of Dante's Italian in his 2005 translation:

I seemed to **die**,
and fell **down** as a **body** **does** when **dead**.

(*Nlf* 27)

Nichols eschews the internal rhyme (there is surely no similarly assonant way of writing *corpo morte* in English), but maintains the alliterative effect of the Italian. Four of Dante's words start with a *c*, and so four of Nichols' words begin with a *d*. This obviously entails a bit of addition from the translator, resulting in a more wordy translation. Nichols provides an elegant solution, recreating the subtleties of Dante's Italian expertly. But, it does not make his translation any *better* than Durling's. By the same token, just because Durling's translation is more 'faithful' to the original, and helps the reader with a vague knowledge of Italian to understand what each word means, it is not *more correct*. The decisive factor in assessing the quality of a translation is its adherence to its *skopos*. Nichols' translation fulfils a very different function (*skopos*) to Durling's. They are both excellent in their own ways, because they are (presumably) coherent with the expectations of two different readerships.³⁰ In this way, *Skopostheorie* subjectivizes translations of literature. An inadequate or incoherent translation, then, is one that deviates from the *skopos* that the translator has carved out for herself/himself. If Durling had claimed that his purpose was to reproduce some of the phonic effects of Dante, to reproduce his metre or rhyme, then his translation would be inadequate. As it is, Durling expressly stated that:

²⁹ Nichols employs what is known as defective *terza rima*, where the first and third lines of each tercet are rhymed, but the middle line has no rhyming equivalent: axa bxb cxc etc.

³⁰ This is, of course, unprovable. I outline the problems of defining the "reader" at 2.3.6.

The translation is prose, as literal as possible, following as closely as practicable the syntax of the original; there is no padding, such as one finds in most verse translations.

(1996: v)

The quality of a translation therefore ought not to be judged in terms of the “*intertextual coherence*”, but in terms of the translation’s ability to fulfil its purpose: its adequacy.³¹

Honesty and openness with the readership are important parts of this equation. It is first important that the translator (at least implicitly) should make the readers aware of her/his *skopos*. The commission (if this is an actor in the equation) must detail what it expects from the translator by way of a *skopos*, and the translator has a responsibility to make the readership aware of this *skopos* (how, otherwise, can we know if it is a good translation or not?). As Vermeer states, the “*skopos and mode of realization must be adequately defined if the text-translator is to fulfil his task successfully*” (1989/2004: 228). So, this honesty with the readership is a crucial element of Vermeer’s theory; if the purpose is not realized, the translation is inadequate. This is the central way in which *Skopostheorie* holds the translator accountable. Her/his actions are not circumscribed by the form or genre of the source text. What is important is instead (and only) “that his translation must function in such a way that the given goal is attained” (Vermeer 1989/2004: 236).

Translation, through the lens of *Skopostheorie*, is thus a tripartite process.³² First, it encourages translators to select an appropriate *skopos* (or to be assigned a *skopos* by the commission). This *skopos* must be appropriate in some way to target culture expectations and translation norms.³³ It is crucial to emphasize that this does not necessarily have to conform to *prevailing* target culture norms. If the translator wishes to write a version that imitates the phonic effects (like, say, Celia and Louis Zukofsky’s occasionally incomprehensible 1969 translations of Catullus), they will inevitably reduce their readership. The strict foreignizing technique will make the translation difficult to read for many and produce sentences and phrases that are meaningless (in such Modernist literature as that of the Zukofskys, it is, after all, for the reader to ascribe some meaning to the text). So unless (for whatever absurd reason) the translator does not want her/his text to be read by anyone, the translator must ascertain that

³¹ So Vermeer (1984/2014: 101–2): “we therefore claim that the assessment of intratextual coherence takes precedence over the assessment of ‘fidelity’ between source and target texts.” Cf. 107 for the hierarchy of axioms in *Skopostheorie*.

³² Note that my phases differ ever so slightly with those outlined by Vermeer (1984/2014: 91–2), but the principles are identical.

³³ These target culture expectations could be compared with the concept of norms in Descriptive Translation Studies and the Manipulation School; see Hermans (1996: 42, 44) for the difficulty of determining these norms.

their *skopos* will in some respect be coherent with some “target audience” (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 91). In short, the translator, before translating, must assess (subjectively) the needs of her/his readers.³⁴

Second, the translator must endeavour to execute this *skopos*, and to make this purpose known to the readership. This is where the translator’s competency comes into play. The poetic translator of Dante, having decided to try to produce an elegant poem in English, would take liberties with the text in order to craft a text that functions as a poem in isolation in the target language. If the translator is overly literal, then the translator could be accused of not adhering to the *skopos* (of not being “adequate to the target-text *skopos*”; Vermeer 1998: 44). A philological translator would, conversely, attempt to produce a version, however inelegant, that helps the reader to understand Italian of the source text. This second stage is where the text’s “adequacy” (or inadequacy) is manifested.

The third and final stage of the process concerns the reception of the translation. If the translation meets the expectations of its readers, then it can be considered to be (intratextually) coherent. It will be, in Vermeer’s formulation, a “success”. If it contradicts expectations it will result in “protest” (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 95–8). A text’s intratextual coherence is, in theory, conditioned by the text’s adequacy; thus it appears below adequacy in Vermeer’s hierarchy of axioms (1984/2014: 107).

At the broadest level, *Skopostheorie* informs us that there is no better or worse translation strategy; each translation, according to the theory, ought to be judged according to its given context and, especially, with regard to the translator’s purpose. Thus the broad thesis of *Skopostheorie* is that any translation method is justified provided that there is a “legitimate *skopos*” (Vermeer 1989/2004: 229).

³⁴ “The optimum depends on the translator’s subjective estimate” of what is needed by her/his readership (Vermeer 1998: 50).

2.2 A Note on ‘Rival’ Theories

I would like briefly to mention other “target-oriented” studies of translation. One of the most similar approaches to *Skopostheorie* is Gideon Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), which evolved separately around the same time as the former.³⁵ The central difference comes in their respective methodological standpoints: DTS (and Polysystems Theory)³⁶ refuse to make any value judgements about translations (they are purely descriptive). The two approaches, however, are compatible with Vermeer’s; *Skopostheorie* is just a more general, broad theory. DTS is a perfectly valid approach, demonstrated eloquently by Edoardo Crisafulli in his book on Henry Francis Cary’s translation of the *Commedia* (2003).³⁷ Even Crisafulli, however, takes issue with Toury’s refusal to incorporate some sort of evaluative element into his theory (80–1). As a result, the author chooses to alter Toury’s approach ever so slightly to allow for some evaluation (82). This is a perfectly legitimate approach; but, I must stress, it is just one valid approach among many. It is not the purpose of this essay to argue against the Descriptivist School of translation.³⁸ A lot has been written to explain the benefits of one target-oriented approach over another. From my perspective, each approach simply has a different (valid) methodological lens through which to analyse translations. Descriptivists naturally do not tell the translator how to translate. As Toury points out, “it is of no concern of a scientific discipline [...] to effect changes in the world of our experience” (1995: 17). Of course, Vermeer’s approach does not prescribe a particular translation strategy; it is only prescriptive inasmuch as it advises the translator to be faithful to her/his own purpose. It is also prescriptive in a purely delimiting, didactic sense; it instructs us that there are myriad valid translation strategies.

Another difference between descriptivists and functionalists is that the former focus on cultural norms. Descriptivists focus on the translation’s relation to cultural norms, and describe its position within that culture (or literary polysystem, as Itamar Even-Zohar puts it). *Skopostheorie*, to my mind, looks more at the individual element of translation (looking at the translator’s intention rather than the cultural factors behind the translation). The two factors are, demonstrably, not mutually exclusive, resulting in a great deal of overlap between the

³⁵ So Toury (1995: 25): “the first formulations of the *Skopostheorie* [...] almost coincided with my shift to target-orientedness.”

³⁶ On Polysystems Theory, see Chesterman (2001b: 136).

³⁷ Crisafulli weighs up the benefits of employing Vermeer’s approach at 23–4, but considers it too radical.

³⁸ Including the likes of Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, and Theo Hermans. See Crisafulli (2003: 18) on their respective methodologies. For a brief explanation of the differences between descriptivism and functionalism, see Snell-Hornby (2006: 161–2).

various target-oriented approaches. It merely constitutes a minor difference in perspective. Take, for instance, Susan Bassnett's analysis of Henry Rider's seventeenth-century translation of Horace:

The translator not only selects the text for translation, he or she then reshapes it in the target language. In that process, the question of typological substitution is therefore very much a matter of individual choice, though obviously within the constraints of context and convention.

(1997: 89)

Such a conclusion is entirely within the parameters of *Skopostheorie*, and suggests that the boundaries between the various approaches are weaker than initially believed.³⁹ Of course, the descriptive approach seems more likely to look for cultural or systemic reasons to explain the translation. *Skopostheorie* takes for granted that there are cultural and sociological norms underpinning the translation process, but it does not focus on these norms. So, in the instance of intratextual coherence, it states that one must translate coherently with some aspect of the target culture in mind. DTS deals more directly with the identification of these norms. The similarities between the various target-oriented approaches to translation abound. Take, for instance, Hermans' assertion that:

Translations are not normally produced for their own sake, but for a purpose, and with reference to already extant texts and discourses.

(1996: 40)

Skopostheorie deals more directly with the first feature of Hermans' enumeration (purpose), while DTS deals more directly with the latter (social and cultural norms, the "already extant texts and discourses"). Again, there is a great deal of conceptual overlap here.⁴⁰ But there are subtle methodological differences which must be acknowledged. Accordingly, each approach provides a useful analysis in isolation. If I had wanted to focus more on the cultural or societal backgrounds of modern translations of Dante, with a purely descriptive analysis, I would have been more likely to adopt Toury's approach. But his is just one method among many.⁴¹

³⁹ Indeed, Toury (1995: 25) suggested that the gap between his and Vermeer's approach "may be narrowing".

⁴⁰ For instance, neither approach dictates cultural norms or suggests a best way of going about a translation. So Hönig (1997: 10): translation theories "must provide support for decision-making strategies, but it cannot and must not establish rules *in lieu* of decision making."

⁴¹ Snell-Hornby (2006: 64) is perhaps a little harsh on descriptivists, deducing that "their own dogmatic rejection of any kind of evaluation has never convincingly been explained."

Another ‘rival’ approach worth considering is Ernst-August Gutt’s Relevance Theory. Gutt’s and Vermeer’s theories are remarkably similar. Relevance Theory focuses on the expectations of the readership, arguing that all forms of translation must be made relevant to a particular readership. Vermeer views Relevance Theory as a subcategory of his broader *Skopostheorie* (1996: 65). This is a valid assertion because (a) Relevance Theory reduces translation types to two broad categories, thus eschewing some forms of translation, and (b) because Relevance Theory is not a prescriptive theory.⁴² There is not the space here to outline all of the differences between the two approaches. Suffice it to say that, similar to DTS, Relevance Theory is a narrower theory than Vermeer’s with a (very marginally) different methodological focus. Relevance Theory is more of a bottom-up analysis, focusing on the whims of the target audience and their effects on the translator, whereas *Skopostheorie* takes more of a top-down approach in that it takes the perspective of the translator first.⁴³ Both authors have tended to dismiss their similarities to the other’s approach.⁴⁴ I believe that Chesterman has it right here: the two approaches are “basically making the same point” (2001b: 135; cf. Chesterman 2010: 222–3). They have a slight difference in methodology and scope, and Vermeer’s are of greater importance to this study; but this is not to negate the importance or relevance of Gutt’s approach.

The logic of Vermeer’s approach also obtains in other related disciplines. Lorna Hardwick, for one, has done a huge amount of work on the role of the audience in shaping the translations of classical Greek drama into English.⁴⁵ Her model of analysis for the translations of drama through the lens of Reception Theory is invaluable, and has a similar methodology to *Skopostheorie*.⁴⁶ Her studies subjectivize and relativize translations just as Vermeer’s do:

Different constituencies of readers and spectators stand in different relationships to what has gone before, textually, theatrically, culturally and in terms of the unexpected that strikes as they watch, listen and read.

(Hardwick 2013b: 338)

⁴² See Chesterman (2010: 223) for a brief description of the differences.

⁴³ Nevertheless, similarities abound. See Gutt (2000: 190): “the translator needs to clarify for himself whether his informed intention is, in fact, communicable, that is, whether he can reasonably expect the audience to derive this interpretation in consistency with the principle of relevance.” Cf. 212 on authorial intention, which is equally similar to Vermeer.

⁴⁴ See Gutt (2000: 17, 218, 220) and Chesterman (2001b: 135–6).

⁴⁵ Hardwick (2001, 2010, 2013b). Her work highlights the parallels between Reception Studies and Translation Studies (see, for example, 2000: esp. 9–22).

⁴⁶ Not a great deal of work has been done on the parallels between Reception Theory and target-oriented translation theory. Borden (2014: 115–16) finds analogies between Hardwick and Vermeer, while Venuti (2004: 187) briefly acknowledges the similarities between Vermeer’s translation theory and Stanley Fish’s reader-reception theory (1980). Cf. Reiß and Vermeer (1984/2014: 81) where Vermeer briefly acknowledges the influence of reader-response theory.

As such, Hardwick calls for a re-evaluation of the role of reader/spectators in the “construction of meaning” in literary translation; models of translation theory that describe translation as a kind of violence or conflict fail to do this (2010: 204). It is clear, then, that Vermeer’s line of reasoning has parallels that transcend and predate translation theory. His is a theoretical elucidation of an idea that is already accepted (though by no means universally, as will be demonstrated at 3.2) by academics and lay-people alike.⁴⁷ There is not the space here to discuss the similarities and differences between the various approaches in full. Suffice it to say, they are all legitimate, logical approaches to translation that allow the discipline to transcend linguistics towards a more tolerant sociological focus.

2.3 Criticisms and Responses

Skopostheorie has been subject to a significant amount of both misinterpretation and legitimate criticism in recent years. This section will address some of these issues. Here is a list of some of these assumptions:

- a) *Skopostheorie* is not an original theory.
- b) *Skopostheorie* allows unethical translations.
- c) *Skopostheorie* fails as a descriptive approach.
- d) *Skopostheorie* does not apply to literary translation.
- e) *Skopostheorie* does not provide an evaluative model by which one can judge the quality of a translation (in other words: *Skopostheorie* is too general).

Axioms (b) and (e) provide a sound criticism for the theory; they demonstrate that there still needs to be some work done to give *Skopostheorie* “further specification”, as Vermeer himself identified in 2001 (in Chesterman 2001b: 135). However, many of these claims are based on a selective reading of Vermeer’s work, and it is my intention to prove that *Skopostheorie* furnishes a legitimate model to describe and prescribe literary translation.

⁴⁷ To take a random example, Haynes’ (2010: 14) beautiful introduction to a collection of Donald Carne-Ross essays broadly describes the logic behind *Skopostheorie*: “one translation does not cancel out another. The crib and the imitation can both succeed, potentially, depending on whether the translator writes well and knows enough.”

2.3.1 Basic Criticisms

I will first deal with some of the more banal criticisms of the theory. Many of these have already been brought to light and largely debunked by Christiane Nord in her spirited defence of Vermeer's theory (1997a: 109–22). One idea, a particular favourite of Peter Newmark, postulates that the theory is unoriginal. Newmark, in his invective against *Skopostheorie*, writes:

To translate the word 'aim' into Greek, and make a translation theory out of it, and to exclude any moral factor except for loyalty, added on as an afterthought by Nord [...] is pretending too much and going too far.
(2002: 83)⁴⁸

To rebut this claim, I will paraphrase Nord's argument against the likes of Newmark: when Newton developed his theory of gravity, it was not necessarily a completely independent, original idea (Nord 1997a: 114–15). Gravity always existed; it was and is an immanent fact of nature.⁴⁹ So, then, if Vermeer's line of reasoning has its origins in other translation theories of the 1960s, as Newmark contends (1990: 106), then that should be entirely expected. Vermeer did not simply invent *Skopostheorie* one day in the 1970s. Moreover, *Skopostheorie*, as a "general" theory of translation (*eine allgemeine Translationstheorie*), is designed to describe (like the theory of gravity) an immanent descriptive truth. As such, a completely opposing criticism that could be levelled at *Skopostheorie* is that it is simply stating the obvious.⁵⁰ Translators have the right to translate how they like and, ultimately, if the reader does not enjoy a particular translation of Dante, s/he can always turn to a different one. Everyone has their own individual preference. This much is objectively true.

Why then employ *Skopostheorie*? I will return to this issue in greater detail in Chapter Three (3.2), but it is clear that many critics, reviewers, and impartial readers have their own restrictive opinions about what constitutes a "good" translation.⁵¹ These opinions frequently serve to narrow the translator's possibilities. *Skopostheorie* instead looks to *expand* the

⁴⁸ Cf. Newmark (1990: 106) where he goes into slightly more detail about why *Skopostheorie* "hardly constitutes an original theory of translation."

⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that *Skopostheorie* is an immanent descriptive theory; it certainly has gaps, as demonstrated at 2.3.3.

⁵⁰ Pym (2014: 49) makes the point that Vermeer's ideas "were not particularly troubling in themselves, given that they called on common sense". Cf. Hatim (2001: 79–80), who suggests that many of *Skopostheorie*'s claims are things "on which we have all been agreed all along."

⁵¹ So Hönig (1997: 6): "laypersons hold dogmatic positions towards translation." *Skopostheorie* argues directly against such dogma. Indeed, there seems to be something imbued in Dante scholarship that makes many critics resistant to certain translation strategies (see de Rooy 2003b: 57).

translator's options. In the words of Vermeer, it "expands the possibilities of translation, increases the range of possible translation strategies" (1989/2004: 237). This, he goes on, is "something that is too often denied" (237). *Skopostheorie* informs the reader that to criticize the translator with reference to the strategy s/he employed is invalid. One of the theory's best attributes is to be found in translation criticism (or the criticism of translation criticism).⁵² Much in translation criticism (from poets and scholars alike) is written in these terms of the translator somehow betraying the original. And it is because of the prevalence of these dogmatic, reducing views of translation that I am carrying out this study: towards a re-evaluation of how many people judge the quality of the translation of poetry.

2.3.2 Ethics

It has been argued that *Skopostheorie* permits translations that are inherently unethical. This comment is, on the face of it, justified. After all, any theory that approaches a translation from the perspective of the target text may allow the translator to distort the source text howsoever s/he sees fit. This is one of the more persuasive arguments against *Skopostheorie*; however a number of ripostes may be made by using both canonical *Skopostheorie* and the subsequent theorizations of Christiane Nord. Anthony Pym has suggested that this approach could produce "mercenary experts, able to fight under the flag of any purpose able to pay them" (1995a: 338). The translator may also have licence to deceive her/his readership (Crisafulli 2003: 38). As well as giving the translators unethical free rein, *Skopostheorie* could be accused of being excessively culturally relative; that is, it "reinforces the major language and its many other linguistic and cultural exclusions" (Venuti 1995: 12). The first two criticisms may, theoretically, be answered by Vermeer's assertion that the translator translates for people "who have the right to know the reason for the choice of strategy the translator made in order to know what and whom and how they are reading the author [and the translator]" (1992b: 13). Of course, this is a reasonably unassertive prescription; it is assumed by *Skopostheorie* that the author will not deceive the readers and will act in good faith. Beyond this, Vermeer holds the belief that ethical premises are not the business of a general theory of translation (1996: 100–1).

⁵² Vermeer (1998: 54) identified this function of *Skopostheorie*.

A possible solution,⁵³ presented by Nord, comes in the concept of “loyalty”. This concept is designed to ensure that the translator does not deceive her/his audience, maintaining a link between both the source text author and the target culture. So Nord: “loyalty commits the translator bilaterally to the source and target sides [...]. [It] means that the target-text purpose should be compatible with the original author’s intentions” (1997a: 125). Here I do not necessarily agree with Nord. Take as an example Seamus Heaney’s poem–translation “Ugolino” (1979; *FW* 61–4), which is a creative translation of *Inferno* XXXII–XXXIII: the translator’s intention is demonstrably completely different from Dante’s. He has removed it from its mediaeval Italian context; it is no longer “compatible” with the source text, in Nord’s sense. And yet, this is considered entirely appropriate by the text’s readership, because it is published as a Heaney poem within a collection (*Field Work*) of more Heaney poems. Like Vermeer, I maintain that the decisive factor must remain the target text. The source author and translator’s intentions may indeed be totally different.

For me, the only crucial ethical feature is that the reader is *made aware* (implicitly or explicitly) of the *skopos* of the translator. Thus, more creative translations ought to be clear that they are not meant to be linguistically compared with the original. For the most part in literary translation, translators already do this. By way of a random example, let us look at the first sentence of Andrew Porter’s translation note to the libretto of Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre*:

This translation of *The Ring* was made for singing, acting, and hearing, not for reading. It is neither a straight, literal crib to the sense of the German [...] nor an attempt to render Wagner’s verse into English verse.

(1983: 35)

This is an example of an optimal, explicit way of ensuring the readers are aware of the translator’s *skopos*. Nord also points out that many translations also let the reader know “the intended function [...] either from situational clues or from the text itself” (2001: 195). And since most *published* translators of literary texts (and certainly most translators of Dante) provide such “clues”, it seems fair to say that most translations fall within the ethical limits of *Skopostheorie*. One does not necessarily have to be loyal to the intentions of the source text, provided that the reader knows what the translator’s *skopos* is.

⁵³ With which Vermeer does not agree: see Vermeer (1996: 79–101) and Chesterman (2001b: 135).

However, there are clearly some unresolved issues here. Apart from telling the translator not to be evil, to conform to some translation norm in the target culture, and to be “honest”, there are no explicit limits to *Skopostheorie*. Indeed, there are cases where the ideas of a literary text have been deliberately and nefariously distorted, which would not—could not—be addressed by canonical *Skopostheorie*.⁵⁴ In this respect, the theory may well require more specification. Nord’s minor alteration, on the other hand, seems to transgress some of the boundaries of canonical *Skopostheorie*. Perhaps Vermeer is right that ethical considerations are not even the business of a general theory of translation.⁵⁵ After all, since *Skopostheorie* does not in any way dictate translation norms, it perhaps remains the responsibility of other, more refined, less broad theories of translation to pick up the slack.⁵⁶ But this is a significant lacuna in *Skopostheorie*.

Another, less fraught, issue that some scholars have had with *Skopostheorie* is that it is culturally relative. Nord has discussed this most eloquently. Her response is simple: “I do not take it as a negative criticism” (1997a: 122). Many translations will be culturally relative out of necessity; that is, they will alter certain conditions of the source text to make it palatable to the target reader. This is to be expected in translation: a great deal of literature is translated into English in a domesticating way, as Venuti has identified (1998, 2008). Moreover, *Skopostheorie* does not demand that texts be translated in such a way. This is just one option available to the translator. A translator may have a completely different *skopos* that seeks to emphasize the foreign elements of the text.

A more valid criticism contends that *Skopostheorie* blurs the boundaries between translation and non-translation. ‘Where does one draw the line?’ such critics ask. Pym, for one, criticizes Vermeer for failing to demarcate the limits of translation (1997: 77). Nord, for her part, provides an extremely broad definition of translation in response. It is “any translational action where a source text is transferred into a target culture and language” (Nord 1997a: 141). Professed equivalence is all that matters. As such, any text that lays the claim of being a translation (though even this much is not necessary), and has an identifiable source text, is by definition a translation. Robert Lowell’s *Imitations* (1962) are therefore translations as much as St. Jerome’s *Vulgate*. But this delimiting approach to translation is crucial for functionalists.

⁵⁴ Snell-Hornby (2006: 106) provides examples of nefarious translation. The author, somewhat unconvincingly, even suggests that Nord’s concept of “loyalty” could help to bring a stop to such behaviour.

⁵⁵ Vermeer (1996: 83): “a theory should be value free”. Toury (1995: 17) provides a similar viewpoint.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Chesterman (2001a) and Venuti (2011) for ideas of an ethical framework; Chesterman suggests a translator’s “oath”.

The term “translation” is inherently ambiguous and, possibly, undefinable, as identified by Susan Bassnett.⁵⁷ She conceives of translation thus:

It is probably more helpful to think of translation not so much as a category in its own right, but rather a set of textual practices with which the writer and reader collude.

(1998a: 39)

I am very much in favour of this broad, permissive model of translation. Some distinction does need to be made between translation and adaptation, as identified by Peter Low.⁵⁸ After all, our own cultural norms demand that a text labelled a ‘translation’ must bear reasonable certain lexical similarities with the source text. But this equation is, of course, entirely a question of choosing a terminology.⁵⁹ A more creative translation is therefore not somehow ethically inferior to a philological version. The only unethical instance within this framework would be if the translator attempted to deceive her/his readership. The terminology used by the translator must conform to the recipient culture’s norms.⁶⁰ But the terms imitation, adaptation, version, and translation all broadly describe the *same* act of rendering an offer of information⁶¹ in one language in another language. All of these acts (however one should choose to define them) are appropriate forms of rendering given the right context.⁶² The only prescription is that they must conform to the *skopos*, and thus not deceive their readers.

⁵⁷ Bassnett (1998a: *passim*).

⁵⁸ Low (2013: 230–1), agreeing with Bastin (1998: 6), who asserts that “there is a point at which adaptation ceases to be translation at all.”

⁵⁹ See, in particular, Bassnett (1998a: 39).

⁶⁰ What we call a translation, in the view of Hermans, depends on the “constitutive norms” of the target culture (1996: 42).

⁶¹ An *Informationsangebot* in Vermeer’s terminology (1998: 63).

⁶² Indeed, Hardwick (2001: 23) has identified a “growing flexibility of [...] norms” between translation, adaptation, and version in the context of Greek theatre translation and performance. On the shift in translation norms in general, see Chapter 4.

2.3.3 Is *Skopostheorie* Descriptive or Prescriptive?

One major issue with *Skopostheorie* is determining whether it is descriptive or prescriptive of translational practice. That is, does it describe how translations *are* carried out, or does it instruct how translations *ought* to be carried out?⁶³ Christiane Nord, for one, identifies functionalism in general as a purely normative/prescriptive approach (1997c: 41ff.).⁶⁴ I contend (as Vermeer did; 1998: 63) that *Skopostheorie* is both descriptive and prescriptive, though limitations must be imposed upon both of these functions.

Let us first investigate what Vermeer intended his theory to be: asking, as Andrew Chesterman did in 2010, what is the *skopos* of *Skopostheorie*?⁶⁵ Chesterman, for one, has disputed the descriptive role of *Skopostheorie* in the field of Translation Studies, contending that, with a few exceptions, Vermeer's theory has failed as a descriptive approach, and is only applicable in the realms of idealism as a prescriptive approach.⁶⁶ Indeed, some of Vermeer's own writing has implied the latter ontological position:

The statement of goal and the conditions *should* be explicitly negotiated between the client (commissioner) and the translator [...]. Here the translator *should* be able to make argumentative suggestions. [...] (*I am aware that this requirement involves a degree of wishful thinking; yet it is something to strive for*).

(1989/2004: 199)⁶⁷

However, Vermeer also described his theory thus:

Skopos theory is meant to be a functional theoretical general theory covering process, product and, as the name says, function both of production and reception. As a functional theory it does not distinguish between descriptive and (didactic) prescription.

(1996: 26n.)

⁶³ Chesterman (2010: 214–16) covers the debate surrounding this issue. He draws the conclusion that it is “essentially prescriptive, although it has some descriptive assumptions” (215).

⁶⁴ For clarity, I will henceforth avoid using the word “normative” due to the inherent flexibility in the adjective's meaning (see Chesterman 1997/2000: 52–4: “for some scholars, ‘normative’ seems to be identical with [...] ‘prescriptive’. [...] For other scholars, ‘normative’ seems to be both prescriptive and descriptive”; quoted at 52).

⁶⁵ See Chesterman (2010: 224), where he concludes thus: “Has skopos theory has [*sic*] fulfilled its own skopos? My answer would be: not entirely.”

⁶⁶ Chesterman (2010: 223). *Contra* Pym (1995b: 170), who erroneously asserted that Vermeer “rejected such prescriptivism”.

⁶⁷ My emphasis to highlight his prescriptive statements.

Chesterman presents the argument that Vermeer is incorrect in expecting that past translations have followed his model of target-orientedness. Though he had conceded that *Skopostheorie* has gaps in its descriptive approach, Vermeer still demonstrably held the belief that his “general” theory should bridge the “ontological” divide, as Chesterman terms it; that is, it should be read as both a descriptive and prescriptive approach:

It is prescriptive insofar as it can help translators to decide how they might reach an optimal result. It can be understood descriptively when taken as a guideline for investigating (and reviewing) already existing translations.

(Vermeer, in Chesterman 2001b: 136)

Chesterman’s dispute of this claim relies on a few central themes. Firstly, pertaining to Vermeer’s point on commission (that the “conditions should be explicitly negotiated”), Chesterman argues that the translator may be overridden by other actors in the translation process (2010: 217). For instance, the translator may not be the definitive expert on the topic, or a separate group or individual may influence the translator’s work. However, Chesterman’s reasoning takes a remarkable jump from this point to claiming that most translations are therefore “non-optimal cases”: that is, cases where a translator is forced to act “under duress, against the council of his own expertise” (2010: 217–18). The involvement of third-party actors in translation is, of course, almost universal in translation practice; but does this really make “duress” the norm in translational action? Chesterman also contends that *Skopostheorie* is inadequate in dealing with “bad translations” (218).

First of all, it is necessary to accept this internal paradox of Vermeer’s translation theory, which is surely both a flaw and an inherent aspect of any “general” theory of translation, of any translation theory that attempts to unite and to subsume both prescription and description. Its very breadth ensures that there will be *some* cases to which *Skopostheorie* does not apply.

But I would like to take issue with Chesterman’s view that denies *Skopostheorie*’s descriptive value *in toto*. He holds that Vermeer’s general translation theory, because of the frequent involvement of third-party in the translation process, “would only deal with special cases – surely not the intention of skopos theorists” (2010: 218). Indeed, as seen, Vermeer resorts to a prescriptive position when he raises the issue himself. It seems to me unlikely to expect that duress from other groups and individuals affects the translation process negatively in most instances, as Chesterman suggests. It may not be possible to prove that Vermeer’s theory describes every translation that has ever been carried out (who could prove such a

thing?), but it describes a lot more of translational reality than Chesterman alleges. Certainly there are cases in which the translator cannot be said to be the “translation expert” (Vermeer 1992b: 13) with an amicable working relationship with her/his commissioner. But his assertion that such cases represent the majority of translational actions is completely without basis.

To respond directly to Chesterman’s claim that *Skopostheorie* fails as a descriptive approach, I will return to the concept of adequacy. Chesterman believes that *Skopostheorie* relates to an optimal world: it is, he declares, idealism. However, if a theory discusses adequate translations (that is, in this case, the translator’s ability to fulfil her/his own intention) then that clearly implies that inadequate translations must exist. That is to say, any translations that fail to achieve the level of adequacy propounded by *Skopostheorie* (and outlined by the translation brief) are *not optimal*. As such, *Skopostheorie* demonstrably accounts for both good and bad translations.⁶⁸ Chesterman makes the strong point that there are some extreme circumstances that may not apply in *Skopostheorie*. And, indeed, in this study I am falling into the trap of describing ideal scenarios: modern translations of Dante’s *Inferno* are, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, “optimal cases” of translations. As such, this study can never empirically prove the general usefulness of *Skopostheorie* as a descriptive approach. In this respect, it could even be argued that *Skopostheorie* relates better to the description of literary translation than of technical translation, for the simple reason that “optimal” translation scenarios are more likely to crop up in prestigious literary translations than in scarcely-read technical texts.

I would thus like to compromise with Chesterman’s position, which rightly questions the applicability of *Skopostheorie* across the board. Indeed, it is not as precise a descriptive approach as those developed by the rival theories discussed above (2.2). For example, DTS would try to make Vermeer’s intratextual coherence more precise; it would question which options are appropriate under which circumstances for the translator, “and the translator’s perceived success or failure in adhering to this or that norm may be deemed to have resulted in ‘good’ or ‘bad’ translations” (Hermans 1996: 42).

So, to refine *Skopostheorie*’s ontological position and to reconcile the positions of Vermeer and Chesterman, it is necessary to subdivide the terms “prescriptive” and “descriptive” into two categories:

⁶⁸ Indeed, by writing about “bad” translations, Chesterman is himself being prescriptive. In this respect, the discussion becomes somewhat circular.

Prescriptive theory	Retrospective (or evaluative) prescriptivism	Prospective (or didactic) prescriptivism
Descriptive theory	Exegetical (or investigative) descriptivism	Immanent (or existential) descriptivism

Canonical *Skopostheorie* claims to fulfil all four of these categories, but I must limit my employment of *Skopostheorie* to the two in the shaded column. Both of these categories are primarily *retrospective*.

A prescriptive theory may retrospectively evaluate translations (i.e. determine the merits/pitfalls of past translations) or advise people (especially translators) how an optimal translation may be achieved. *Skopostheorie*, in theory, fulfils both of these axioms. The former axiom is of greater use for translation criticism, while the latter is of greater use for translation training (or “applied” translation studies).⁶⁹ The unresolved question of ethics (2.3.2), however, still looms over this latter application of *Skopostheorie*. This essay thus sets aside didactic element of the theory: I am not concerned with translator training here.

Further controversy lies in *Skopostheorie*’s descriptive claims. Descriptivism may also be divided into two facets. A descriptive theory may be immanent or ubiquitous, and make “existential, descriptive claim[s]” (Chesterman 2010: 215). That is, it may describe something that is universally true: “a translational action *is* governed by its purpose” (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 85; my emphasis). On the other hand, there is exegetical (or investigative) descriptivism, which helps us to study and to understand past translations. Vermeer seemed to limit *Skopostheorie* to the latter descriptive sense in his later writings; his theory, he tells Chesterman, “can be understood descriptively when taken as a guideline for investigating (and reviewing) already existing translations” (Chesterman 2001b: 136).

As such, I will abandon (at least in this essay) the immanent descriptivism that is particularly prevalent in Vermeer’s earlier works. *Skopostheorie* does not account for every translational action that has ever taken place; there have been, and always will be, countless occasions where the theory does not apply to translation practice. It is useful as a retrospective and exegetical theory, but less so as an immanent descriptive theory. Moreover, its exegetical descriptive function must remain limited. As Chesterman points out, issues such as “the prevalence of poor translations, coupled with poor working conditions and low pay [...] are not addressed by skopos theory” (2010: 223). As an exegetical descriptive theory, then, it may only be useful for looking at “optimal” cases. It fails to take linguistically incompetent

⁶⁹ See Nord (1997b) for the latter application.

translators into account, addressing only the translation's teleological adequacy. Chesterman's criticisms have thus served to narrow (and to refine) the scope of *Skopostheorie*; but they do not serve to negate its applicability.

As such, *Skopostheorie*, as Nord and Chesterman have identified, has gained more traction as a prescriptive theory. However, it is a perfectly adequate model to describe (many) past literary translations: to analyse translators' purposes, and to demonstrate why they made their decisions with reference to the socio-cultural context. What my study represents, then, is a narrowing of the scope of *Skopostheorie*. Much of my description of the canonical theory (2.1) is tailored towards translator training (didactic prescriptivism). I intend to shift the focus away from this, giving *Skopostheorie* a centrally retrospective function. I will show how this may be done in my third chapter by employing recent translations of the *Inferno*. But, of course, these are arguably "optimal cases". This study, then, is just one empirical example of how *Skopostheorie* as a descriptive approach *may* be applied in literary translation, nothing more.

2.3.4 *Skopostheorie* and Literary Translation

Skopostheorie, as I will demonstrate in the third chapter, may be employed in a practical way both to describe and to prescribe literary translation just as much as technical translation.⁷⁰ *Skopostheorie* has no prescriptions regarding text typology; the *skopos* of each individual case will dictate the target-text type.⁷¹ The theory was designed by Vermeer to subsume all types of translation.⁷² After all, the author includes numerous examples of translating literature in his theoretical papers.⁷³ Nevertheless, *Skopostheorie* has suffered from being bogged down in banal and non-literary configurations that have served to make the theory appear for purely quotidian use. Susan Bassnett, for instance, in her book describing translation theories in general, uses the following example to legitimize and to describe *Skopostheorie*:

⁷⁰ On the distinction between literary and technical translation, see Bassnett (1997).

⁷¹ See Hatim (2001: 77–8) on text typology and *Skopostheorie*.

⁷² On the validity of *Skopostheorie* to *all* text types, see Nord (1997a: 64 *et passim*).

⁷³ The translation of Homer comes up quite a lot in Vermeer's writing. Nord (1997a: 93–103) convincingly uses the example of translating *Alice in Wonderland* into German. Cf. Vermeer (1992: 12b) on translating Sallust.

[In accordance with *Skopostheorie*], a translator is at liberty to reconfigure a text in accordance with the norms of that text type in the target language. So texts such as professional letters, instruction manuals, legal or technical documents, recipes and patterns need to be reproduced in the target language in whatever way the translator deems appropriate.

(1980/2014: 84)

But *Skopostheorie* can be used for so much more than translating cake recipes. Nord raises the same issue: “literary translators or literary scholars interested in translation often see functionalism as something that is simply not meant for them” (1997a: 120). This assumption fails to grasp the full intended scope of *Skopostheorie*. One reason for this tendency to disregard literary translation comes from within the theory itself. Nord’s work focuses on translator training (coining the term “functionalism”), which implicitly draws attention to more technical translations. Another reason for this stems from the idea of the translation “commission” (*Auftrag*), which again seems oriented towards professional translators. The vocabulary and terminology of *Skopostheorie* have traditionally been seen as tailored towards professional, non-literary translation. It must be noted, however, that such terminology could be applied to any form of translation. After all, the translator of Dante has a commission (e.g. Penguin Books) just as much as the translator of a car manual (e.g. Hyundai). In any case, “a translator may be his own ‘commissioner’” (Vermeer 1996: 79).⁷⁴ It is therefore clear that *Skopostheorie* was, at least, *designed* to deal with all kinds of translational action.

This has not prevented more narrow readings of *Skopostheorie*. Many esteemed translation theorists have commended *Skopostheorie* for its relevance to technical translation, but attempt to negate any link to literary translation.⁷⁵ The issue of text typology represents a crucial contradiction in the reasoning of Lefevere and Bassnett. According to their conception, translation can be subdivided into two broad categories: literary translation and technical translation (Bassnett 1997: 87). Bassnett praises the contribution of *Skopostheorie* to translation studies, but does not explicitly apply it to literary translation. The literary translator is “constrained by the source text in a different way” to the technical translator; and, for many scholars, Vermeer’s reasoning must only be applied to the latter category (Bassnett 1997: 87; cf. Chesterman & Wagner 2002: 46). As such, contrary to the thesis of functionalists, both Bassnett and Lefevere, despite their similarities with Vermeer mentioned above, maintain a more limited view regarding what makes a “satisfactory translation” (Lefevere 1975: 101). So

⁷⁴ *Contra* Crisafulli (2003: 39) who erroneously insists that *Skopostheorie* is predicated on the presence of an external commissioner.

⁷⁵ Snell-Hornby (2006: 65) discusses this perspective.

Bassnett: “when the rewriter is perfectly fused with the source, a poem is translated” (1998b: 74). There is still a tendency here to define the adequacy of a target text in relation to its source text. As *Skopostheorie* contends, a translation does not necessarily have to be defined in these terms (though it ought to be if it professes to be an ‘accurate’ or ‘faithful’ translation).

One problem, raised by Matthew Reynolds, goes as follows: “what job it (the literary text) does, can never finally be defined” (2011: 21). Of course, such an assertion concedes that literary texts *do* have a function and, by extension, so must their translations. Certainly, such situations, functions, and jobs are “more complex still” (2011: 21), but this is not to deny the existence of some sort of intention or purpose behind literary translations. One of John Dryden’s purposes in translating the *Aeneid* was, as Lefevere has pointed out, to bring the work to two broad groups: the seventeenth-century English aristocracy, and the lower-middle classes (1998: 44).⁷⁶ Translators’ purposes (*skopoi*) are broadly possible to pinpoint in any literary text. The occasional mundane language used by functionalists does not negate its importance in literary translation. Perhaps the most useful theoretical work outlining the utility of functionalism in literary translation came in a 1990 essay by Margret Ammann. She provided a model through which one could analyse and assess a translated literary text (1990). This study has compelled Mary Snell-Hornby to shift her position on the applicability of *Skopostheorie* to literary translation.⁷⁷ A number of other studies have also developed the real-world application of *Skopostheorie* in a literary setting.⁷⁸ The case study of English translations of Dante’s *Inferno* will contribute to this discourse.

For a particularly illustrative example of how *Skopostheorie* may be employed in literary translation, let us return to Seamus Heaney’s 1979 poem–translation, “Ugolino”, which appeared at the very end of his collection *Field Work* (FW 61–4). As far as I can tell, no one, at the time of publication or more recently, criticized Heaney for his “raid” tactic on the text.⁷⁹ It is an exceptional poem in its own right, and is designed to be read in the wider context of *Field Work*. No one criticizes Heaney for misleading students of Dante or for “saying things in English [Dante] would never have dreamt of saying in Italian”.⁸⁰ But this is, quite clearly,

⁷⁶ Further, Dryden defined his purpose and readership in his *Dedication of the Aeneis*: “I am not ambitious of pleasing the lowest, or the middle form of Readers” (ll. 1916–17), though it is clear that it was read by people of all classes. So Corse (1991: 131): “everything about the translation suggests that he was appealing to a popular audience.” Dryden’s primary purpose (among numerous others) was “to make Virgil speak English, as he would have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in the present Age” (ll. 2007–9).

⁷⁷ Compare Snell-Hornby (1990: 84) and Snell-Hornby (2006: 64–5): “I am now convinced that the skopos theory can be applied to more areas of the discipline than can Descriptive Translation Studies.”

⁷⁸ See Nord (1997a: 93ff.), Lavric (2007), Esala (2013), and (especially) Low (2003, 2013), among others.

⁷⁹ See Heaney & Hass (2000: 1–2 *et passim*) on this raid (and settlement) metaphor.

⁸⁰ Singleton (1950: 394), on Sayers’ 1949 *Inferno* translation.

because of the context. “Ugolino” is a product of Heaney’s artistic expression as much as it is an imitation of Dante. Moreover, the imagery of food and cannibalism in “Ugolino” is constructed to allude to and juxtapose the first poem of the collection (“Oysters”), where the narrator describes his consumption of oysters which lay “alive and violated [...] on their beds of ice” (FW 11).⁸¹ Allusions to the crisis in Northern Ireland at the time abound, and it is designed to be read with this in mind (for some readers, at least).⁸² Certain features of the *skopos* of this poem are not completely agreed upon: there is dispute as to whether the parallel between political violence in mediaeval Pisa and contemporary Éire is condemnatory or sympathetic towards Ugolino.⁸³ Implicitly (or, perhaps even explicitly), the poem’s *skopos* is entirely different from, say, C.H. Sisson’s verse translation that was published a year later in 1980.⁸⁴ Heaney, modern literary criticism seems to be unanimous in concluding, had every right to “raid” the text as he did because of his poetical skill, and because it was implicitly agreed between the target audience and the author that his *skopos* was entirely different from the creator of the source text (Dante). As Heaney himself admitted, he had “foraged unfairly into the Italian and ripped it untimely from its place” (Brandes & Heaney 1988: 12).

By extension, should we think of full translations of the *Inferno* by poets as any different? As recently as 2013, Joan Acocella raised the concern (of Mary Jo Bang’s 2012 translation) that “all of us should worry about her students [...]. They’re going to go off thinking that Dante wrote about meringue-pie mountains, and this is wrong” (2013: n.p.). This seems to be a common concern regarding creative verse translations of Dante: that they will somehow corrupt the next generation of Dantists. But if it is acknowledged between target reader and translator that the translation will not “faithfully” follow the wording of the original (Bang herself acknowledges this),⁸⁵ then the translator is at liberty to translate however s/he likes. The translator has carved out some sort of *skopos* for herself/himself, ascertained the readership, and then writes with that *skopos* and readership in mind. Heaney did exactly this in

⁸¹ See Fumagalli (1995: 124–7) on the structure of *Field Work*.

⁸² That said, it is not crucial for his readers to pick up on these allusions: “the contemporary parallel is not at all necessary”, said Heaney (O’Driscoll 2008: 425).

⁸³ Heininger (2005: 59–60) asserts that the condemnatory attitude from Dante’s original is maintained in Heaney’s translation. McCarthy (2008: 57) conversely reads the translation as an expression of “sympathy for the suffering of innocent victims”, agreeing with Fumagalli (1995: 137–40). Cf. Crisafulli (1993: 200–1) for a more agnostic view.

⁸⁴ Sisson’s aim, understandably, is more selfless; though he, as a poet, demonstrably wants to show off his poetic ability too. Sisson is in favour of a milder form of domestication than Heaney: to bring the poem into the “the kind of verse which belongs to the current development of the language” (Sisson 1980: 39ff.). Cf. Heaney’s review of Sisson’s translation (1980: 14).

⁸⁵ Bang, quoted in Goetzman (2012: n.p.): “this translation might also appeal to readers who do read poetry but haven’t read the *Inferno* because they assumed it would be too difficult.”

1979, and modern poets today are following suit in their own individual contexts, with their own *skopoi* in mind. Every translation, literary or otherwise, has a *skopos*. Vermeer's formulation is thus a broad overarching idea that is, as Nord asserts, "valid for all fields of oral or written intercultural communication and for any culture and language pair" (1997a: 64).

2.3.5 How to Spot a *Skopos*

But how does the *skopos* manifest itself? After all, there is no list of *skopoi* available to translators. Moreover, a translator cannot be expected to provide a breakdown of her/his decision-making process (a "purpose analysis"; Pym 2014: 57) with every translation. This issue is, in theory, relatively straightforward.

For the translator, the brief will be provided by either a commission (in literary translation, this will probably be a publisher or a patron) or by the translator herself/himself. In the case of literary translation, one would suspect that the variety of options available to the translator would depend on her/his competence or on her/his relationship and agreement with the commission. Compare, for instance, my prose-crib translation⁸⁶ with that of Clive James: we were both our own commissioner, and had the freedom to translate however we (individually) saw fit (though this is where the similarities end). Since we were both operating without the external influence of any sort of commissioner (James clearly did not write the translation on demand for W.W. Norton or Picador), we had an almost inexhaustible variety of *skopoi* available to us. James, as a talented poet, had the *skopos* of producing "an easy-seeming onward flow" with enjoyable, modern-sounding poetry (2013: xxvi). My *skopos* was entirely different, owing to my own inability to write poetry (among other reasons). As such, the translator does not have a list of *skopoi* from which to choose their translation method; but why should s/he? There are simply too many to list, and this is why Vermeer did not bother to enumerate the *skopoi*. Robert Pinsky's *skopos* in translating the *Inferno* (1994) is somewhat different from Ciaran Carson's *skopos* (2002), even though they both translated the same text in the same way (*terza rima*) in a similar time period. Myriad external features influence the *skopos* of a translator. In every single translation of Dante's *Inferno*, I contend that there is a *skopos* detectable, whether implicitly or explicitly.

⁸⁶ See Appendix.

I must note that, in other texts, the number of *skopoi* may be more limited. Translations of Dante are, as has been noted, truly exceptional in their diversity and in their sheer number.⁸⁷ Of all texts then, it is perhaps most logical that the *Inferno* should follow both the descriptions and prescriptions of functionalism. However, certain limitations may be found in texts that have been translated less, even not at all. Should we really judge the English Dante by the same standards as, say, an English Cavalcanti, or an English Petrarch? Take, for instance, Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1903 epic poem *Maia* which, for whatever reason, has yet to be translated in full into English. *Skopostheorie* would dictate that, provided that the translator were faithful to her/his *skopos*, any means of translating the poem into English would be acceptable if that medium were demanded by the commission. If the text has no history in the target culture, and the target culture has little or no knowledge of the original text, then the translator could be at liberty to distort the meaning however s/he chooses. One would of course hope (assume, even) that the *skopos* would compel the translator to be "loyal," and avoid deceiving the target culture. It therefore seems entirely logical that the more a text has been translated, the more *skopoi* there are available to the translator. Vermeer only briefly touches on the issue: "how many goals are actually realizable is another matter. We might assume that in at least some cases the number of realizable goals is only one" (1989/2004: 234). It would be impossible to quantify these goals. The *skopoi* available to a translator ultimately depend on various extratextual factors: translation norms of the recipient culture, demand, and so forth.

The prescriptive element of *Skopostheorie* is thus quite easy to follow: the translator will translate best when s/he is faithful to her *skopos*. It becomes a little more complicated when one approaches the issue from a descriptive point of view. That is to say, how does the receiver (the reader of the translation) know what the translator's *skopos* was? Vermeer responds thus:

As for the recipient(s), the *skopos* will have to be (if at all) inferred from text-internal (immanent) and external (transcendent) signals (features). From the point of view of the recipient(s) the *skopos* of a translation as intended by the (commissioner and) translator coincides with the latter's [*sic*] 'intention'.
(1996: 79)

⁸⁷ Crisafulli (2000: 340): "there are a great number of rewritings of Dante's poem into English (perhaps more than into any other language)". Cf. De Sua's preface (1964: n.p.) to his important book on the tradition of translating Dante.

This ties back into the earlier point on ethics (2.3.2): it is the translator's responsibility to be open with her/his readership and let it know "the reason for the choice of strategy" (Vermeer 1992b: 13; cf. 1996: 7). This may manifest itself explicitly (by way of a translator's note at the beginning of the volume, for example) or implicitly (through cover design, or through signs within the text). The translator's honesty is essential in *Skopostheorie* (even without the addition of Nord's conception of loyalty).⁸⁸ Therefore, according to *Skopostheorie*, it is expected that the reader will know exactly what to expect from a certain translation.

2.3.6 Translation Quality Assessment

This is all, however, theoretical. The question remains as to whether it is feasible, possible even, to determine the *skopos* of any single translation. Anthony Pym has hit upon this problem:

If the purpose is ultimately defined by the translator, as Vermeer would suggest, then how can we consistently accuse translators of not fulfilling the purpose that they themselves defined?

(2014: 56)

Put simply, how does the reader or the critic decide whether a translation is good or bad (that is, how faithfully does it adhere to the *skopos* adduced by the translator)? How can we deduce whether the translator is making a mistake, or is simply taking deliberate 'liberties' with the source text?

The former issue is raised by Dorothy Sayers' translation of the *Commedia*. Using Vermeer's logic, one would have no right to criticize her decision to employ *terza rima* as a translation method. She eschews the "verbal accuracy" that prose translation entails in favour of a flowing poetic version for the "common reader": one who is "literate, but not [...] educated" (Sayers 1949: 56; cf. 1963: 92). Thus she intended to sustain some of the "speed and rhythm and the 'punch' of the rhyme" (1949: 56). Within the parameters of *Skopostheorie*, there is no valid reason to criticize her on making such decisions. After all, the "source text does not determine the variety of the target text" (Vermeer 1989/2004: 238). Sayers decided to adopt certain qualities of the source text (*terza rima*) but abandoned numerous others to create

⁸⁸ See, for example, Vermeer (1996: 80; 1989/2004: 234).

her own poem. No one can begrudge Sayers this. However, what of her use of archaisms? Take, for example, the following passage from *If I* 112–17:

But, as for **thee**, I think and deem it well
Thou take me for **thou** guide, and pass with me
Through an eternal place and terrible

Where **thou shalt** hear despairing cries, and see
Long-parted souls that in their torments dire
Howl for the second death perpetually.

(*Sal* 74)

Through the lens of *Skopostheorie*, the fault here is not with her faithfulness to Dante. She makes it quite clear in her introduction and in other essays that her work “is not, of course, Dante” (1949: 55–6).

Strictly speaking, there is nothing wrong with archaizing translations under *Skopostheorie*. Some source-oriented perspectives decry such “backdating” translations on the basis that they are written in a style that is inimical to Dante’s.⁸⁹ This perspective is invalid, according to *Skopostheorie*, because it focuses on source- and target-text differences. If, however, we turn to a target-oriented perspective, and consider that Sayers wanted to provide a translation that was lexically accessible to the “common reader” of mid-twentieth-century Britain, one may consider the translation to be, in some respects, inadequate. She intended to create a translation that was free of “too-jarring an anachronism” (1949: 61); and yet, some readers may argue that her translation has failed to adhere to this particular *skopos*.

This illustrates one of the most serious issues with *Skopostheorie*. How do we know that this was not part of Sayers’ *skopos*? We have two pieces of writing by Sayers explaining the reasons for her translational decisions in detail (one of which is her introduction). Such works, in theory, let the reader know exactly what to expect of a work of translation. Vermeer asserted that “if the translator does his work well, the translation [...] will correspond to its *skopos*” (1996: 79). But if the translator has not comprehensively defined every aspect of her/his *skopos*, then how is it possible to define it *in toto*? A further problem arises out of Edoardo Crisafulli’s interpretation of Sayers’ translation:

⁸⁹ So Griffiths & M. Reynolds (2005: xxi): many translators (such as Cary and Sayers) adopt archaisms that create the impression “that Dante wrote in an Italian which would have sounded two hundred years old to his first readers; he didn’t, he wrote in a sweet new style.”

Sayers's greatest achievement [...] lies in the fact that she is the only translator to go some way towards reproducing Dante's mingling of styles: she retains the original Latin expressions and blends formal, archaic and colloquial English.

(2000: 342)

Crisafulli's view is a substantial shift from many interpretations of Sayers' translation,⁹⁰ and raises a very interesting question. Who decides whether a text is adequate? That is, is it possible to know for sure what the author's *skopos* really is? Crisafulli praises Sayers' text for the exact reasons for which others condemn it, stating that her archaisms were a deliberate textual feature to reflect Dante's varied register. It seems almost impossible for the retrospective critic to judge the quality of a translation if one cannot, for certain, quantify the translator's *skopoi*. Authorial intention is difficult to identify, especially if (unlike Sayers) the translator does not provide a note on the translation.

Can *Skopostheorie*, then, inform us about the quality of translations? Functionalists assert that "you can only judge the quality of a translation fairly if you know why the translator translated that way" (Chesterman & Wagner 2002: 84; cf. 88–90). Yet, its terminology is vague and, being a general theory, it does not provide any strict guidelines. *Skopostheorie* does not provide a mechanism by which critics, readers, and reviewers may judge the quality of a given translation. For Radegundis Stolze, this is one of its central pitfalls: it is "too unspecific for the foundation of a translation theory" (2002: 280). Stolze certainly has a point that the theory is unspecific. But, to my knowledge, there exists no perfect *model* of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA).⁹¹ There have been some attempts to produce a TQA model under the umbrella of functionalism (Kußmaul 1995: 127ff.). However, I wholeheartedly agree with Hans Hönig's proposition that, because of the inherent ambiguity involved in TQA, it is extremely problematic to base a critical assessment on a readership whose desires and reactions can never be truly quantified; a "speculative element [inevitably] will remain" (1997: 14–15; cf. 31–2).

As inconclusive as this may seem, Hönig has hit upon a possible solution to the problem. One does not *need* a definitive TQA model. This issue highlights the inherent ambiguity and interpretability of literature in general. One cannot possibly quantify good or

⁹⁰ Kiely (2003: 63) describes her translation as "abominable". Contemporary reviews such as Singleton (1950), E. Williamson (1951), and Elliott (1958–59) voiced similar views. Cf. Holmes (1957: 279): "Miss Sayers' diction often becomes clogged by her fondness for the rare and the antiquated word." To add to this confusion, Bassnett (1998: 73) labels Sayers' translation "colloquial".

⁹¹ Though attempts have been made. See, for instance, House (1997).

bad translations in a definitive way, in exactly the same way that one cannot definitively separate good literature from bad literature. This does not necessarily make *Skopostheorie* purely relativistic, but there is demonstrably a relativistic element to it (Vermeer 1998: 52–3). This need not necessarily be taken as a weakness of the theory as a whole. Pym has observed that *Skopostheorie* might make all translations “unfalsifiable”, on a pedestal beyond criticism (2014: 56). The translator’s adherence to her/his *skopos* does indeed seem a little arbitrary. I would, however, like to provide a hypothesis: there is no tidy way of weighing up one translation over another, and rightly so. It is ultimately up to the individual reader to evaluate this, with respect to her or his social and cultural conditions.

This point relates to translation errors as well. As Chesterman contends, “errors are relative to readers and readers’ expectations. But readers are different: some have access to the source text, others do not” (1997/2000: 121). Accordingly, he presents the entirely reasonable conclusion that “evaluative assessments [regarding errors in particular] are ultimately not final or absolute but relative to particular people and places and times” (122). Of course, there will be some cases where one will be able to deduce that the translator has made a mistake, particularly in prose translations where the translator has professed full philological accuracy. It becomes a little more difficult in ‘creative’ translations, when the translator is already taking ‘liberties’ with the source text. But this is, of course, Chesterman’s point: it is difficult and ambiguous, but there is nothing wrong with this subjectivism.

So much for adequacy. What, then, of intratextual coherence (*viz.* the role of the audience in the construction of meaning)? For this, one may return to Reader Response Theory which, as mentioned previously, has strong but previously unacknowledged similarities with *Skopostheorie*. It is up to the so-called “interpretive communities”, as Stanley Fish calls them, to decide the coherence of a translation.

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions.

(1980: 171)

That is to say, readers will inevitably interpret a text based on the social conditions in which they are reading it.⁹² As Vermeer asserted, there is “no such thing as ‘the’ authoritative [source] text for all recipients” (Reiß & Vermeer 1984/2014: 81). Interpretation of a translation depends

⁹² For a detailed explanation of Fish’s ideas, see Tyson (2006: 185–8).

on the position of the person who reads it. Using this logic, it is impossible, pointless even, to attempt to identify the readership.

The problem [...] is not that there is no set of addressees, but that it is an indeterminate, fuzzy set [...]. The clarity or otherwise of the concept is not specified by the *skopos* theory.

(Vermeer 1989/2004: 233)⁹³

The translator thus may not even be thinking of a particular addressee when translating. Even Mary Jo Bang, who has produced one of the most distinctive modern translations of the *Inferno*, claimed to have “[no] particular readers in mind” (Goetzman 2012: n.p.). However, the assumption will naturally be there that some people of some sort of background will want to read it. It will not be to some people’s taste (Bang’s translation is very much at the opposite end of the scale to Singleton’s scholarly prose translation), but each one will be judged by its own interpretive community. This fits neatly into the logic of Theodore Savory, who argued persuasively in 1959 (long before *Skopostheorie*) that “readers of translations do not differ only in their personal preferences, they differ also [...] in the reasons for which they are reading a translation at all” (1959: 57). Though his attempts to pin down readership groups are a little reductive,⁹⁴ his thesis obtains today.

Owing to this subjectivity, the purpose of this essay is not to evaluate recent translations of Dante’s *Inferno* in a definitive sense. As Vermeer himself said, “it will not always be possible to produce a ‘really’ optimal text” (1996: 100). It will not even try to identify the readers of these translations. Instead, my focus will be on the translator’s purpose; the reception of the translation (its “intratextual coherence”) is too complex to identify.

Accordingly, the second part of this essay describes the purposes behind these translations, and provide hypotheses as to the “adequacy” of each translation. Like Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie*, this essay is both descriptive and prescriptive. To conclude, *Skopostheorie* accounts for the beautiful variety of translations of texts into English. It is, as I have mentioned, a wonderfully delimiting approach. *Skopostheorie* is not mutually exclusive with other target-oriented approaches; they are rather sub-theories of Vermeer’s overarching general theory. There are areas where it lacks specificity, but this is an inevitable feature of such a broad idea. Ultimately, its appeal lies in its flexibility and tolerance. *Skopostheorie* is a heuristic,

⁹³ Cf. Reiß: “it is extremely doubtful whether there is any point in measuring the deficits and surpluses of the target text compared with the value of the source text” (1984/2014: 113).

⁹⁴ Savory identifies “four kinds of readers” to whom the translator may appeal (1959: 57–9).

teleological tool to be employed against dogmatic and excessively linguistic positions towards translation (some of which will be discussed in the second chapter). It teaches us that there is a vast array of options available to the translator, and the quality of the work does not rest on the translation strategy or on the relationship between the source and the target text.

2.4 Afterword

Today, the general attitude to *Skopostheorie* is respectful but somewhat indifferent. It is viewed as a useful but essentially *passé* approach to translation, with little impact on literary translation. Many of its claims are not universally accepted. The purpose of this chapter has been to challenge (not necessarily to disprove) some of these claims and to demonstrate how *Skopostheorie* may offer a useful lens through which to understand the translation process. But even if one does not accept all of the more controversial claims of *Skopostheorie*, I believe that one can find value in the approach. Regardless of some of the more complex elements of the theory, *Skopostheorie* provides a unique and useful way of looking at translations: focusing on the translator's purpose, and using that as a starting point for translation analysis. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how this translation analysis could manifest itself. Even if we do not accept all of Vermeer's claims, I hope to prove that the broad methodology of *Skopostheorie* can help us to understand and to study literary translations. Andrew Chesterman has, not unjustly, criticized the theory for its lack of empirical evidence: "it is striking that very little such testing has actually been done" (2010: 216). The following chapter will provide some groundwork towards empirically validating *Skopostheorie*.

CHAPTER 3

Recent Translations of the *Inferno*

A Functionalist Analysis

3.1 Towards a Practical Retrospective Application for *Skopostheorie*

Chapter Two was entirely theoretical. This chapter will demonstrate how Vermeer's theory may be applied in a practical sense. *Skopostheorie* is, I must reiterate, not a purely prescriptive approach. Despite the reservations presented by Chesterman (2010), *Skopostheorie* has a descriptive function in a limited but very real sense. Most translations are not carried out under the optimal circumstances that *Skopostheorie* presupposes (Chesterman 2010: 217–18). And yet, *Skopostheorie* maintains some descriptive value (2.3.3). Above all, the approach provides the translation critic with a broad framework with which to analyse and to criticize (in both senses of the verb) translations. The analysis is the *descriptive* area of the approach, whereas the criticism is *prescriptive*. In this chapter, I employ both the (retrospective) prescriptive and (exegetical) descriptive aspects of *Skopostheorie*. This is preceded by an explanation of why this retrospective prescriptive function is important. I demonstrate that *Skopostheorie* is as important to the critic as it is to the translator (3.2). This is followed by a brief discussion of the prominent trends (or, perhaps, *skopoi*) in translating the *Commedia*. Next, I analyse three recent translations of Canto I of Dante's *Inferno* through the lens of *Skopostheorie* (3.4). I attempt to identify the main *skopoi* of these translators and translations. All translations have intentions and purposes, and it is important to identify these to understand their position in the target situation. Secondly, I discuss these translations critically, utilizing the prescriptive function of *Skopostheorie*. In so doing, I look at the merits and faults of these translation with specific and exclusive reference to their *skopoi*.

Hans Vermeer did not provide a coherent model or metric for translation criticism. Functionalist models for translation analysis have been proposed in the past, most notably by

Margret Ammann.¹ My approach *broadly* reflects Ammann’s methodology: the main focus, naturally, is the function of the target text within the target culture. This will be determined in particular by the translator’s intentions, which may be divined by extratextual or paratextual evidence (the writings of the translator herself/himself) or intratextual evidence (the evidence within the text). This then allows me to provide some sort of evaluation of the translation, in determining the extent to which the translator has achieved her/his *skopos*. Thus, to clarify, I am not using a definitive *model* as constructed by Margret Ammann. I am broadly attempting to identify some prominent *skopoi* from the translations, and I am discussing the extent to which these translators are faithful to their *skopos*. It is not for me to identify a translation’s intratextual coherence in any definitive way.² As discussed in the previous chapter, *Skopostheorie* lacks precision when identifying its “recipients”: all it says is that there must be recipients for whom the translation should be coherent. Accordingly, this chapter deals primarily with Vermeer’s first axiom: the *skopos* rule (*viz.* the translation’s adequacy). After all, the translation’s “communicative efficacy [*viz.* intratextual coherence] is primarily determined by the degree to which it fulfils its *skopos*” (Chesterman 1997/2000: 33). Thus, intratextual coherence is subordinate to, and determined by, the *skopos* rule. I look at the extent to which the *skopos* is realized, which ultimately conditions the translation’s intratextual coherence.

In this chapter, I analyse three very different recent translations of Dante’s first canto. As demonstrated by the appendix of this volume, the turgescence of *Commedia* translations has only continued since the 1990s, and translation criticism has barely been able to keep up. Indeed, a reviewer writing as early as 1965 asserted that “the current output of writing on Dante in all languages has reached such a point that no man could keep up with it” (Fergusson 1965: n.p., paraphrasing Erich Auerbach). Today, it is scarcely possible to keep pace with the output of English translations of the *Commedia*. As such, in order to provide a reasonably detailed account of the chosen translations within such a brief chapter, I deal with just a fraction of recent translations all published in the mid-1990s. The translations are by Seamus Heaney (1993), Steve Ellis (1994), and Robert M. Durling (1996). Furthermore, to provide some focus

¹ See Ammann (1990) for the full model. Cf. Snell-Hornby (2006: 109–14) for a brief explanation and the model’s subsequent applications.

² In this respect, Ammann’s model is fraught with difficulty, since it requires the analyst to determine the target and source texts’ intratextual coherence (that is, the extent to which the text is understood by the reader) by using her personal adaptation of Umberto Eco’s notion of the “model reader” (1979: 62 *et passim*). A possible (though flawed) way of determining the translation’s intratextual coherence may be in book sales. For example, 50,000 copies of Sayers’ translation were sold in the first three months (*Dant. Enc.* 765). Cf. B. Reynolds (1983) on Sayers’ popularity.

in my discussion, I limit my analysis and (most of) my examples to passages from the opening canto. There are some exceptions, but these are provided to solidify examples from the first canto. “All beginnings are crucial,” as Burton Raffel once noted (1988: 108); in this spirit, I will use the opening cantos translated by Heaney, Ellis, and Durling as synecdoches, as archetypes, of the rest of their translations. After all, the tone does not shift greatly from canto to canto within each translation.

To some readers it may seem peculiar that I continually refer to the source text in the following section in this squarely target-oriented approach. In Vermeer’s formulation, target-orientedness is a prescriptive concept. That is to say, translators and critics alike ought to consider the conditions of the target culture above the conditions of the source culture. I should stress, however, that this does not preclude discussion of the source text *in toto*. The *intertextual* coherence between the texts remains an important descriptive aspect of the theory. The source and target texts do not *have* to be entirely intertextually coherent, but the extent to which they differ from the source text is where the point of interest lies in a translation. How has the translator transferred the source material into her/his own poetics/prose? one might ask. As such, the translator’s adherence to her/his *skopos* can only be identified by way of comparing the source and target texts. This will be the principal procedure of section 3.4. The preceding section (3.3) will provide some context, identifying various trends in Dante translation in recent times.

Lastly, it will be observed that I occasionally make reference to the terminology of other translation theories to describe the linguistic process. Terms such as “dynamic equivalence” and “foreignization” appear on the odd occasion. Again, this is because Vermeer’s general target-oriented theory does not provide sufficient terminology by itself to describe translations in full. Any translational terminology is defined on the occasions when it is used. But I do need to clear up one term before we get started: “creative translation”. I am using the term “creativity” in a very general sense, as defined by Sternberg and Lubart:

Creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints).

(1999: 3)

Creative translation, therefore, may set out to be ‘unfaithful’, in a sense, to the source-text author. Creative translation may vitalize contemporary poetry, as Stuart Gillespie stipulates (2011: 29), but it does not necessarily have to. The creativity depends on the translator’s

engagement with the text, not on its reception. There may be degrees of creativity in translation (some translations are more creative than others), but all creative translations have the task of being “novel”. In the case of translating Dante, creative translations will usually be verse translations of the *Commedia*. Indeed, I consider both Heaney’s and Ellis’s versions “creative” translations.

On a final note, one will notice that there is somewhat more detail on Heaney’s *skopoi* than on those of the other translators discussed. This, unsurprisingly, owes to the amount of both primary and secondary literature devoted to his poetics. *Skopostheorie* is certainly a much easier interpretative tool when the translator has already written so much on the subject. This is not to be seen as a flaw of the other translators, nor of my own methodology. For some translators, the only method of divining their *skopos* is by way of the text itself, or with hints within the introduction. That said, mercifully, most translators provide at least some sort of note on their intention.

3.2 Why *Skopostheorie* Matters

Aside from all of the criticisms mentioned in the preceding chapter, there is one that must be addressed before I proceed with this study. To put it simply, it has been argued that *Skopostheorie* does not actually *prove* a great deal in literary translation. Anthony Pym has recently made this point. He concedes that *Skopostheorie* brought in pragmatic ideas, such as “the general principle that the one text can be translated in different ways, to suit different purposes”; however these ideas “were not particularly troubling in themselves, given that they called on common sense and a dash of existentialist liberalism (each translator has to decide for themselves)” (Pym 2014: 49). In sum, there is a general impression that *Skopostheorie*, as a prescriptive theory, just states the obvious. And yet, it is demonstrably clear that it is not simply “common sense” to everyone involved in translation. Target-orientedness is still resisted in many quarters of translation criticism and translation theory. In this section, I briefly outline some views of translation that diametrically oppose the prescriptions of *Skopostheorie*. These views ultimately fall into the old ‘free vs. liberal’ dichotomy of translation, and condemn certain translations on the basis of the strategy employed by the translator. Such criticism has the tendency to ignore the intentions of the translator and the intended function of the translation in the target culture, and is instead often based on aesthetic preferences alone. As

such, it could be said that *Skopostheorie*'s main prescriptive function lies in the criticism of translation criticism (or 'translation criticism criticism').

I will begin by looking at André Lefevere's 1975 book *Translating Poetry*.³ The purpose of Lefevere's study was, in part, to build on and, above all, to criticize such lines of reasoning — such as that of Savory (1957)⁴ — that are “content to state the various possible types of translation, and then defend them all, on the grounds that there is a certain type of translation which satisfies a certain type of reader” (1975: 3). It is my belief that every translation must satisfy a “certain type of reader”; indeed, such a claim is more or less unfalsifiable. And yet, Lefevere's study is predicated on the view that “most translations, versions, and imitations are unsatisfactory renderings of the source text” (1975: 99). Any translation that focuses “exclusively on one aspect of the source text only” is, in his view, inherently flawed. As such, he dismisses “literal” translations as “positively harmful”; “metrical” translation “destroys the balance of the source text”; prose translation is either bogged down by “a mass of additional words” or by “superimposing its syntactical patterns on the target text”; meanwhile, in a rhyming or blank verse translation, “the target text reads more like an unintentional parody of its source” (1975: 96–8). Lefevere does propose some sensible solutions,⁵ but his attempts to narrow the boundaries of translation and to condemn various strategies are in direct opposition to the ideas of *Skopostheorie*. His argument is ultimately founded on the principle that some translation strategies are objectively better than others; *Skopostheorie*, conversely, removes value from this debate. Some strategies may be more appropriate than others in the target situation, but ultimately the quality of the translation itself is determined by the translator's ability to achieve her/his *skopos*.

Lefevere is not the only notable translation theorist whose ideas contradict *Skopostheorie*. Lawrence Venuti extols a “foreignizing” approach to translation, arguing that translations that make the translation read like an original work are inherently unethical because they perpetuate the dominance of the target culture (1995: 17; 2004/2013: *passim*). Put simply, the better translations are those that retain some of the foreignness of the source; that give the reader some idea that s/he is in the presence of a translation by way of the language in text; that eschew the dominance of the target culture. In the words of Venuti, a translation ought “to be

³ Note that, as Jones points out, Lefevere's ideas changed somewhat in the following decade: it was “written before the late-1980s shift in translation studies towards viewing translation as not just a textual act, but also a psychological and a social one” (2011b: 11).

⁴ And, later, that of Vermeer: see Reiß & Vermeer (1984/2014: 38) for Savory's influence on Vermeer.

⁵ See in particular Lefevere (1975: 101–4); he himself admits that his model will not produce an “ideal” translation, just one that might “be more successful than most” (104).

read differently from an original composition precisely because it is not an original, because not only a foreign work, but a foreign culture is involved” (2004/2013: 115).

Venuti’s idea, like Lefevere’s, presupposes the existence of some ‘better’ form of translation, be it for ethical or aesthetic reasons. There is not the space here to discuss Venuti’s arguments in full, nor is it my purpose to debunk them.⁶ It will be enough to say, for now, that Venuti’s position, while admirable in its quest for a more ethical form of translation, essentially attempts to *limit* the translator’s possibilities. It does not account for the richness of translation strategies that we see in translations of Dante specifically, and in literary translation in general. *Skopostheorie* provides a more tolerant, delimiting alternative. Of course, the case could be made for applying the two approaches dependent on the context: Venuti’s approach is particularly important in a post-colonial context, where it prescribes a less Euro-centric form of translation.⁷ However, Vermeer’s is perhaps more appropriate when looking at antique or classic(al) texts that are translated over and over again: those who complain that the likes of “poor Sophocles [are] in no position to sue for infringement of copyright or defamation of character” are few and far between.⁸ (And yet, some people do, as will soon become clear.) Translators are somewhat less constrained by the source text once the work becomes “canonical”, at which the point the translation forms part of a “continuum of rewritings that enable a translator to feel more free than if he or she were translating a text that had never been translated before” (Bassnett 2014: 102).⁹ *Skopostheorie*, then, is appropriate for looking at these translations of canonical texts. The more a text is translated, the greater the range of available *skopoi*.¹⁰

For the remainder of this section, I will outline some views that are particularly persistent in both translation criticism and Dante studies. Though they may raise very different points, what unites them is a tendency to ignore the translator’s intention, and to limit the options available to the translator. A lot of translation criticism is misguided or confused in scope. As Edwin Honig has observed:

⁶ See, in particular, Weinberger (2002: 114–18) and Bassnett (2014: 104–8) for a more extensive critical discussion of Venuti’s paradigm. His point on ethics is certainly well founded, and he correctly observes the dominance of the English-speaking world in translation. But it is perhaps too much of a stretch then to advocate foreignizing strategies above all else in reaction.

⁷ Indeed, Bassnett (2014: 175) has observed a slight shift in translation norms towards Venuti’s “utopian ideal”.

⁸ Such is Paul Turner’s (2007: 133) peculiar admonition of Seamus Heaney’s renderings of Sophocles.

⁹ Cf. Lochhead (1985), after whom Bassnett made this observation. Stuart Gillespie makes a similar point to Bassnett, detecting that “classical translation” has “a special status” (2011: 21). Cf. Lefevere (1998) on how texts acquire “cultural capital”, which allows a greater degree of creativity in translation.

¹⁰ The point could also be made that there are more possibilities in translating poetry than translating prose.

A lot of the criticism of translation by people who look at it as a linguistic exercise, or even a literary exercise, based on a linguistic transferral, is that the writer always ‘takes too many liberties’ with the text.

(1985: 177)

Let us begin by looking at some criticisms of translations into verse. One common criticism is that the translator’s verse form is not comparable to the verse form of the source text. The poet Burton Raffel makes this point on John Ciardi’s 1954 translation of the *Inferno*. His translation is written in wrong sort of poetic language, according to Raffel: “Ciardi’s adjectives can justly be termed Shakespearean or even Miltonic”, while many of his turns of phrase are “both extravagant and false to the original” (Raffel 1988: 109).¹¹ But, of course, being false to the original is not a valid criticism under *Skopostheorie*. Raffel ultimately fails to acknowledge the intentions of the translator.¹² Both Raffel (1988: 110) and Joan Acocella (2013: n.p., discussing Mary Jo Bang’s 2013 translation of the *Inferno*) fear that such poetic translations that ‘take liberties’ with the source text, will distort the meaning for the next generation of “unsuspecting students”. But such a position rests on the presupposition that the translation is somehow written *for* students of Italian or comparative literature. Plainly, Ciardi’s and Bang’s translations were not written for that purpose. It is one thing to criticize a verse translation for its lack of grace in the target language; but to criticize it from an entirely source-oriented perspective is to misunderstand the translator’s purpose.

Such a position, too, seems to rest on a degree of scholarly condescension. Creative (*viz.* poetic) translations are begrudged because they are ‘unfaithful’. In his polemic assessment of Sean O’Brien’s 2006 *Inferno* translation, Eric Griffiths concludes that “nobody needs it” (O’Brien’s version): “Italian is a nice and easy language, it’s no trouble to learn and is worth learning for the Comedy alone” (2006: n.p.). Indeed, Lorna Hardwick has observed that scholars (classicists, in her formulation) see such more creative forms of translation as somehow “invasive” (2008: 361). There is a resistance to poetic translation because it does not convey the source text in a way that they would expect.

On the reverse, there are those who criticize translations because they fail to retain any of the poetics of the source text. Paolo Cherchi is one who provides a rare criticism of prose

¹¹ For an analogous criticism of rendering Dante into an English metre, see J.T. Barbarese on Elio Zappulla’s 1998 *Inferno* translation: “blank verse comes to readers of English covered with Shakespeare’s and Milton’s fingerprints” (2009: 648). For contrast, see Esolen (2003: xxiv): “in English, iambic pentameter [*viz.* blank verse] is the only meter that will do.”

¹² Ciardi (1954: x) stated that he “labored [...] for something like idiomatic English” while trying “to approximate [not replicate] Dante’s way of going” with his defective *terza rima*.

translation. Cherchi criticizes Charles Singleton's translation on the basis that its *skopos* is too narrow: its abundance of notes, Cherchi argues, is "indirect proof of a failure of what the translation has been unable to retain of the original" (2003: 35). Cherchi seemingly favours a more holistic approach to translation, presenting the argument that "it is impossible to think of form and content as two separate elements" (35). Since Singleton fails to reproduce any of the *form* of the original, his translation is inferior to Durling's (which has a more poetic tone than Singleton's, according to Cherchi). The negative view towards prose translations that capture none of the elegance and grace of the original poem is particularly prevalent among poets. Octavio Paz, for instance, in his seminal essay on translation, maintains that, "in theory, only poets should translate poetry" (1971/1992: 158). Any translation that is excessively literal, and fails to retain the poetics of the source text, can no longer be considered a translation: literal translation "is a mechanism, a string of words that helps us read the text in its original language" (1971/1992: 154). Granted, this is one of the primary functions of Singleton's prose crib; but to say that this somehow prevents Singleton's version from *being* a translation betrays an unnecessarily narrow view of the nature of the discipline. Two of Europe's greatest poets, Giacomo Leopardi and John Dryden, both translators of the *Aeneid*, harboured similar views towards the translation of poetry.¹³

What is consistent about each of the above views is that they seek to reduce the translator's options, extolling implicitly or explicitly some elusive platonic ideal translation strategy. This perspective of translation pervades modern scholarship and (especially) literary criticism.¹⁴ *Traduttore traditore*, indeed. And it is on account of the prevalence of these views that *Skopostheorie* matters. The value of *Skopostheorie* is its tolerance, its openness to all types of translation. All strategies have their own value. Of course, *Skopostheorie* does not actually serve to negate these opinions. Instead, this section demonstrates what it is up against. It offers an alternative to narrow "conflict models" of translation, as Lorna Hardwick puts it (2010: 204). *Skopostheorie* may be just "common sense" to some; but limiting, "sterile",¹⁵ profoundly source-oriented conceptions of translation practice still abound. Even critics of *Skopostheorie* acknowledge its hermeneutic value. Edwin Gentzler, in an otherwise critical assessment, lauds Vermeer's approach in one very important respect:

¹³ J.D. *Sylvae* A 5: "[the translator] must perfectly understand his Mothers Tongue, and absolutely command his own: So that to be a thorow Translatour, he must be a thorow Poet." G.L. *Opere* 969 (in the essay "Traduzione del libro secondo della eneide"): "senza esser poeta non si può tradurre un vero poeta".

¹⁴ Some other source-oriented views of translating Dante: R. Hollander (2003), Kart (1995, on Pinsky), Harrison (2013, on James), Kiely (2003, on Carson), and, especially, Moore's stunningly vitriolic article on Pinsky (1996).

¹⁵ As Bassnett (2014: 102) puts it.

Such a theory breaks the chain of 2,000 years of theory revolving around the ‘faithful vs. free’ axis.

(Gentzler 1998: 269)¹⁶

It asks such questions as: What is the translator’s purpose? What is the translation’s (intended) function in the target culture? Thus, what is its *skopos*? And these are the questions that I will apply to three translations of *Inferno* I in the following section. Such questions are especially important in the context of translations of the *Commedia*. The debate regarding the ‘best’ way of translating Dante’s poetics has raged since the nineteenth century. As Ronald de Rooy has put it:

Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, there was an almost religious battle between modernist, ‘creative’ translators on the one hand and academic, ‘precise’ translators on the other.

(2003b: 57)

Further:

The old polarization between the fearless (at times reckless) ‘poetical’ translators and the more cautious ‘academic’ translators seems to be very much alive.

(2003a: 13)

This illustrates why *Skopostheorie* is particularly important in the context of translating Dante. How best to translate Dante’s *Commedia* has been a major issue for centuries. But *Skopostheorie* helps us to see that no such platonic ideal exists. It advocates agnosticism in a debate that has often been dogmatic. *Skopostheorie* may have “stagnated in the 1990s” (Windle & Pym 2011: 17), but it still matters.

3.3 Trends in Translating Dante: In Search of the “Spirit” of the Original

In *The Poetry of Translation*, Matthew Reynolds identifies the preponderant “metaphors” used by translators in the translation of poetry into English (2011: 6–7 *et passim*). In his formulation, “all translations are guided by metaphors” (2011: 304). Thus, the way translators conceptualize their own translations, their own *skopoi*, may be determined or described by such metaphors.

¹⁶ Cf. Gentzler (2001: 71) where he makes basically the same point.

In a similar fashion, by way of introduction to my section on translations of Dante, I will now identify a few of the prominent metaphors and trends in describing modern translations of Dante's *Inferno* as described by the translators themselves.

There is a tendency from translators and critics alike to speak of the “spirit of the original”.¹⁷ Michael Hamburger, for one, wrote that all translators must take “liberties” even in “more faithful kinds of translation”; as such, the translator must target “a faithfulness to the spirit of the thing and not only to the words” (Honig 1985: 177). In all forms of translation of verse, translators (particularly verse translators) tend to defend their work as a vessel which carries the “spirit” into the target language. If they cannot preserve the words of the source text, at least they can save Dante's spirit. In the parts of his translation that required significant lexical deviation, Robert Pinsky wrote that “I hope that it is faithful to the spirit” of Dante (1994: xxi). “Style—and the spirit that informs it—is [*sic*] the deepest concern of the translator”, wrote Stanley Lombardo (2009: xxxviii). Fortunately, translators tend to expand on what Dante's “spirit” means to them. It may be to “recapture the vigour” (Ellis 1994: ix), to preserve the vernacularity (Carson 2002: xix–xxi), or to provide the “speed and rhythm and the ‘punch’ of the rhyme” (Sayers 1949: 56). The distinct lack of unanimity of what this faithfulness to the spirit entails accounts for the great diversity in translations of Dante. He appeals to each of his readers in a unique way.

So, the translator's preface is of mixed value in ascertaining the *skopos* of a translation. On the one hand, the way they describe translations is often reduced to common generic metaphors such as “faithfulness,” “fidelity,” and “spirit”. On the other hand, these metaphors clearly mean something to each of the translators. It is particularly helpful when translators define their terms, as Geoffrey Bickersteth did of his translation of the *Inferno*:

By ‘a faithful rendering’ I mean one which says in English neither more nor less than what Dante says in Italian [...]. By ‘an unidiomatic rendering’ I mean a translation which reads like an original English poem.

(Bickersteth 1955/65: xvii)

Despite the predilection for describing their own translations in such formulaic terms, it is frequently possible to gain some idea of the translator's *skopoi* by from reading the translator's own writings (within or without the translated text). Most translators claim that they are being

¹⁷ *Inferno* translator Allan Gilbert identified this trend: “their English verse renders the spirit of Dante's Italian verse” (Gilbert 1969: ix). Walton (2008: 155f.) has identified this tendency in the context of the translation of ancient Greek plays. Such a trope, it could be argued, obtains across the board in the translation of any poetic work.

“faithful” to *something* in the source text. It is this “something” that I will strive to identify in the translations of Heaney, Ellis, and Durling.

These metaphors aside, many approaches towards translating the *Commedia* have been attempted. They may be divided into five overlapping categories:¹⁸

1. Prose cribs, whose primary purpose is to assist the reader in understanding the Italian. Such translations have been produced by Norton (1891), Sinclair (1939), and Singleton (1970), among many others.
2. Narrative prose, which eschews any of Dante’s poetics and reads as though it were a novel.¹⁹ A particularly famous example of this approach in literary translation came in E.V. Rieu’s controversial translations of Homer (1946, 1950), though this approach is extremely rare in translating Dante. Employers of this approach include Reed (1962) and Gilbert (1969).
3. *Terza rima*. The problems of employing *terza rima* in English are well documented (Szirtes 2012), but that has not prevented a vast number of translators from attempting it. The metre and syllable-count of such translations are often irrelevant; the primary function of the translation is create the same interlocking rhyme scheme as Dante’s. This often results in so-called “padding”: adding words to the target text that has no recognizable equivalent in the source text. There are some translators who strictly adhere to Dante’s rhyme scheme with “hard” rhyming *terza rima*, such as Binyon (1933) and Chipman (1961), while numerous others resort to “soft” (or “deficient”) rhyme to allow a little more flexibility with the final word. Translators who have employed this approach include Pinsky (1994) and Palma (2002). There is also a third sub-category, which Cunningham (1966: 8–9) labels “defective *terza rima*”.²⁰ Such an approach removes the connectedness of the rhyme scheme, and leaves an unrhymed line amidst two other rhymed lines. Ciardi (1954) and Nichols (2005) employ defective *terza rima*.
4. Other forms of verse. Easily the most common alternative to *terza rima* is blank verse (unrhymed verses in iambic pentameter).²¹ But this category may also include a significant variety of verse forms, such as rhymed quatrains (James 2013), Spenserian stanzas (Musgrave 1893), iambic tetrameter (Lambert 2010) and free verse in its various guises. As with category three, category four could be broken up into numerous sub-categories.
5. Adaptation. This is a grey area, and very much depends on one’s terminological distinction (see 2.3.2). It could perhaps be argued that the extremely creative translations of Bang (2013) and Birk & Sanders (2003) constitute adaptations. However, since they are both written in free verse, it would perhaps be more appropriate to place them in category four. As such, this final category denotes versions that would not normally be considered translations as such, including children’s

¹⁸ Note that the most prominent three categories (one, three, and four) broadly reflect those outlined by de Rooy (2003a: 14–20).

¹⁹ De Rooy (2003b: 57) labels this category “‘poetic’ or rhythmic prose”.

²⁰ Or “bastard *terza rima*” as Toynbee charmingly terms it (1900/2005: 220).

²¹ This is “the usually accepted equivalent of the [Italian] hendecasyllabic line” (B. Reynolds 1995: 231). Note also that this tendency “remains strong” (de Rooy 2003b: 58–9).

versions (Tusiani 1965), abridged versions (or “retellings,” Lindskoog 1997), or graphic novels (Moran 2012).

The appendix of the present volume demonstrates, above all, the persistence of all *types* of translation of the *Inferno*. There is no longer the “surfeit of triple rhyme” that Cunningham identified in the nineteenth century (1965: 94–145), but nor has it disappeared in spite of the criticisms that such a difficult approach entails.²² In the twenty-first century, the most notable trend is the increase of translations across the board. David Wallace was entirely correct in asserting that “the translation, imitation, and contestation of Dante in English shows [*sic*] no signs of abating” (1993: 281). *Terza rima* translations, defective or pure, continue to be produced with great frequency, as do blank verse translations, along with other bolder attempts at verse. There have been few attempts at scholarly prose since Durling’s 1996 translation, and none frequently circulated. This ought not to be met with surprise; prose translations have appeared at a significantly slower rate than those in verse over the last 250 years. This is not necessarily to be explained by the alleged obsolescence of prose, as de Rooy alleges;²³ there has not been a trend away from prose translations towards verse translations. Instead, the evidence seems to indicate that important prose translations appear once every generation or so. This issue will be investigated further at section 3.4.3.

Nevertheless, categories one, three, and four are easily the most common. Accordingly, in order to provide some breadth to my analysis, I have selected one translation from the three most prominent categories of those presented above: I am taking Durling’s translation from category one, Heaney’s from category three, and Ellis’s from category four. They are discussed chronologically. Each translation engages with Dante in its own unique way, and works with a different *skopos*.

²² Cf. de Rooy (2003b: 56–8) for a broad overview of the problems associated with translation into *terza rima*. In 1966, Cunningham declared, perhaps harshly, that “the difficulties [of rendering *terza rima*] have so far proved insuperable” (1966: 277). In the twenty-first century, however, we tend to get a more optimistic view: having analysed a few *terza rima* translations of the 1990s and 2000s, de Rooy concluded that “I have become more optimistic about the *possibility* of a *terza rima* translation” (2003b: 72; author’s emphasis).

²³ “Prose seems to have become somewhat outdated” (de Rooy 2003a: 13).

3.4 Three Translations of *Inferno* I

3.4.1 Dante Astray: Seamus Heaney's Poem–Translation (1993)

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to Seamus Heaney's translation of the opening three cantos of the *Inferno*. They were first published in full in a 1993 collection of translations of the *Inferno* by a group of nineteen contemporary American (and one Irish) poets.²⁴ This section will attempt to identify some of the intentions behind Heaney's translation, and will raise a number of questions regarding Heaney's translation technique. Heaney's translations are here composed in an analogous poetic tone to his original works of poetry. "Translation and creation are twin processes" indeed, as Octavio Paz famously asserted (1971/1992: 160). In order to investigate Heaney's *skopos*, I will look into his own conception of translation by looking at two prominent metaphor pairings invented by the translator. Although these perhaps fail to account for the complexity of Heaney's translation technique, they help to develop an idea of Heaney's attitude towards translation. Ultimately, his translation does not strive to be significantly different from the source text in a Lowellian sense; instead, it seizes on certain key passages to serve his own translational ends. His version of Dante is creative, but it is notable for the comparative subtlety of its creativity.

Heaney's translation is written in defective *terza rima*; that is, it is divided into tercets with soft rhyming syllables at the end of the final word of the first and third line of the tercet (axa bxb cxc etc.). This serves to maintain a degree of the source text's theological element,²⁵ while eschewing the strict rhyme constraints that Dante's interlocking *terza rima* entails (aba bcb cdc etc.). It is not a new approach to Dante (indeed, by the end of the twentieth century, there are almost no "new" approaches to Dante): John Ciardi's famous 1954 translation employed a similar rhyme scheme. Nevertheless, Heaney's decision both to employ and to modify Dante's approach already gives us an idea of his intention. The base elements of Dante's work are still present: a form of the *terza rima* is in place, while the cantos are translated in full. But, as will be seen below, he allows his poetic skill to modify these elements to a reasonable degree.

²⁴ Heaney had published sections of the *Inferno* in translation in various volumes before 1993. As mentioned, he published a translation of *If* XXXII and XXXIII in a poem entitled "Ugolino" in *Field Work* (1979). He also wrote a full translation of *If* III (Heaney 1987a), as well as a translation of *If* I entitled "The Dark Wood" (1988a). Lastly, he published "The Crossing", a translation of part of *If* III, in *Seeing Things* (1991b). Note that the relevant sections of the latter three translations are extremely similar to that which was published in 1993. Note also that Heaney had already composed a translation of *at least* the first three cantos long before their publication (1985: 18).

²⁵ On the central importance of the number three, see Raffa (2009: 320–1) and Heaney (1988b: 94). Cf. Szirtes (2012: 191–2). On Heaney's attraction to Dante's theology, see Cavanagh (2009: 146).

Before further discussing Heaney's translation directly, it is first worth paying attention to the unique metaphors with which he describes his translation techniques in order to build a picture of his intentions. Heaney adopts a Viking analogy to describe translation, and elucidates it in his conversation with Robert Hass entitled "Sounding Lines" (2000). Historians divide the Viking relationship with Ireland into two categories: the raids and the settlements. Heaney uses these metaphors to conceptualize his translation techniques. A raid is something tantamount to Robert Lowell's *Imitations* (1962): Heaney "interfered" with the source text in such instances, adding new metaphors and vocabulary to force his own poetics on the text. In the instance of Heaney's poem-translation "Ugolino", "I put in a couple of images, and thickened the texture of the Italian up" (Heaney & Hass 2000: 2). The settlement metaphor, on the other hand, best describes his translation of *Beowulf*: here, he "stayed with it, formed a kind of conjugal relation for years" (2). Heaney does identify some stylistic differences between the two techniques. For instance, within a settlement he forbids himself from the addition of such metaphors that were present in "Ugolino": "no 'spattered carnal melons' allowed", says Heaney (6–7). However, the metaphor does not primarily account for a difference in poetic style. Both of these approaches, it should be noted, are forms of so-called 'free' translation. Indeed, all of Heaney's translations are creative. The metaphors centrally describe Heaney's personal poetic relationship with the texts. In a raid, Heaney has no issue with altering the purpose and context of the source text. "Ugolino", for example, is much more a commentary of the tensions of 1979 Ireland than of mediaeval Florentine politics.²⁶ The metaphor is tied up as much in the *context* of the translation as its *poetic technique*.

Take, for instance, Heaney's translation of part of Book VI of the *Aeneid* in his collection *Seeing Things* (1991b), entitled "The Golden Bough". The source text acquired a unique meaning for the translator following the deaths of his friend (and "father figure") Robert Fitzgerald and his father Patrick Heaney.²⁷ The significance of *liber sextus* is clear: Seamus, like Aeneas, wishes to descend to the underworld "for one look, one face-to-face meeting with my dear father" (*ST* 3).²⁸ It is for these reasons that Heaney raided this particular text: it is a translation of Virgil, but it is a profoundly personal poem. This is the nature of Heaney's raiding technique: it is about giving an old text a new meaning, removing it from its former context to a distinctly contemporary setting. Such a technique could also be described as a "Lowellizing"

²⁶ On "Ugolino" and Irish politics, see Fumagalli (1995: 126–7, 132–40; 2001: 259–60), O'Donoghue (1998: 242–5), O'Driscoll (2008: 425), McCarthy (2008: 56–9), and Heininger (2005: 53–5).

²⁷ On the motivations behind his *Aeneid* translation(s), see Heaney and Hass (2000: 16). Cf. O'Driscoll's interview with Heaney (2008: 322).

²⁸ Compare Verg. *Aen.* 6.108–9: "ire ad conspectum cari genitoris et ora contingat."

of the source text: Heaney himself admits Robert Lowell's profound influence on his translation style in the 1970s (O'Driscoll 2008: 218). But this influence was not reflected to a significant degree in Heaney's poetic style; rather, Heaney writes, "I was influenced in my *attitude* to translation by Lowell" (2008: 218; my emphasis).²⁹ "Ugolino" and "The Golden Bough" are both versions extracted from longer poetic works, and translated with varying degrees of creativity. They are both examples of Lowell's influence on Heaney (through Lowell's translation of *Inferno* XV, "Brunetto Latini," in his 1963 collection *Near the Ocean*) and of Heaney's raiding idea; it is as much about context as poetic or translational style.

By extension, since Heaney expressly defined "The Golden Bough" as a raid (Heaney & Hass 2000: 16), it may be reasoned that the poem–translation that concludes *Seeing Things*, "The Crossing", is also a raid. The two poems bookend the volume: both are translations of two of Heaney's favourite poets (Virgil and Dante) and both deal with themes of journeying, descent into the underworld, death, and myth.³⁰ His rendering of *Inferno* III in "The Crossing" is reasonably creative in a lexical sense (though not to the extent of "Ugolino") but it is, in Heaney's terms, a raid because of its context. The question, then, remains open as to whether Heaney's translations of Cantos I–III are "raids".³¹ As will be argued below, it seems to me that Heaney's engagement with the *Inferno* has both raiding and settling motives. Amidst this somewhat circular discussion, the point could be made that Heaney's raid–settlement metaphor does not sufficiently account for the complexity of his own translational activity. This need not be taken as a criticism; after all, it is a metaphor not a theory.³² Nevertheless, in Heaney's terms, it would seem that his translation of Dante's first canto bridges the divide between raid and settlement. It is still removed from its context, personalized, made contemporary (like "The Golden Bough", "The Crossing", and "Ugolino"), but not to the same extent: contextually, it is presented more as a translation than as a poem. There are some distinctly personal elements in his 1993 translation, but he does not add metaphors as forcefully as in "Ugolino".

Heaney's metaphor of "pure" and "impure" translation is perhaps tailored more specifically to Heaney's linguistic transfer. For Heaney, a "pure" translation "will involve an attempt at all kinds of precisions, equivalents, and honesties" (Brandes & Heaney 1988: 12).

²⁹ Cf. Cavanagh (2009: 148) on the influence of Lowell on Heaney's treatment of Dante.

³⁰ For brief analyses of the uniting themes of *Seeing Things*, see Nordin (1999: 46–7, on the central importance of the two translations in interpreting the rest of the collection), Collins (2003: 115–95, especially 180–1), D. O'Brien (1996: 186ff.) and Putnam (2010: 4–5).

³¹ Note that the text of "The Crossing" (from *Inferno* III 82–129) is almost identical to the equivalent text in the 1993 edition of Heaney's translation of Cantos I–III (*Hlf* 3–15).

³² Heaney himself does not really delve into translation theory in his writings; in fact, he is quite dismissive of it: "it's hard to generalize in relation to [the] obedience/divergence question. On different occasions you have a different covenant with the original" (O'Driscoll 2008: 218).

“Impure” translations, on the other hand, are figuratively understood “through the wall of the original language”; the translator, with “impure” translations, takes over the text in a “slightly imperial sense” (12). This particular metaphor is closer to the old ‘free vs. literal’ dichotomy than the raid–settlement metaphor. Maristella Gatto has convincingly applied the impure–pure metaphor to two Heaney translations of Dante: “Ugolino”, for her, is an “impure” translation in Heaney’s sense, whereas his translation of part of Canto III in “The Crossing” (which is more or less identical to the equivalent passage of his full translation of the canto published in 1993) has “pure” motives (Gatto 2000: 66–73). It would seem, then, that Heaney attempted a “purer” translation of Cantos I–III than of XXXII–XXXIII (in “Ugolino”).

It is, of course, crucial to note that Heaney’s first reading of Dante was by way of another translation (Dorothy Sayers’ 1949 translation).³³ As such, it could never be said to be the purpose of his translation to provide a version that would be significantly coherent with the source text. For Heaney, the source text was as much Sayers, Singleton, and Sinclair as it was Dante (Fumagalli 2001: 260). By his own admission, he did not read Italian well (O’Driscoll 2008: 425). (That said, he would undoubtedly have had the linguistic ability to work through the Italian by way of scholarly prose translations.)

Much of the above may seem, on the face of it, both superfluous and pedantic, but such distinctions are crucial in order to define Heaney’s *skopos* in this particular translation. Heaney’s Canto I and “The Crossing” are both profoundly personal works; they, along with his translation of Virgil, were composed at a time when the poetic messages of the source text resounded with Heaney’s own poetics.³⁴ Consequently, as will be demonstrated below, the poetic style of Canto I is crafted in Heaney’s own distinct tone. His divergences from the source text are more subtle than his “Ugolino” of 1979. “Ugolino” bears a number of brand new metaphors that have no resemblance to Dante’s imagery. Metaphors such as “famine victim”,³⁵ “spattered carnal melon”,³⁶ “monstrously at rut”,³⁷ “jockey to his mount”,³⁸ “a hiss sizzling in our country’s grassy language”³⁹ are just some examples of brand new poetic additions by Heaney in “Ugolino” (*FW* 61–3). His *Inferno* I–III is not as flexible with his use of the Italian.

³³ See Heaney & Hass (2000: 2, 4) and de Petris (1989: 72) for Heaney’s acknowledgement of Sayers’ translation. Cf. Heininger (2005: 56) and Cavanagh (2009: 145–6) for a brief discussion of Sayers’ influence.

³⁴ See Cavanagh (2009: 145–7) on the draw towards Dante for Heaney.

³⁵ Compare *If* XXXII 127: “come ’l pan per fame si manduca.”

³⁶ Compare *If* XXXII 132: “quei faceva il teschio e l’altre cose.”

³⁷ Compare *If* XXXII 134–5: “dimmi ’l perché [...] che tu ti mangi.”

³⁸ Compare *If* XXXIII 15: “tal vicino.”

³⁹ Compare *If* XXXIII 80: “[il] bel paese dove ’l sì suona.”

It is creative, but it bears a much more subtle creativity. His *skopos* here is different from his *skopos* in writing *Field Work*.

There is not the space here to carry out a full appraisal of Heaney's translation techniques. The most detailed guide currently in publication has been written by Conor McCarthy (2008), though this contains only minimal references to Dante. Perhaps the 2016 publication of Heaney's *Aeneid: Book VI* will encourage a more holistic and detailed study of Heaney's translation techniques.⁴⁰ In any case, the discussion must be distanced from mundane questions that ask where Heaney's translations sit on the literal-free translation continuum. Paul Turner, for instance, asks whether *The Cure at Troy* (Heaney's translation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*; 1991a) is more Sophocles or Heaney in tone; he asks "whereabouts on the scale between these two extremes of 'version' does Heaney's work belong?" (2007: 121). Of course, the answer (in Heaney's case) will always be that it is closer to Heaney than the source text,⁴¹ but this reveals little from an analytical, descriptive perspective. A more fruitful approach than simply producing reductive value judgements would be to accept Heaney's approach as primarily creative (be it a raid or a settlement, a pure or an impure translation), and to discuss his purposes when he does markedly diverge from the source text.

With the information at hand, one can form a fairly detailed picture of Heaney's *skopos*. In the remainder of this section, I will analyse how Heaney has gone about achieving his aim.⁴² Below is the opening tercet of Heaney's Canto I:

In the middle of the journey of our life
I found myself **astray** in a dark wood
where the straight road **had been lost sight of**.
(*Hlf* 3)

As Maria Cristina Fumagalli has noted, Heaney's text differs from the source in its rendering of Dante's perspective of the *diritta via*: for Dante, the road is *smarrita* ("lost"). Heaney, conversely, emphasizes the Dante's lack of vision of the road; "the road is still there somewhere", writes Fumagalli (2001: 263). Nevertheless, aside from hints of Heaney's poetics,

⁴⁰ The forthcoming collection of essays, tentatively entitled *Raids and Settlements* (John Benjamins) should help to fill this lacuna.

⁴¹ Note that Turner uses this as a point of criticism for Heaney's approach: "The *Cure* gives no indication of any particular interest in the play that Sophocles wrote, or of the slightest respect for it" (2007: 133). His methodology is, of course, completely at odds with *Skopostheorie*.

⁴² This section is designed to accompany, not to rival, Fumagalli's outstanding analysis of Heaney's *Inferno* translation (1997: 204–34; 2001: 259–74). My study cannot hope to be as detailed as hers, but it does raise some further points for discussion.

the opening of Heaney's translation reads quite coherently with the source text.⁴³ The "astray" on line two suggests a parallelism with Heaney's *Sweeney Astray* (1983),⁴⁴ which was published while Heaney was working on his translation of the beginning of the *Inferno*.⁴⁵ Indeed, Heaney's specific intention in this passage is laid out clearly in his 1985 essay entitled "Envies and Identifications". Dante's allegory notwithstanding, Heaney writes, it is crucial to note the human emotional element of the *proemio*: Dante is "writing about panic, that terror we experience in the presence of the god Pan, numen of the woods" (1985: 12). This "panic" is emphasized greatly in Heaney's translation.

As such, Heaney chooses to render *paura* as "panic" in the following tercet:

How hard it is to say what is was like
in the **thick of thickets**, in a wood so dense and **gnarled**
the very thought of it renews my **panic** [*paura*].
(*Hlf* 3)

A few points may be made on this wonderful passage. First, much of the language that Heaney employs recalls his other poetic works. His rendering of *esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte* (*If* I 5) is particularly creative; indeed, it is here where his own poetics are first overlaid to a significant extent over Dante's poetics. This line, both tonally and lexically, resembles the woody language in a poem from a near contemporary work of Heaney: "The King of the Ditchbacks", published in his *Station Island* of 1984:

They dressed my head in a fishnet
and plaited leafy twigs through meshes

so my vision was a bird's
at the heart of a **thicket**

and I spoke as I moved
like a voice from a shaking bush.
(*SI* 57–8)

⁴³ Fumagalli here observes a degree of intertext between *Station Island* and Canto I; I would however dispute her claim that the opening tercet, at least, represents a "substantial deviation from the original on Heaney's part" (2001: 262; cf. 1997: 209). There are some much greater deviations to come.

⁴⁴ Cf. Heaney's use of "astray" (*Hlf* 8) for *smarrita* (*If* II 64).

⁴⁵ In a 1985 essay, Heaney mentioned that he had already translated the first four cantos of the *Inferno* (1985: 18). The two works that are chronologically closest to this are therefore *Station Island* (1984) (whose Dantean references are well acknowledged) and *Sweeney Astray* (1983) (Heaney's creative translation of the Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*).

Most prominent is the recycling of the word “thicket” to express the denseness of the bush.⁴⁶ This woody imagery equally reflects numerous passages from *Sweeney Astray* (1983). Here the image of the “thicket” is frequently associated with the suffering and woes of the mad Sweeney:

Sweeney fell heavily through the **thicket** and ended up on the ground like a man in a bloodbath. Then he gathered himself up, exhausted and beaten, and came out of the **thicket**, saying:

—It is hard to bear this life after the pleasant times I knew.

(SA 14)

The association of fear, panic, and exile with thick of the forest (be it metaphorical or literal) is pervasive in *Sweeney Astray*. Sweeney, like Dante, is “astray in the wood” (SA 55); Sweeney is forced “to sleep naked every night up there in the highest thickets” (SA 68); both Dante and Sweeney are “unsettled, panicky, astray” (SA 67).⁴⁷

The unmistakable intertext between *Sweeney Astray* and Heaney’s *Inferno* I translation indicates both a textual and thematic overlap in his poetics in the 1980s.⁴⁸ Both original creation and translation are expressions of Heaney’s poetics. Fumagalli has noted a number of examples of this in Heaney’s other original works: “glut”, “maddened by hunger”, and “gnawing” (*Hlf* 4–5) are all resonant with the carnal food imagery presented at the beginning and end of *Field Work* in “Oysters” and “Ugolino” (2001: 265–6). Indeed, the word “glut” appears in both “Oysters” and Canto I (*Hlf* 6; *FW* 11), while “gnawing”, “ravenous”, and “insatiable” appear in both “Ugolino” and Canto I (*Hlf* 4–5; *FW* 61).⁴⁹ Heaney’s translation of the *Inferno*, then, is an extension of his own poetic skill; despite the inescapable strictures of the source text, Heaney

⁴⁶ This sylvan imagery is prevalent in Heaney’s poetry of the 1980s: *Hlf* 5: “you will have to go another way around [...] to escape the toils and thickets of this ground.” Heaney employs similar wording in the poem “Alphabets” in his collection *The Haw Lantern*: “the poet’s dream stole over him like sunlight and passed into tenebrous thickets (*HL* 2). Cf. Fumagalli (2001: 263). The frequency of such vocabulary in his posthumously published *Aeneid: Book VI* (2016) is also worthy of note.

⁴⁷ The metaphor of the “wolf in the wood [...] tearing ahead [...] howling and rending” in *Sweeney Astray* also resonates with Canto I (SA 42). Note also the Dantean undertones in Sweeney’s statement that “I have endured purgatories since the feathers grew on me” (SA 66).

⁴⁸ One might also note the intertext between Heaney’s translation and other English works of poetry. Take, for instance, Heaney’s rendering of the *gran deserto* (*If* I 64) as “that great waste land”, which reads as somewhat metapoetical in the context of Heaney’s 1985 discussion of T.S. Eliot’s (author of *The Waste Land*) engagement with Dante: “Virgil comes to Dante, in fact, as Dante comes to Eliot, a master, a guide and authority, offering release from the toils and snares of the self, from the *diserta*, the waste land.” Nb. that Heaney may elsewhere be attempting actively to avoid such intertext with the likes of Eliot, as Fumagalli (2001: 264) argues.

⁴⁹ In this fascinating dialogue between Heaney’s own texts, one might also point out, as Fumagalli does (2001: 262), the reuse of the word “straight” in Book XII of *Station Island* and Canto I of Heaney’s *Inferno* (cf. *SI* 92, 94; *Hlf* 3).

finds a way to make his translation read in his own distinctive voice.⁵⁰ The voice of the translator is the same as the voice of the poet.

A second point needs to be made on Heaney's rendering of the *selva selvaggia*. Heaney was clearly determined to replicate some of the repetitive wordplay of the Italian. The savage wood is, for Heaney, "the thick of thickets" (*HIf* 3). In the source text, both *selva* and *selvaggia* come from the same Latin root, although the adjective had adopted a wider meaning by Dante's time (*AEIt* 385). Heaney does not just reproduce the repeated sound effect of Dante; he, like Dante, chooses two words of the same etymological root ("thick" and "thicket") to produce the same effect on his readers.⁵¹ This technique is an example of dynamic equivalence in Heaney's translation; it is an attempt to recreate the phonic effects of the source with complete licence to alter its meaning and structure, provided that the effect of the target text on its readers has "a high degree of equivalence of response" (Nida & Taber 1969: 24).⁵² Dante's adjective *selvaggia*, or "savage" as Durling translates it (*DIf* 27), is not rendered directly by Heaney, who instead focuses on English adjectives that describe the physical environment.

For the translator, this passage represents, more than anything else, a "struggle with the undergrowth" (Heaney 1985: 12). This, in turn, has a semiotic association with the pilgrim's panic and fear. Whereas Dante, in the source text, must simply *campar d'esto loco selvaggio* (*If* I 93), Heaney's Dante must "escape the toils and thickets of this ground" (*HIf* 5). The "swarming, mobbish element" of the dark wood that Heaney identifies (1980: 14) in the opening canto is stressed and intensified. Henry Hart has identified the pervasiveness of the image of the dark wood, exile, and fear in Heaney's poetics of the 1980s. They are profoundly personal and, perhaps, like "Ugolino" from 1979, political:

St. John of the Cross,⁵³ Dante, and Sweeney merge for Heaney into a single persona [...]. Voluntary or involuntary exiles, they join Heaney as he journeys through his dark wood of Irish troubles. Through translation Heaney appropriates their masks, manipulating their medieval voices and texts so that they speak for his and his country's contemporary need for atonement.

(Hart 1992: 144)

⁵⁰ Another recurrent Heaneyism is his "jaws of death" of *HIf* 1.102. Heaney reuses this in his creative translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (*BT* 54): "why am I still clamped like prey in the hungry jaws of death?". No such metaphor exists in either Dante or Sophocles.

⁵¹ *OED* (s.v. 'thicket, *n.*): from the Old English "*picce* thick" plus the denominative suffix *-et*.

⁵² Cf. de Rooy (2003b: 64–8) on the application of such phonic features by a handful of American translations of *Inferno* XXV.

⁵³ Juan de la Cruz (1542–1591). Heaney translated his poem from Spanish in Booth (1983) and, subsequently, in *Station Island* (89–90).

His works reflect a feeling of isolation: Heaney is, at this time, “astray” from his native home in Ireland. Hart explores this Heaneyan sentiment at length in *Sweeney Astray*;⁵⁴ but, as he points out, such a feeling may also be detected in Cantos I–III.

It is in Dante’s metaphors and passages of narration where his creative poetics come to the fore. For instance, Virgil’s speech to Dante at the end of the canto (*HI*f 5–6; *If* I 91–129) produces fewer Heaneyisms than the earlier passages.⁵⁵ For example:

Questi la cacerà per ogne villa,
fin che l’avrà rimessa ne lo ’nferno,
là onde ’nvidia prima dipartilla.
(*If* I 109–11)

He will pursue the wolf through every town
until he has hunted and hounded her to hell
where envy unleashed her first and set her on.
(*HI*f 6)

This passage reads smoothly with the syntax of Dante’s Italian, and Heaney is less creative here than in other passages. Nevertheless, he layers his English verbs on Dante’s to heighten the movement of the narrative: the plain single Dantean verb *rimettere* becomes both “hunted” and “hounded”; *dipartire* becomes both “unleashed” and “set on”. Even when he restrains his creativity, Heaney’s poetics cannot help but understatedly shine through.

Indeed, a particular hallmark of Heaney’s translation is a tendency to add or exaggerate the effect of the source-text verbs, often by way of present participle clauses in the more descriptive sections. Take, for instance, Heaney’s translation of *If* III 83–4, in which Charon berates the crowd of sinners. Dante’s verb to commence this admonition is simply *gridare*:

Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
gridando: “Guai a voi, anime prave!”
(*If* III 82–4)

Heaney, however, expands on this, heightening the emotion of Charon’s voice and increasing the horror of the scene: in “The Crossing” (*ST* 105) Charon is “raging and bawling”, while in

⁵⁴ See Hart (1992: 138–58).

⁵⁵ This of course reflects the tone of Dante’s Italian. Anyone who has read the *Inferno* without the aid of a translation would observe that the dialogue is often written in much clearer, less poetic, verse. As Prue Shaw has observed: “dialogue is intrinsically dramatic, and allows for demotic expressiveness in the low style which Dante exploits with great verve” (2014: 223).

Heaney's full Canto III, Charon is, slightly more reservedly, "bawling out" (*Hlf* 14). This technique is replicated to great effect in Canto I. Dante's encounter with the leopard at *If* I 34–6 (which *impediva tanto il mio cammino*) is rendered with no fewer than four present participles in just two lines:

[...] The spotted fluent shape
of a leopard crossed my path [...]
Harrying me, **confronting** my advance,
loping round me, **leaping** in my face
so that I turned back downhill more than once.
(*Hlf* 4)

These three forms are all an expansion on one Dantean verb: *impedire*. Heaney here means to heighten the sense of hopelessness beyond that produced by Dante by layering the clauses one after another. As with his translation of *gridare*, this is a case of Heaney seizing on a single verb and exaggerating its effect for his own poetical purposes. This heightening effect (with or without present participles) appears in various guises throughout the rest of the canto. For instance, the wolf's advance towards Dante (*la bestia senza pace [...] venendomi 'ncontro; If* I 59) becomes "the animal's turbulent head-on attack" (*Hlf* 4).

The use of participles to heighten the emotion is replicated in *Sweeney Astray*: "bleeding headless torsos and disembodied heads" here pursue Sweeney,

Lolling and baying,
snapping and yelping,
whining and squealing.
(*SA* 69)

This Heaneyan technique, coupled with the occasional colloquial phrase ("in the heyday of the false gods", "where the sun is dumb"; *Hlf* 4–5), gives his translations a distinct tone. It has a vibrancy that is very different from the regular poetic flow of the source text, which, it seems, is entirely the point of his translation.

This preponderance of additional present participles in particular thus serves to emphasize the more horrible, the more painful, more panic-inducing passages to enhance his particular reading of the poem. As noted, for Heaney, Canto I is a crucial passage to frame the pilgrim's panic, to exhibit the bleakness of the landscape and the hopelessness of the situation. By lingering on certain passages while staying reasonably 'faithful' in others (particularly the dialogue between Dante and Virgil), Heaney is using the poem to his own effect in a truly

subtle way. There are, of course, numerous Heaneyisms scattered throughout the rest of the text, but of greater import are the few passages in which Heaney's creativity shines brightest. Heaney does not, as Michael Cavanagh suggests, "[tone] Dante down [...] [making] him rather plain" (2009: 159). In fact, he does the exact opposite: Dante's imagery and sense of *paura* are exaggerated in certain areas by Heaney's translation techniques to produce a wonderfully new, distinctly Heaneyan, poem. As Fumagalli aptly puts it, Heaney's translation "enhances and revitalizes Dante's work" (2001: 274). This, as we can see from "Envies and Identifications" and numerous subsequent interviews, was Heaney's intention, his *skopos*.

Let us, then, return to the question of raids and settlements. By analysing the text, Heaney's *skopos* is clear. He does not add any extended metaphors that cannot be found in the source text, but he applies a degree of creativity to ensure that his *Inferno* I–III reads as a distinctly personal poem. Now, Heaney himself identified his engagement with Dante and Virgil in *Seeing Things* as "raids". Linguistically, both the translations of *Seeing Things* and Cantos I–III may be categorized along the same lines. But, as noted, the raid–settlement metaphor is not primarily linguistic; it is largely contextual, with some linguistic elements. In this sense, Heaney's 1993 translation could be categorized as a settlement, since the text functions as a complete translation of the first three cantos; it is not "ripped untimely from its place" (Brandes & Heaney 1988: 12). For me, Heaney's *Inferno* bridges the divide between raids and settlements. Heaney's 2000 interview demonstrated better than anywhere else his attitude to translation. There is always a tension between "staying with" a text or removing it from its context. Heaney's *Inferno* translation encapsulates this tension. He produces a "pure" translation and it is published as a complete translation of the opening three cantos. Moreover, Heaney must have formed that "conjugal relationship" with Dante throughout the 1980s which renders a translation a "settlement". And yet, Cantos I–III equally constitute a singular personal poem: as demonstrated, he "interferes" in a few key areas to impose a degree of his own poetics on the text.⁵⁶ In a very subtle way, Heaney *does* "project new meanings onto the text".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ There is no "line for line equivalence between original and translation" as Gatto (2000: 72) alleges.

⁵⁷ *Contra* Gatto (2000: 72).

3.4.2 Steve Ellis: Abbreviation and Familiarization (1994)

Steve Ellis's translation of the *Inferno*, entitled *Hell* in its first edition, divided opinion upon its publication. It was written in informal, plain English, and reduced the words of the source text significantly.⁵⁸ Ellis was, however, clear about his intentions. His translation's purpose was always to be an abbreviated, readable version of Dante. It has undertones of northern England (Ellis was born in Yorkshire), and is written in "free verse",⁵⁹ loosely adhering to poetic conventions. Below, I will detail these prominent aspects of Ellis's work that appear in Canto I. His *skopoi* of brevity, simplicity, and familiarity are, as will be demonstrated, realized. This chapter thus serves to rebut some of the source-oriented criticisms that were made against Ellis's translation.

The tone of Steve Ellis's translation is immediately clear from his opening line: "halfway through our trek in life" (*Elf* 1). Ellis's translation is in free verse. Its *raison d'être*, according to Ellis, is to make up for the deficiencies of previous translations, which fail to recognize the colloquial tone and "vigour and directness" of the source text (Ellis 1994: ix). It explicitly aims at replicating these (perceived) aspects of Dante's text alone. His is not a formal, wordy poem, but a brief, swiftly moving version that simplifies and reduces the source text. His employment of free verse, and the at times selective use of Dante's lexicon helps him to achieve this end. There is a detectable northern English dialectal tone in Ellis's version, though the translator concedes that such a detection is not strictly necessary for the enjoyment of the translation: it will, says Ellis, "fall very differently on different ears" (Ellis 1994: x). Ellis is entirely open with his readership in his introduction.⁶⁰

To begin, let us look at the informalities in Ellis's text. His tendency to use more familiar terms is patent from the very beginning. Dante's elided disyllable *cammin* (meaning 'journey' in this passage) has religious connotations in the source text (Cassell 1989: 6–8). In Ellis's version, the iambic stress in his verse falls firmly on the familiar, unassuming monosyllable "trek":

⁵⁸ Compare 855 words in Ellis's Canto I with Dante's 954.

⁵⁹ Ellis himself identifies his translation thus (1994: x). Altieri, uniquely, finds a metre in Ellis's translation, labelling it "octosyllabic trimeter" (1998: 29).

⁶⁰ Crisafulli (2004: 460–1), however, notes a few minor contradictions in Ellis's paratext. Cf. Ellis (1998: *passim*, 2014: 364) for a later restating of his initial intentions.

Halfway through our **trek** in life
I found myself in **this** dark wood,
miles away from the right road.

(*Elf* 1)

Ellis's poem is immediately removed from the religious context of his source. Trek, of course, implies a long, arduous journey, but it removes the seriousness and religious element of the *cammin*. Let us turn to the second line. Here Ellis uses an Americanism that is now common in Anglophone parlance: the demonstrative pronoun "this" is used instead of Dante's indefinite article. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this modern usage as a centrally "unliterary" use of the pronoun, where it refers to a place that has not been "previously mentioned or implied".⁶¹ It is, of course, a grammatical anomaly: the wood has not yet been mentioned. However, in a manner consistent with the rest of the opening tercet, the pronoun maintains Ellis's colloquial tone. Ellis, through the voice of Dante, is talking to the reader as a twentieth-century friend. To affirm this familiarization, Ellis uses the familiar hyperbole "miles away" in the third line to signify the loss of the *diritta via*. The tone is thus set for a remarkably informal rendering of Dante's *Inferno*.

There are countless further examples of Ellis's recourse to colloquialism in the first canto alone. At *If* I 94, Dante *gride* at the sight of the *lupa*; Ellis renders this simple Italian verb as "hollering" (*Elf* 4). This translation is, of course, not inaccurate, but it provides a much more narrow definition of the Italian verb, whose uses are numerous in Dante.⁶² Ellis's use of the verb is equally dialectal,⁶³ and reinforces the familiarity that pervades his translation. Colloquial imagery of this sort that expresses dismay, sadness, or pain, is unsurprisingly more common later in the *Inferno* once Dante enters the *porta* of Hell. The occasional recourse to a demotic tone introduces the reader to Ellis's unrelenting colloquialism that pervades his poem. For instance, Virgil's *dèi falsi* become "sham gods" (*If* I 73; *Elf* 4). It could even be argued that this occasionally serves to exaggerate Dante's more frightful passages. For example, *le disperate strida* that Dante will, according to Virgil, see when he voyages through Hell become "grisly screaming" (*If* I 115; *Elf* 5).⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the wolf's *bramosa voglia* is idiomatically rendered as "greedy guts" (*If* I 98; *Elf* 4). Such techniques ultimately enhance Dante's imagery, adding to it a new familiarized dimension.

⁶¹ *OED* (s.v. 'this, *pron.* and *adj.*' 5k).

⁶² *Enc. dant.* III 284–6 lists six different nuances in Dante's works.

⁶³ *OED* (s.v. 'holler, *v.*'): "*dial.* and *U.S.*".

⁶⁴ Ellis also translates *disperato* as "hideous" at XXXIII, 5, which is the adjectival participle's only other appearance in Dante's writings (*Enc. dant.* II 504).

Ellis also simplifies the text, domesticating it in such a way that his syntax and grammar smooth out any of the linguistic and semantic peculiarities of Dante's Italian. Dante's grammar and syntax frequently appear convoluted to the English reader, while his fundamental semantic message is frequently hidden beneath a poetic layer. See, for instance, the following passage:

Ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

(*If* I 8–9)

To a reader unfamiliar with the allegory and the later events of the poem, *l'altre cose* remain shrouded in uncertainty.⁶⁵ Even the *ben* that Dante found there has been subject to various interpretations.⁶⁶ While Ellis's rendering does not add to this discourse, it simplifies the poetry of the original to such an extent that only the basic semantics remain:

But since I got some good there
I'll talk about the bad as well.

(*Elf* 1)

After all, Dante's literal meaning is quite simple here: Dante must discuss the bad things before he can discuss the good things (whatever they may be). Ellis seizes upon this to ensure that this fundamental message is clear to his readership. This represents a clear case of explicitation⁶⁷ in Ellis's reworking. There are some features of Dante's narrative which remain implicit; some of these become apparent through close reading, others require more interpretation. This passage represents the former category: *l'altre cose* are simply *il male*. Ellis deliberately makes the reader's job easier by employing this technique selectively throughout his translation. A further example of this technique comes at *If* I 40. Dante's religious overtones are not made at all explicit by Ellis's opening thirty-nine lines.⁶⁸ Perhaps to compensate for this, Ellis chooses to render *l'amor divino* simply as "God" (*If* I 40). Ellis's translation is nothing if not clear.

⁶⁵ As the Hollanders (2000: 13) points out, "these innocent-sounding lines have been the cause of considerable puzzlement."

⁶⁶ Durling identifies it as the "undertaking of the journey" (1996: 34); the Hollanders opt for "God's grace" (2000: 13); Singleton's more traditional interpretation equates it to "the wayfarer's rescue by Virgil" (1970b: 6).

⁶⁷ "The phenomenon which frequently leads to TT stating ST information in a more explicit form than the original" (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997/2014: 55).

⁶⁸ Indeed, Ellis's implication of Dante's moral and religious framework is one of Robert Gordon's central criticisms of the translation (1996: 232).

In response to Dante's sometimes perplexing syntax (for an English speaker, at least), Ellis continues to employ this domestication technique.⁶⁹ This may be exhibited by a famously difficult passage, when the pilgrim is briefly given some degree of hope by the rising sun:

Si ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle
l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione.

(*If* I 41–3)

In this somewhat Latinate clause, the subjects (*l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione*) are positioned at the very end. Most Anglophone translators, due to the constraints of English syntax, opt to invert the syntax of the source in order to move the subjects to the beginning of the clause,⁷⁰ or change the subject to first person so that the clause reads in the same sequence as in the Italian.⁷¹ Ellis, true to type, goes even further:

So they seemed like good omens,
the hour and the sweet season, against
this beast with the brilliant skin.

(*Elf* 2–3)

Worthy of note is the exclusion of any first-person pronouns in Ellis's tercet; instead, the "good omens" are enough to convey the idea that the sun had given Dante reason to retain hope of ascending the mountain. The subject ("they") is restated by way of parenthetical commas ("the hour and the sweet season"), maintaining a degree of similarity with Dante's syntax while still clarifying the main idea for the Anglophone reader.

As mentioned, a central feature of Ellis's technique is his use of abbreviation. This is undoubtedly part and parcel of his attempt to render Dante's complex rhetorical techniques in a clear comprehensible way. When the pilgrim spots the leopard for the first time, he exclaims that it was *quasi al cominciar de l'erta*; this is truncated by Ellis to "just at the beginning" (*If* I 31; *Elf* 2). *L'erta* in Ellis's translation is implied, since the "lonely slope" (*la spiaggia diserta*) is mentioned just two lines earlier. This technique of omission of single nouns and adjectives continues throughout Ellis's translation. Dante's *vene e polsi* (*If* I 90; *Elf* 4) are rendered as

⁶⁹ When a "transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text" (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997/2014: 43–4).

⁷⁰ Singleton (*SgIf* 5), Sinclair (*ScIf* 25), and Norton (*NoIf* 3) all choose to invert the syntax.

⁷¹ This seems to be favoured by more "poetic" scholarly translators: Durling (*DIf* 29), Hollander & Hollander (*HHIf* 5), and Musa (*MIf* 5) change the perspective.

simply “my pulses”; the *loco selvaggio* (*If* I 93; *Elf* 4) from which Dante must be saved is rendered as “waste”; while the line in which Virgil describes God’s potency (*in tutte parti impera e quivi regge*) is reduced to the verbless clause “emperor everywhere, king there” (*If* I 127; *Elf* 6). Ellis’s translation successfully employs as few words as possible.

In spite of his brevity, Ellis does make some interesting additions to Dante’s text. Take, for instance, *If* I 19–21, where Dante’s panic is momentarily relieved by the sight of the *pianeta*. Ellis renders it thus:

So my fear was **thawed** out a little
that had **iced** over my heart
on this night of such misery.

(*Elf* 2)

This frozen metaphor does not have any parallel in the source text. Dante’s metaphor (*il lago del cor*) has several possible interpretations,⁷² but that of Ellis is not one of them. It therefore must follow that Ellis’s beautiful metaphor is his own poetic invention. After all, the “pit of the heart” (or even “the lake of my heart”) has no real metaphorical meaning in English. In the following simile, some translators⁷³ opt to make explicit Dante’s apparent shipwreck image (*quei [...] uscito fuor del pelago a la riva*; *If* I 22–3). Ellis, instead, identifies *quei* as a “swimmer”:

I was like a weary **swimmer**
getting back from the **sea** onto shore.

(*Elf* 2)

This is perhaps a little less effective than the previous alteration. The situation is rather less serious for Ellis’s swimmer. Instead of comparing Dante with one who has escaped from the deep sea (*pelago*) after a shipwreck (implied, but not specifically mentioned by Dante), Ellis’s swimmer has inexplicably been swimming in “huge waves” (*Elf* 2). Nevertheless, it is an interesting take on Dante’s simile by Ellis, and it introduces a trend in Ellis’s writing to modify the source text’s metaphors and similes to suit his own poetic purposes.

⁷² See Lansing (2009: 62–9) on why it should be translated as “pit” instead of “lake”. For the more traditional interpretation, see Singleton (1970b: 7–8).

⁷³ See, for instance, *HIf* 3 (“survivor”) and *ZIf* 21–2 (“one who’s rescued”). Note that Singleton renders *uscito* as “escaped”, which again presupposes the ‘survival’ notion of this simile (*SgIf* 4).

It is worth noting in brief that there are passages in which Ellis does try to replicate Dante's wordplay. The most prominent example of this in Canto I comes at line 36. Here, Dante, at the sight of the leopard, repeatedly turns to flee out of fear: *i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto*. The phonic device is uniquely Italian: the noun *volta* and the participle *volto* are assonant in a way that is difficult to replicate in English.⁷⁴ Ellis shifts the internal rhyme onto a different word in the clause: "I often turned round to return". Thus the verb and the participle mirror each other in the English. Such instances are rarities in Ellis's text; after all, it was not his professed intention to reproduce Dante's rhyme. Nevertheless, such instances, however seldom they may appear, are poetically satisfying. Far from being a simplified version of Dante alone, such passages remind us of the poetic skill inherent in Ellis's malleable free verse.

Ellis confesses in his introduction that his "northern [English] input" is an implicit feature (1994: x). Unlike Carson's 2002 translation of the *Inferno*,⁷⁵ its main point of difference is not the uniqueness of the dialect in which it is written. Of course, there are clear instances where his familiarization betrays a sense of localization:

Next a wolf, greediness itself
oozing from her famished body,
the cause of hurt to so many –

well, this one upset me so much
just from the fear of her look,
I gave the hill up completely.

(Elf 3)

The informal language that Ellis uses here is not exclusively "northern". Ellis says so himself: "I did not want to foreground, by any means, the regionalism of the voice I was using" (1998: 64). For example, by translating *carca* figuratively as "oozing", Ellis is not chiefly resorting to a local form of English. It is colloquial, perhaps dialectic in this instance, but not uniquely Yorkshire in tone. This, of course, is entirely the point of Ellis's translation. It appeals as a (colloquial) regional Dante to some (chiefly English readers) and just as a colloquial Dante to others. The text functions on various levels, and appeals to different interpretive communities.

Ellis's translation had a mixed reception. Barbara Reynolds found some fault with his translation. Her criticism rests on the basis of the brevity and swiftness of his version. For

⁷⁴ In fact, the two words come from the same Latin root (*AEIt* 461).

⁷⁵ The translation by the Northern Irish poet is unmistakably dialectical (2002: xx). Cf. M. Reynolds (2008) and Hutchins-Boisseau (2003).

Reynolds its speed renders it “inadequate for the dimensions of Dante’s poem” (1995: 232). But, of course, this is a squarely source-oriented approach to translation criticism. Put simply, through the lens of *Skopostheorie*, Reynolds is wrong to criticize Ellis’s translation on the basis of its swiftness. There have been further criticisms of Ellis’s translation.⁷⁶ Indeed, Fumagalli describes Ellis’s translation as “much criticized”, though fails to cite Ellis’s critics (2001: x). The argument could be made that this represents the continuing (though perhaps diminishing) view that more creative or localized translations of Dante are in some way deficient. Several eminent authorities, such as Nick Havely and Edoardo Crisafulli, have contradicted this view, proving the acceptance of such techniques in the upper echelons of Dante Studies. Crisafulli praises Ellis for his modernization of the *Inferno*, something that Sayers had done years earlier;⁷⁷ indeed, for Crisafulli, Ellis’s version is even more complete a modernization than that of Sayers (2000: 343). Havely, for his part, drawing on some of the “more perceptive reviewers”, lauds Ellis’s version as a “significant innovation [...] which could point the way to a plurality of locally spoken Dantes” (2014: 272).

The question then remains: has Steve Ellis achieved his purpose? It seems to me that he has, for the most part; though many critics fail to take his purpose into account. In an otherwise commendatory article, one reviewer concludes on a negative note:

[Ellis’s translation] has missed something fundamental about Dante’s achievement, and in missing it has harmed its own cause [...]. [Ellis] has lost the detail and myriad variations of character and concept [of Dante’s original].

(Gordon 1996: 231–2)

P.N. Furbank (1996: n.p.), for his part, expresses his concern that Ellis has employed “only one effect among many” of Dante’s style. But, of course, what both of these reviewers fail to note is that Ellis’s “cause” was not to recreate these “myriad variations”.⁷⁸ Ellis explicitly (by way of his introduction) and implicitly (by way of the techniques outlined above) set out to translate according to his personal view of Dante’s rhythm and speed. Critics frequently talk about translations in terms of “loss” (Gordon himself does at 231). But through the lens of *Skopostheorie*, all translations *must* lack some qualities of the source text; or, to put it in a more positive light, translations generally try to gain something from the source text that will be

⁷⁶ Ellis (1998: 65–6) summarizes their main points.

⁷⁷ Indeed, Ellis praises Sayers’ translation in his introduction (Ellis 1994: x).

⁷⁸ So Ellis (1998: 66): “I never thought I could reproduce the full variety of Dante’s voices.”

coherent to the target culture. Ellis eschews laboured reference to “the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual sense which the *Comedy* envisions” (Gordon 1996: 232) simply because he must. His is a version that is deliberately concise, and consistent with his purpose. After all, “I have been especially keen to reproduce [...] Dante’s concision and economy” (Ellis 1994: xi). The point could even be made that he goes beyond this *skopos*; he certainly takes inspiration from Dante’s succinctness, but he takes this even further (as the statistics reveal). As demonstrated, Ellis set out “to simplify the language of translation to a kind of plainness” (1994: ix); this is perhaps where Ellis is most consistently successful. If there is one valid criticism to be made, however, it would be in his desire “to be faithful (as far as possible) to both style and meaning” (Ellis 1994: xi). As proven, especially with his metaphors and similes, Ellis does deliberately deviate from the source text’s “meaning” in some respects. This is not a grave criticism of Ellis’s style, but he could certainly have benefited from being clearer in his introduction.

Nevertheless, the point stands that a translation does not need to be a holistic recreation of Dante’s grace; any translator that attempts to do this would be doomed to failure. Ellis narrowed his *skopos*: he set out to translate in a *succinct, familiar, clear* (“readable”), and *poetic* manner. Typically, for translators of Dante, he claimed that he was trying “to recapture” and “to reproduce” *some* of the effects of the original. Of course, the extent to which these verbs are appropriate to describe the translation of a text that is so culturally removed is up for debate. But it must be concluded that Ellis has realized his purpose. Moreover, his translation fulfils a function in the target culture. It may be read quickly (thanks to its brevity) and easily (thanks to its simplification). A degree of intellectual snobbery will undoubtedly oppose such *skopoi*. Nevertheless, it equally functions as an interesting poem in its own right, with familiar language and sprinkles of northern English dialect.

3.4.3 Robert M. Durling: Understanding the Muse or the Philosopher? (1996)

Just as Heaney’s translation of the first three cantos was first published, and not long before the publication of Ellis’s *Hell*, the scholar Robert M. Durling of the University of California, Santa Cruz, began to translate the *Inferno* in an entirely different way. Durling translated the text in just six weeks in 1993 (Telander & Durling 2011: n.p.). It was published by Oxford University Press in 1996, with accompanying annotations, some of which were provided by his former student, Roland L. Martinez. It is written in prose, but the text is laid out as if a poem. In this way, Dante’s *terzina* forms are mirrored by the facing text.

Durling declares that his translation is “prose, as literal as possible, following as closely as practicable the syntax of the original” (1996: v). He leads with this statement, and it is clearly the primary function of his translation. It is, he continues, “designed to direct the reader’s attention over to the original” (v). Nevertheless, it is not meant to be a simple prose crib, an interlinear translation that reads in unidiomatic, clumsy English; he hopes that “the translation reads well aloud” (v). He does not, however, stress this latter point. Its effect is primarily foreignizing: “to convey in part the nature of Dante’s very peculiar Italian” (v). If there are peculiarities in Durling’s English, they are entirely deliberate. As such, there are a few different components to Durling’s approach. By way of his English text, he is attempting to demonstrate the strangeness, the difference of Dante’s Italian. He is equally trying to help the reader of Italian to understand the source text. This is further proven by the layout of his English text. Although decidedly written in prose, Durling’s English is laid out in tercets to mirror the facing Italian.⁷⁹ There is also an agonistic element to Durling’s translation. It is, Durling hopes, “more faithful than any other English translations” (Telander & Durling 2011: n.p.). While it is not entirely clear what he meant by “faithful”, one of Durling’s purposes was seemingly to help students to read the Italian. Indeed, his decision to translate Dante stemmed from the perceived inadequacy of prior translations.⁸⁰ It is of interest that Durling does not emphasize the readability or rhythm of his translation as an important element; as we shall see below, it was emphasized to a greater extent by Durling’s reviewers.

In any prose translation of a text that has been translated before, it is inevitable that there will be an echoing of the previous translations in the more recent one. This has been pointed out most eruditely by Robert and Jean Hollander (2000: vii–viii), who have demonstrated the striking similarities between John Dickson Sinclair’s translation of the *Commedia* (1939) and that of Charles Singleton (1970). Indeed, as Gilbert F. Cunningham (1966: 164) and, later, Dino Cervigni (2002: 454–6) have demonstrated, there is a significant cross-over between Sinclair’s monumental prose translation and those of his predecessors from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as that of Charles Eliot Norton (1891).⁸¹ Subsequent writers have tended to tiptoe around this delicate issue: the Hollanders, for one,

⁷⁹ De Rooy (2003a: 13) attributes the prose paragraph formatting of other prose translations to the unpopularity of prose translations in the USA; he thus hypothesizes that Durling sought “to cover up” his prose with this “poetical lay out”.

⁸⁰ Telander & Durling (2011: n.p.): while teaching the *Commedia*, Durling “was appalled” at the quality of translations at conveying Dante’s language (“I found that I spent about twenty minutes of each period pointing out what the Italian really meant”).

⁸¹ Indeed, Norton himself credits the influence of several other prose translators of the nineteenth century (1891/1920: iii). Cf. Cunningham (1965: 160) and Cervigni (2002: 454–5).

criticize Singleton for “his failure to acknowledge the frequency of his exact coincidence with Sinclair” (2000: viii), while Cervigni criticizes both Sinclair and Singleton for engaging in a “strategy of concealment” in their translations in failing to acknowledge their sources (2002: 454).⁸² At this point, I must absolutely stress that Durling does *not* engage in any way in such a practice. The text of his translation has remarkably few similarities to its predecessors, especially given his employment of a similar translation strategy. But, of course, he does belong to this linear tradition of scholarly translations, each of which attempts to bring Dante’s mediaeval Italian to a new generation of students. The perfect translation of Dante, demonstrably, cannot exist. But because of the wonderfully rich scholarly tradition, exemplified by the translations of Norton, Sinclair, and Singleton, the Anglophone reader already had access to a prose crib that, with a few possible exceptions, adequately mirrored the Italian. As such, although Durling is firmly part of this scholarly tradition,⁸³ his translation, as we shall see, finds its own unique niche beside them.

Durling’s translation was received positively, almost unanimously. Tom Peterson, for one, praises it for its being “almost absolutely faithful to Dante’s syntax” (1997: 350). Now, this is, of course, hyperbole, since no translation could possibly follow Dante’s syntax to any great extent, owing to the significant syntactical differences between contemporary English and Dante’s Italian. However, this is a common laudation for Durling’s translation: it helps the reader to understand the Italian. These sentiments are echoed by such Dantists as Theodore Cachey (1999: 403) and James Torrens. The latter’s article encapsulates succinctly the general attitude towards Durling’s work:

[Durling] captures the quality of old interlinear translations, and thereby helps anyone trying to decode Dante’s original.

(Torrens 1996: 26)

Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated below, Durling’s translation is more complex, more nuanced than a simple prose translation to assist the student of Italian. His is a translation that finds a unique niche beside the meticulously philological renderings of Sinclair and Singleton. This manifests itself in the fluency of Durling’s prose: his reviewers rightly tend to praise him

⁸² But see Cunningham (1965: 4): “references are made from time to time to verbal similarities between translations. These have often led to charges of plagiarism, but [...] great caution must be exercised. Resemblances are inevitable when translators have a common linguistic and literary tradition, and very careful investigation is needed to support a charge of piracy.”

⁸³ Robert and Jean Hollander’s 2000 translation is also part of this tradition. Unlike the others, it is in a form of verse, but its intention coincides with the aforementioned texts. Cf. Cervigni (2002: 454; cf. 456 on the question of the Hollanders’ verse form).

not only for philological prowess, but also for prosaic elegance.⁸⁴ One criticism of his translation technique stemmed from the impression that it was not elegant enough:

It does not live up to the poetic power of the versions by Ciardi, Musa, and Hollander; Durling's lines are at times oddly literal, missing the idiomatic.
(Cooksey 2014: n.p.)⁸⁵

As I have pointed out time and again in this essay, such a perspective is entirely incompatible with *Skopostheorie*. Durling's prose translation of the *Commedia* was never composed with the intention of living up to the poetic power of previous verse translations of Dante. His *skopos* is much more in line with the likes of Sinclair and Singleton; as such, any references to 'rival' translations that I make will be to prose/scholarly translations.

To begin, by looking closely at the text, I would like to prove what may be thought to be a self-evident truth by now: that Durling's text usually mirrors the Italian exceptionally closely, both in terms of syntax and vocabulary. First, Durling's choice of vocabulary tends to echo Dante's in his use of cognates.⁸⁶ *Selvaggia* (*If* I 5), for instance, is rendered as "savage" to mirror the Italian word, which comes from an identical Latin root (*silvaticus*).⁸⁷ Durling proceeds with this strategy throughout the *proemio* and, indeed, the rest of his translation. *Rinova* becomes "renews";⁸⁸ *trattare di* becomes "treat of";⁸⁹ *abbandonai* becomes "I abandoned";⁹⁰ *perigliosa* becomes "perilous";⁹¹ *acquista* becomes "acquires";⁹² and so it goes. This is, on the face of it, not a particularly surprising development; however, the most remarkable feature here is Durling's insistence on using the cognate even when an English synonym may aid in the flow of his English. Take for instance, the beginning of the simile at line 55:

E qual è quei che volentieri **acquista** [...]
(*If* I 55)

⁸⁴ See Botterill (1996: 285), the Modern Language Association (see Institute for Humanities Research 2012: n.p.), and Cherchi (2003: 41) on the impression of Durling's "readability".

⁸⁵ Note that Cooksey's review was of Durling's translation of *Paradiso* (2010).

⁸⁶ Peterson (1997: 350) has picked up on this strategy.

⁸⁷ Cf. *AEIt* 385 (s.v. 'selvaggio') and *OED* (s.v. 'savage, *adj.* and *n.*'): both from the Latin adjective "silvāticus".

⁸⁸ *If* I 6. Cf. *AEIt* 360 (s.v. 'rinnovare') and *OED* (s.v. 'renew, *v.*'): both from the Latin verb "renovāre".

⁸⁹ *If* I 8. Cf. *AEIt* 437 (s.v. 'trattare') and *OED* (s.v. 'treat, *v.*'): both from the Latin verb "tractāre".

⁹⁰ *If* I 12. Cf. *AEIt* 1 (s.v. 'abbandonare') and *OED* (s.v. 'abandon, *v.*'): the Latin common element is unclear here; but both words come via French.

⁹¹ *If* I 24. Cf. *AEIt* 311 (s.v. 'pericoloso' and 'periglio') and *OED* (s.v. 'perilous, *adj.* and *adv.*'): both from the Latin adjective "periculōsus".

⁹² *If* I 55. Cf. *AEIt* 5 (s.v. 'acquistare') and *OED* (s.v. 'acquire, *v.*'): both from the Latin verb "acquīrere".

And like one who gladly **acquires** [...]

(*DIf* 29)

There is no development of the simile in Durling's, no explication to embellish Dante's image. Even Singleton, the great literalist, finds room to change the verb to enhance the simile:

And like one who **is** eager **in winning** [...]

(*SgIf* 7).

To assist with meaning, the adverb (*volentieri*) becomes an adjective for Singleton ("eager") and the verb *acquistare* is rendered in a new way which explains the semantics of the simile to a greater extent, but diverges in the grammatical functions of the source text. It is important to stress that both translators engage intermittently in such a practice demonstrated here by Singleton. In fact, the above case is perhaps the exception that proves the rule: both translators tend to follow the procedure of using cognates whenever they possibly can: both render *peltro* as "pelf", *impedire* as "impede", and so forth. This is not to ascribe a greater value to either translation; the point is that their translations go about their philological tasks in marginally different ways. Notably, demonstrating his philological prowess, Durling avoids false cognates such as *pieta* (which, instead of "pity", he renders as "anguish").⁹³ He tends to seek out the common root word to find what could be described as a "formal equivalent,"⁹⁴ but he does not go about this without exception.

Another element of Durling's translation which achieves some degree of formal equivalence with the source text comes in his syntax. In many passages, Durling's word order mirrors the Italian almost exactly, which creates the (deliberate) effect of making his English bland. See, for instance, Durling's rendering of Virgil's description of the savagery of the *lupa*:

Questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide.

(*If* I 94–6)

⁹³ He does, arguably, use one false cognate in the *proemio* in rendering *lago* as "lake" at 20; see Lansing (2009: 62–9), who argues that *pit* is more appropriate.

⁹⁴ A technique that seeks to achieve perceived "similarity" with the source text; see Nida & Taber (1969: 201): "a translation in which the features of the form of the source text have been mechanically reproduced in the receptor language".

This beast at which you cry out lets no one
pass by her way, but so impedes him that she
kills him.

(*DIf* 31)

Dante's parenthesis is maintained ("at which you cry out"), ensuring that the subject ("the beast") opens the clause, and the verb and direct object ("lets no one") are distanced from it, as in the source text. Indeed, the only significant lexical change that Durling is forced to make is his rendering of the notoriously difficult Latinate preposition *per*, which he translates first as "at" and second as "by". The most striking example of this, however, comes in Durling's translation of line 96 ("but so impedes him that she kills him"). Aside from the necessary shift of the direct object pronouns to after the verb, Durling's syntax mirrors Dante's perfectly, to the extent that his English reads as somewhat awkward. But this is entirely the point of Durling's passage here. It invites the reader to cast her/his eye across to the Italian; his English does not compete with Dante's Italian, but instead sits in its shadow, nudging the reader towards it.

One final point ought to be made on Durling's attempt to maintain similarity: his translation, although in prose, is formatted as if a poem; Dante's *terzine* are (usually) mirrored by prose tercets in Durling's text, which is quite an innovative move for a prose translation.⁹⁵ This ultimately serves to help readers compare the source and target texts. Durling's tercets and sentences are presented to mirror Dante's.

Crucially, however, Durling does not preserve the aforementioned source text elements consistently throughout his translation. He instead creates a hybrid translation, which swings between being a philological crib with foreignizing syntax and a reasonably graceful prose version to help the reader to understand the sense over the source-text grammar. That is to say, a striking element of Durling's translation is that it does not always read as a perfectly literal crib of the Italian. Subtle grammatical adjustments are made to make the translation read more fluently in English. This often consists simply of a change in person, voice, or tense. In this way, the reader attempting to work her/his way through the Italian must occasionally deconstruct Durling's text, and use it only as a rough guide to Dante's Italian. This will often manifest itself in a change of subject so that Durling's English may syntactically follow Dante's Italian without recourse to awkward syntax. Dante's grammatical subjects are often to be found later in the clause than the Anglophone reader would expect. See, for instance, the passage in

⁹⁵ Note that three of the most prominent prose translations of the twentieth century—Sinclair (1939), Gilbert (1969), and Singleton (1970)—were all presented in paragraph form.

which Dante is momentarily given hope by the rising sun, only to be scuppered by the sight of the lion:

Sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle
l'**ora** del tempo e la dolce **stagione**.

Ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la **vista** che m'apparve d'un leone.

(*If* I 41–5)

In bold are the nominal subjects of the two main clauses. If they are to be rendered in English as subjects, then, the nouns ought to be moved further to the front of the sentence to comply with the strictures of English syntax.⁹⁶ Durling instead finds an elegant solution to change the grammatical sense of the source text, but still broadly to maintain the word order:

So that **I**
took reason to have good hope of that beast with its
gaily painted hide
from the hour of the morning and the sweet
season; but not so that **I** did not fear the sight of a
lion that appeared to me.

(*DIf* 29)

For both main clauses, the subject is now the first person. This has two effects. First, it ensures that the words are presented in largely the same sequence as in the source text; Durling's syntax mirrors Dante's. Second, the shift in subject simplifies the text for the Anglophone reader. No longer does the sight of the lion 'give me fear'. Durling's English is more direct: "*I* did [...] fear the sight of a lion".

Durling employs this technique throughout his translation. His rendering of a similarly tricky passage in Canto XI, in which Virgil describes the first subcircle of the seventh circle of Hell, demonstrates this tendency towards preserving the source text syntax, while changing the grammatical subject to compensate:

Onde omicide e ciascun che mal fiere,
guastatori e predon, tutti tormenta

⁹⁶ Cf. Singleton 5: "So that the hour of the day and the sweet season gave me cause for good hope of that beast with the gay skin."

lo **giron** primo per diverse schiere.

(*If* XI 37–9)

Thus **homicides** and **whoever** wrongfully strikes,
spoilers, and **bandits**, all are tormented in the first
subcircle in different groups.

(*DIf* 173)

What is most striking about Durling's translation is not just the change in subject, but the change from active to passive voice. In the source text, it is the first subcircle (*lo giron primo*) that torments (*tormenta*) the homicides *et al.* To the Anglophone ear, this may sound peculiar; and so Durling, to ease the reader's understanding of Dante's sense, employs the passive voice. The homicides *et al.* are now the subjects, "tormented in the first subcircle". Durling's interests are clearly not squarely in grammatical accuracy and so-called literality. Where necessary, he adjusts the grammar of the Italian to simplify it and to make it read more smoothly in English.

On a related note, there are occasions where Durling resorts to both a colloquial form of English, and, contrarily, an archaic form. He sometimes makes a concerted effort to avoid the archaic diction that so many of his predecessors employ. Durling's phrase "I cannot really say how I entered there" (*DIf* 27) has a distinctly informal tone. Such phrases do not appear consistently throughout his version, but they appear often enough to suggest an effort on Durling's part to help the reader's understanding of the sense in English. Finally, there also appears to be an infrequent tendency to poetic (and archaic) turns of phrase. Somewhat outdated words like "shamefast" for *vergognoso* (*DIf* 31; *If* I 81) and "woebegone" for *mesto* (*DIf* 33; *If* I 135) work their way into Durling's translation very occasionally. These perhaps serve to remind the reader of the poetics of the source text.⁹⁷ They create a fascinating contrast with the aforementioned informal phrases.

As such, Durling's translation is definitively a hybrid translation; it does not have a singular articulable *skopos*. Its purpose is, as Durling himself noted, primarily to assist with reading the Italian. But Durling's translation is demonstrably more ambitious than that. Whatever one makes of the above examples, it is clear that Durling has made some sort of attempt at writing elegant English prose. It is not an unreservedly philological translation. This lends weight, at least in part, to Paolo Cherchi's assertion that Durling's translation "is a sign that professors are trying to understand the Muses as well as the philosophers" (2003: 41). There is no single consistent voice in Durling's translation; it varies between very occasional

⁹⁷ Indeed, the *OED* classifies both English words as "archaic".

poetic archaisms, simplifying colloquial English, and literal prose crib. This ultimately makes for a more elegant prose version than some previous scholarly translations, whose emphasis was more centrally on philological accuracy. Durling's translation also strives towards such philology, with great care to reflect the etymology of the source text on numerous occasions. But his success ultimately lies in the breadth of his approach. It is perhaps less useful to help the reader of Italian than the prose versions of Sinclair and Singleton,⁹⁸ and indeed it is perhaps less elegant than the more creative prose versions of Gilbert (1969) and Reed (1962), but it balances philology and elegance in a way that none of these translations can manage. Durling attempts to capture more in his translation than these previous prose translations; his *skopos* is more ambitious, has greater breadth. This, of course, raises a number of challenges for the translator. It is the translator's most significant difficulty to produce a translation that is concurrently "as literal as possible" and "reads well aloud" (Durling 1996: v). Durling's translation is certainly more successful in conveying the former than the latter; but this is the component that Durling himself emphasizes to the greatest extent.

This, of course, does not mean that Durling's translation has utterly supplanted the translations of Sinclair and Singleton as the optimal prose translation, as Steven Botterill has suggested.⁹⁹ His *skopos* is somewhat different from his predecessors—despite the fact that they share "the same very illustrious ancestry" (Cervigni 2002: 454)—and deserves to be seen as a new take on Dante's verse, a marginally new prose translation. Durling has not superseded the prior translations, but rather sits alongside them in a proud prose tradition that is sure to continue. Theodore Cachey encapsulates this idea perfectly: Durling's *Inferno* "can be said to have carved out a unique and provocative niche in the panorama of current Dante translations" (1999: 403). It contributes to the vibrant philological discourse in which prose translations engage, but it does not replace its predecessors. As such, it could be argued that comparing Singleton's and Durling's translations is a somewhat fruitless exercise. Both texts have broadly the same relationship with the source text, and both translators frequently employ the same techniques. Both texts are, in a sense, hybrid translations, since no translation can possibly achieve perfect literality. Of greatest interest are the sections of the text where the translators must exercise some creativity, artistic licence, and interpretation; the extent of their hybridity

⁹⁸ This despite Cachey's claim to the contrary: "the Durling translation is more efficient as a prose crib than its predecessors" (1999: 402).

⁹⁹ Botterill (1996: 285; 2011: 1,918) suggested that Durling's translation would "drive the revered but outdated" translations of Sinclair and Singleton "from the field".

must be the focus. The very richness of Dante's *Commedia* means that, even in the unpoetic world of prose translation, there can always be a new *skopos*.

3.5 Some Concluding Remarks on Translations of Dante

The purpose of this chapter has been to show *Skopostheorie* in action, and to reinforce the theoretical claims made in the second chapter. It may not *prove* a great deal, but it does make the case for a tolerant view of literary translation. The above analyses are but a taste of what Dantean translations have to offer. Indeed, all of these translations merit further research, Heaney's *Inferno* in particular. It is not, however, my purpose to compare their relative qualities. Each functions on a different level and each has its own merits. Together, they attest to the beautiful flexibility of options available to the translator. *Skopostheorie* advocates such a tolerant approach. These translations demonstrate the diverse ways in which translators received Dante in the 1990s. The preceding section also serves to demonstrate how *Skopostheorie* may be applied in the field of literary translation. It is possible to find out the *intentio auctoris*, and to appraise the translation relative to these intentions. Tom Peterson has pointed out that:

Each generation needs its translation of the *Commedia*. The truth is we need more than one: in order to serve different publics, and to be assured that at least one of them will be suitable.

(Peterson 1997: 349)

The three translations outlined here have three very different purposes and, therefore, publics. Heaney's translation reflects his own contemporary poetry: its purpose is not to adhere to the source text with philological accuracy, nor to help students of Italian. It is a personal translation, it is a manifestation of Heaney's own opinion of Dante's poetics. Heaney decided at an early stage not to attempt translating the full canticle (*Station Island* became, in a way, Heaney's own epic poem, his own "kind of penance").¹⁰⁰ *Inferno* I, for Heaney, is both a translation and a poem. Steve Ellis's translation, though approached with a similar spirit to Heaney's,¹⁰¹ held very different *skopoi*. It tries to capture some of Dante's speed and verbal economy, while capturing street language of the 1990s. Durling's, meanwhile, is largely aimed at students; but

¹⁰⁰ See Hart (1992: 143), citing *Boston Phoenix*, 18 Sep, 1987.

¹⁰¹ Note that both cite Sayers' Modernist translation as an influence (cf. Heaney & Hass 2000: 2, 4, and Ellis 1994: ix); though clearly the two writers were influenced in very different ways.

it has a few quirks that strive towards a more readable version than his prose predecessors. Naturally, the point could certainly be made that I am falling into the trap that Chesterman has warned of: these three translations are, it would seem, “optimal cases” (2010: 215). *Skopostheorie* equally could (in theory, at least) be used to criticize translations that fail to adhere to their *skopoi*; it just so happens that these three translators fulfil their purposes immaculately.

There is a tendency for translators to adopt a somewhat defensive tone in their introductions, mindful of the vast quantity of translations that have preceded them and the magnitude and difficulty of the task of rendering the great poet in English. J.D. Sinclair, for instance, begins by defending his translation from those who might accuse his prose version of being “a singularly gratuitous form of failure” (Sinclair 1939/1948: 9).¹⁰² This defensiveness encapsulates one of the great issues at the heart of translating Dante. There is something unique about Dante that attracts translators, but also makes them humble and apologetic. This is, in part, because a lot of modern literary criticism views translation as an inferior activity; and matched against one of the greatest poets of all, the translator is, in the critic’s terms, always doomed to failure. For example, the eminent Dantist, Theodore Cachey, has argued that “the fact that the poem is continually being translated” is “a sign of the untranslatability” of Dante (1999: 401). He continues:

Translations of the *Comedy* in English [...] have been piling up for two centuries, forming in the process a kind of monument to their collective failure and inadequacy.

(1999: 401)

And another, even stronger condemnation, from Richard Moore:

The attempt to represent Dante’s *Commedia* in our language is one of the most consistently and conspicuously failed projects in the history of English translation.

(1996: 124)

To conclude, then, it is necessary to defend of the influx of translations of the *Inferno*. First, the point must be made that all translations contribute greatly to the field of Dante scholarship. “Translation is interpretation”, wrote Charles Singleton (1970a: 372). This

¹⁰² Cf. Bruckman (2011: 9): “what, *another* translation of Dante, I hear you asking?”; Zappulla (1998: ix): “many will ask what possible excuse there can be for yet another [translation]”.

statement obtains to this very day: all translations contribute to the discourse (albeit some at a deeper level than others) on Dantean interpretation. Dante means different things to different readers, and the turgescence of English translations is a direct result of the interpretability of the *Commedia*. There is no end in sight of translations precisely because of the depth of this one fourteenth-century poem.¹⁰³ Dante scholarship and Dante interpretation therefore continue at a phenomenal rate. Translation and interpretation are inextricably bound concepts. Dante has provided a beautifully complex *Informationsangebot* (offer of information), and it is for translators and scholars alike to interpret this. The continual growth of Dante translations ought not to be cause for despair, but jubilation. The best ones will be picked out and have a longer shelf-life (those which, in the words of Vermeer, the readers are “interested in relating to their reality”; 1984/2014: 99) and yet more will appear, offering new perspectives on this eternal poet. Michael Palma’s introduction to his translation of the *Inferno* encapsulates this issue perfectly. It is not for the translator to apologize for yet another translation of Dante’s masterwork:

Given the inexhaustible richness of Dante’s achievement, perhaps we should wonder not why there are so many versions available, but why there are not even more.

(Palma 2002: ix)

Critics who bemoan the proliferation of Dantean translations are therefore entirely missing the point. There can never be a definitive translation of the *Inferno*, precisely because of the diversity and complexity of Dante’s poetry. The unabated urge to translate (and, by extension, the desire to read) Dante in the Anglophone world does not stem somehow from the inadequacy of past translations, but from the richness of Dante’s Italian.

Or, as Susan Bassnett puts it, translation is a complex process “of rewriting, reshaping, and reconfiguring”:

[Translations] ensure the survival of a text through the centuries [in a way that is] innovative and invigorating. Far from being a marginal activity, translation is, and always has been, fundamental to literary and cultural renewal and change.

(2014: 178)

¹⁰³ See Bermann (2011) for a more detailed discussion of the reasons for Dante’s popularity.

And translations of Dante's *Commedia* are at the forefront of this activity. The English, as Eugenio Montale famously wrote, cook up Dante in their own way.¹⁰⁴ But, most importantly, he adds that *hanno ragione*: they are right to do so. Long may it continue.

¹⁰⁴ Montale (in 1996: 410–11) in the 1951 letter entitled “Sulla Scia di Stravinskij” from the collection *Prime alla scala*.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

My study functions on two broad levels. First, it addresses scholars outside of authorized translation studies: the Dante scholars, the reviewers, the readers, even the translators. It informs this group that there is no necessarily superior translation strategy. It goes beyond debates that have plagued poetry translation (and, specifically, Dante translation) over the centuries, which claim that prose defiles the original somehow (“*terza rima* or nothing”)¹ or that poetry somehow betrays the author (“time and again Dante is made to say things in English he would never have dreamt of saying in Italian”).² Though such opinions are perhaps less common today, there remains a rather restrictive view of what constitutes a ‘good’ translation. To many, it might sound rather provocative that the translator may “dethrone” the source text to fulfil her/his purpose. On one level, then, this essay has asserted that such dethroning is often both necessary and desirable. As Hans Hönl wrote, “the source text should no longer be seen as the ‘sacred original’” (1997: 9).

However, *Skopos* is, of course, not unique in sending this message. The Manipulation School and the Descriptivist School both assume this very target-oriented approach to translation. Much of my thesis is common knowledge to these tolerant approaches to translation. Thus, for the purpose of translation studies, my essay has a second focus: to argue in favour of the application of *Skopos* in the field of literary translation. The latter, it seems, is much more of a contested point than the former. Gideon Toury, for instance, has pointed out a general shift in translation scholarship towards the target-oriented reasoning of the likes of Toury and Vermeer. Since the “extreme source-orientedness” of the 1970s, “most translation scholars [...] have [...] come to integrate many more target-bound considerations into their reasoning” (Toury 1995: 25). The Cultural Turn is very much yesterday’s news in translatology. Outside of translation studies too, there seems to be a trend towards a greater tolerance of various translation strategies. As such, it could be argued that the points made in

¹ Sayers (1949: 56).

² Singleton (1950: 394).

my second chapter are more provocative than those of the third. Nevertheless, as demonstrated (3.2), there remains a strong degree of resistance to target-oriented translation in modern scholarship outside of translation studies (and a minority voice within translation studies, most prominently Lawrence Venuti). Pym is perhaps correct in asserting that *Skopostheorie* just appeals to common sense (2014: 49); but it is clearly not “common sense” to everybody. This is why *Skopostheorie* is important: it provides a more tolerant view of translation. The critic has the responsibility to acknowledge the translator’s purpose and to evaluate accordingly. The relevance of *Skopostheorie* as a prescriptive approach, then, relies in part on the existence of narrow, intransigent views towards translation. This does not necessarily put the translator on a pedestal beyond criticism: the translator, too, has a responsibility to make the reader aware of her/his strategies, of how s/he is engaging with the source text.

Nor is this study (or, indeed, *Skopostheorie*) saying anything particularly new. The so-called “primacy of purpose” (Pym 2003: 123) that *Skopostheorie* entails appears frequently within and without translation studies. Gilbert Cunningham, for instance, in his magisterial book on translations of Dante’s *Commedia* before 1966, uses a methodology that is demonstrably analogous to that which Vermeer advocated decades later:

In assessing the quality of the translations examined in this volume, we must bear in mind the purpose for which they were made. We have tried throughout the book to show what each author’s aims were, quoting from his [*sic*] own statement of these if it exists, and how far he [*sic*] was successful in fulfilling them.

(1966: 274)

Stephen Straight, meanwhile, asserted in 1981 (completely independently from Vermeer) that:

Decisions about how “faithfully” to render the original are heavily influenced by the translator’s perception of the audience for the end product. And I believe that it is by focusing upon this issue that the notion of “purpose” can be given some stable basis for use as a criterion for the evaluation of translations.

(1981: 46)

Such considerations are exactly in line with that which *Skopostheorie* subsequently recommended. *Skopostheorie* thus bears striking similarities to a number of historical and contemporary approaches to translation. Gilbert F. Cunningham, Susan Bassnett, Theodore

Savory, and countless others already employ the language of *Skopostheorie* in describing (and, in Straight's case, evaluating) translation. It is not a new conception.

So, the descriptive methodology behind *Skopostheorie* is tried and true. The theory is definitely not *original* in the truest sense of the word. And, further, its prescriptions have been obvious to many critics and scholars for years as well. As Lorna Hardwick has observed, intolerant views of translation are possibly decreasing (at least in the context of Greek drama):

So far as classical scholars are concerned, it would be fair to say that [...] provocative generalisation[s] about academics' distaste for translation no longer applies across the board. Over the last century or so, and with increasing sophistication in the last twenty five years, some distinguished classicists have embraced not only the necessity for translations but also the attractions of participation in the process.

(2013b: 323)

Furthermore, there has been an ongoing shifting of translation norms throughout the twentieth century. Steven Yao, for instance, attributes the rise in acceptability of creative translation to the Modernists of the earlier part of the twentieth century. Thanks to the Modernist tradition, translation was recast "into a uniquely generative [...] mode of literary production" (2002: 233); creative translation has become both prominent and (relatively) acceptable.

Perhaps Dante scholarship, too, is coming to accept the variety and multiplicity in translation, as evidenced by a recent clutch of essays.³ Indeed, the importance of Vermeer's prescriptive stance (in terms of 'translation criticism criticism', at least) may be diminishing in the wake of greater and greater acceptability and tolerance towards different translation strategies:

Interpretive perspectives on Dante's text seem to have changed dramatically over the past century—from an emphasis on the *Commedia* as a stable, unified and universal model to a text prized for its openness to many different, even contrasting interpretations.

(Bermann 2011: 93)

Skopostheorie, then, may well be preaching to the twenty-first century choir. Dethroning Dante is, perhaps, not as controversial as one would expect. In 2016, the source text is no longer sacred as it was in the 1970s. It has, in a way, already been dethroned. But, as I have

³ See, for example, Barolsky (2014), Bermann (2011). Wallace, meanwhile, celebrates the "new ways of investing Dante's verse with the power and bite of contemporary writing" (1993: 256).

demonstrated (3.2), restrictive, source-oriented views of how a text *should* be translated remain. Not everyone prizes the *Commedia* for its openness to different forms of translation and interpretation. *Skopostheorie*, though perhaps less important today, therefore still matters.

Skopostheorie is imperfect, in both senses of the word. It is above all imperfect in the more common definition of the word. The term *skopos*, as many critics will continue to point out, is suitably vague and impossibly elusive. It has not been the purpose of this essay to atone for all the gaps in the inescapably broad *Skopostheorie*. It has been my intention to give it some relevance, some hermeneutic function, that will increase the legitimacy of the theory and to provide a practical application for a discipline that has, at times, lacked empirical value. But *Skopostheorie* is also imperfect in the sense that it is unfinished, a work in progress. My study is, in a sense, my own interpretation of the groundwork of Hans Vermeer, and his colleagues Katharina Reiß and Christiane Nord (among others). My approach is not necessarily canonical *Skopostheorie* (inasmuch as I am finding applications for it that had not been stipulated by its founders), though I believe that there is much to be said for Vermeer's canonical works. Vermeer's core principles have remained at the heart of my thesis, and, while I firmly agree with his own assertion that "the theory needs further specification" (in Chesterman 2001b: 135), I believe that the fundamental descriptive and prescriptive principles are of immeasurable value in the practice and literary criticism of translational action. The present essay has, I believe, gone some way to validating this claim.

There is one major limitation to my approach. This essay has fallen into the trap spoken of by Andrew Chesterman, when he warned that *Skopostheorie* only deals with "optimal" cases of translation.⁴ Indeed, I would argue that Dante's *Inferno*, translated so many times in so many different ways, represents the most optimal of optimal examples. It is the best possible example of the diversity and capability of translation as a discipline, and is an optimal case study for legitimizing *Skopostheorie* as a prescriptive theory in the field of literary translation. As such, I shall not extrapolate wildly on this brief study, and claim that *Skopostheorie* is a perfect theory for any manner of text. Moreover, *Skopostheorie* as a model for negative translation criticism still remains to be proven. Indeed, the tolerance of the theory encourages the translation critic to highlight the positive features of the translation.

As such, some of the hypotheses here may seem inadequate. There are undoubtedly gaps in *Skopostheorie* which, I admit, this survey may be guilty of sidestepping. It does not

⁴ Chesterman (2010: 223): *Skopostheorie* "relies on an optimal set of working conditions with optimally competent translators".

sufficiently account for every single translational action. But it has some uses. First of all, it provides an illuminating lens through which to study translations. Second, it provides a useful (pseudo-)technical terminology for the study of translations. Let us cast aside such terms as “adequacy”, “intratextual coherence”, and “protest” for the moment. At a base level, the study of intentions and purposes can shed light on the study of translation, manifesting itself in the all-encompassing term “*skopos*”. Its perspective is firmly fixed on the translator herself/himself, and her/his reasons for carrying out the translation. It is a fruitful line of enquiry to compare the translator’s stated aim with the actual outcome of the translation. This seems to be the best way of respecting the translator’s intention while providing some “critical” component in this functionalist form of translation criticism.

But let us turn back to the other line of enquiry in the present essay: how translators react to the complexities of Dante’s verse. I have provided a brief exposition of how translators did this in the 1990s. Ellis provided a daring, colloquial approach that few others had attempted before him. Heaney fused Dante into his own poetics. Durling continued along the old, proud tradition of translating Dante into English prose. Perhaps only Ellis’s translation among these three offered a real challenge to contemporary translation norms: his was the only version out of the three to receive any major degree of negative criticism. Many translations will continue to proceed along the accepted norms, translating Dante into blank verse, *terza rima*, or prose. But more now are challenging these norms. The radical recent translations by Mary Jo Bang (2012, in free verse) and Clive James (2013, in quatrains) offer forceful challenges to the norm, as Carson (2002) did a decade earlier with his “Oirish” Dante (B. Reynolds 2005b: 103). Such translations keep Dante alive in the twenty-first century. They reflect, along with the translations of Messrs Heaney, Ellis, and Durling, the “malleability of this great classic of the modern world,” as Bernard O’Donoghue put it (1998: 256).

There are still those who despair that some translators do a kind of “disservice to Dante” (R. Hollander 2003: 45). Indeed, as can be expected, it seems to be chiefly Dante’s translators themselves who advocate their own particular translation strategy the most forcefully. But I am wont to agree with William J. de Souza who, fifty years ago, wrote a short monograph on the tradition of translating Dante into English. His words are as relevant today as they were then. We should not fear or bemoan new translations of Dante, but celebrate them:

It is in the nature of a classic to be interpreted anew by each age. And as long as Dante continues to speak to the ages, translators must set about performing the invaluable service of allowing him to speak in English.

(1964: 125)

And to perform this “invaluable service”, the translator must dethrone Dante.

Appendix

Table of Translators

This is a draft version of the complete list of translators (of at least one *cantica*) of the *Commedia*, to be published in the forthcoming work *To Hell and Back* (Marco Sonzogni, ed.; John Benjamins). Pre-1966 translations were compiled by Gilbert Farm Cunningham his two-volumed *The Divine Comedy in English* (1965, 1966) who, in turn, drew from Paget Toynbee's magisterial work *Britain's Tribute to Dante in Literature and Art* (1921). The list of subsequent translations has been compiled by me over the last two years.⁵ The format follows Cunningham's, with the exception of the inclusion of the translator's nationality in the list. It does not include adaptations or incomplete translations.⁶ This work of *collezionismo* will, in time, culminate in a much needed third volume to Cunningham's exhaustive critical bibliography: the groundwork is currently in place for such a work, cataloguing and critically analysing translations from 1966 to 2016.

Name, year of birth and death, occupation	Nationality	Part translated and date of first appearance	Form of translation
Charles Rogers, 1711–84, civil servant	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1782	blank verse
Henry Boyd, ca. 1755–1832, clergyman	Irish	<i>Inferno</i> , 1785 <i>Commedia</i> , 1802	rhymed six-line stanzas
Henry Francis Cary, 1772–1844, clergyman and scholar	English (born in Gibraltar)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1805–06 <i>Commedia</i> , 1814	blank verse
Nathaniel Howard, 1781–1834, schoolmaster	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1812	blank verse

⁵ With the aid of Healey (2011), which has a few lacunae.

⁶ On the distinction between adaptation and translation, see 2.3.2. I have included only texts that may be considered “translations” in the loosest possible terms; the translations must have been published (or at least printed) and distributed; they also must be translations of at least one full canticle. Unfortunately, such wonderful translators as Schwerner (2000) and Heaney (1993) are therefore left off the list. I have also left off Home's *Purgatorio* (1899–1901), of which only 31 cantos were translated, and Appelbaum's *Commedia* (2000), in which 33 selected cantos were translated across the entire *Commedia*. There are two unpublished translations worthy of note. An unpublished, handwritten 1880 prose translation of the *Paradiso* by a Scottish church minister called James MacGregor (1832–1910) is housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford (cf. Toynbee 1920: vi and Cunningham 1966: 146–8). Second, Cunningham himself wrote his own (seemingly prose) translation of the whole *Commedia*, which was privately printed by his family's company. The only copy of this available to the general public, to my knowledge, is housed in the library of the University of Stirling, to which Cunningham bequeathed his substantial book collection (see Spooner 2001: 77–83).

Joseph Hume, 1767–1843, civil servant	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1812	blank verse
Ichabod Charles Wright, 1795–1871, banker	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1833 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1836 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1840	rhymed six-line stanzas
John Dayman, 1802–71, clergyman	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1843 <i>Commedia</i> , 1865	<i>terza rima</i>
Thomas William Parsons, 1819–92, medical practitioner	American	<i>Inferno</i> I–X, 1843 <i>Inferno</i> , 1867 <i>Purgatorio</i> , I–VIII, 1875 <i>Commedia</i> (incomplete), 1893	quatrains and irregular rhyme
John Aitken Carlyle, 1801–79, medical practitioner	Scottish	<i>Inferno</i> , 1849	prose
Patrick Bannerman	Scottish (?)	<i>Commedia</i> , 1850	irregular rhyme
Charles Bagot Cayley, 1823–83, scholar	English (born in Russia)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1851 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1853 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1854	<i>terza rima</i>
E. O'Donnell, priest	Irish	<i>Commedia</i> , 1852	prose
Thomas Brooksbank, 1824–1902, lawyer	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1854	<i>terza rima</i>
(Sir) William Frederick Pollock, 1815–88, lawyer	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1854	blank verse
Bruce Whyte, lawyer	Scottish (?)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1859	irregular rhyme
John Wesley Thomas, 1798–1872, Methodist minister	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1859 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1862 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1866	<i>terza rima</i>
William Patrick Wilkie, 1829–72, lawyer	Scottish	<i>Inferno</i> , 1862	blank verse (lines of irregular length)
Claudia Hamilton Ramsay, author	English	<i>Inferno & Purgatorio</i> , 1862 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1863	<i>terza rima</i>
William Michael Rossetti, 1829–1919, civil servant	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1865	blank verse
James Ford, 1797–1877, clergyman	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1865 <i>Commedia</i> , 1870	<i>terza rima</i>
David Johnston, 1800–79, medical practitioner	Scottish	<i>Inferno & Purgatorio</i> , 1867 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1868	blank verse
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807–82, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1867	blank verse
Charles Tomlinson, 1808–97, scholar	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1877	<i>terza rima</i>
Arthur John Butler, 1844–1910, civil servant	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1880 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1885 <i>Inferno</i> , 1892	<i>terza rima</i>

Warburton Pike, 1818–82, lawyer	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1881	<i>terza rima</i>
William Stratford Dugdale, 1828–82, lawyer	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1883	prose
James Romanes Sibbald, 1839–85, “independent”	Scottish	<i>Inferno</i> , 1884	<i>terza rima</i>
James Innes Minchin, 1825–1903, civil servant	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1885	<i>terza rima</i>
Edward Hayes Plumptre, 1821–91, clergyman	English	<i>Inferno & Purgatorio</i> , 1886 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1887	<i>terza rima</i>
Frederick Kneller Haselfoot Haselfoot, 1829–1905, lawyer	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1887	<i>terza rima</i>
John Augustine Wiltach, 1824–97, lawyer	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1888	rhymed stanzas
William Warren Vernon, 1834–1919, scholar	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1889 <i>Inferno</i> , 1894 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1900	prose
Charles Eliot Norton, 1827–1908, scholar	American	<i>Inferno & Purgatorio</i> , 1891 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1892	prose
Charles Lancelot Shadwell, 1840–1919, scholar	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> I–XXVII, 1892 <i>Purgatorio</i> XXVIII–XXXIII, 1899 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1915	Marvellian stanzas
(Sir) Edward Sullivan, 1852–1928, lawyer	Irish	<i>Inferno</i> , 1893	prose
George Musgrave, 1855–1932, lawyer	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1893	Spenserian stanzas
Robert Urquhart	English (?)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1895	<i>terza rima</i>
Eugene Jacob Lee-Hamilton, 1845–1907, author	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1898	hendecasyllabic blank verse
Philip Henry Wicksteed, 1844–1927, Unitarian minister	English	<i>Paradiso</i> , 1899	prose
Arthur Compton Auchmuty, 1842–1917, clergyman	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1899	octosyllabic <i>terza rima</i>
Thomas Okey, 1852–1935, scholar	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1901	prose
John Carpenter Garnier, 1839–1926, “independent”	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1901	prose
Edward Clarke Lowe, 1823–1912, clergyman	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1902	blank <i>terzine</i>
Edward Wilberforce, 1834–1914, lawyer	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1903 <i>Commedia</i> , 1909	<i>terza rima</i>

(Sir) Samuel Walker Griffith, 1845–1920, lawyer	Australian (born in Wales)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1903 <i>Commedia</i> , 1911	hendecasyllabic blank verse
Caroline C. Potter	English (?)	<i>Purgatorio</i> & <i>Paradiso</i> , 1904	rhymed quatrains
Henry Fanshawe Tozer, 1829–1916, clergyman and scholar	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1904	prose
Marvin Richardson Vincent, 1834–1922, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1904	blank verse
Charles Gordon Wright, 1854–1936, clergyman	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1905	prose
Frances Isabella Fraser, 1836–1929	English	<i>Paradiso</i> , 1908	blank verse
Agnes Louisa Money, 1842–1910, “independent”	English	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 1910	blank verse
Charles Edwin Wheeler, 1868–1947, medical practitioner	Australian / English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1911	<i>terza rima</i>
Edith Mary Shaw, born 1846	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1914	blank verse
Edward Joshua Edwardes, 1852–1917, medical practitioner	Welsh	<i>Inferno</i> , 1915	blank verse
Henry Johnson, 1855–1918, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1915	blank verse
Courtney Langdon, 1861–1924, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1918 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1920 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1921	blank verse
Eleanor Vinton Murray, 1867–1958	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1920	<i>terza rima</i>
Melville Best Anderson, 1851–1933, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1921	<i>terza rima</i>
Henry John Hooper, 1844–1923	English (?)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1922	unrhymed amphiambs
David James MacKenzie, 1855–1925, lawyer	Scottish	<i>Commedia</i> , 1927	<i>terza rima</i>
Albert R. Bandini, 1882–1950, priest	Italian / American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1928 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1930 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1931	<i>terza rima</i>
Sydney Fowler Wright, 1874–1965, author	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1928 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1954	irregularly rhymed decasyllables
Charles Lacy Lockert, 1888–1974, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1931	<i>terza rima</i>
Jefferson Butler Fletcher, 1865–1946, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1931	defective <i>terza rima</i>

Geoffrey Langdale Bickersteth, 1884–1974, scholar	English / Scottish	<i>Paradiso</i> , 1932 <i>Commedia</i> , 1955	<i>terza rima</i>
Laurence Binyon, 1869–1943, scholar	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1933 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1938 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1943	<i>terza rima</i>
Louis How, 1873–1947, author	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1934 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1938 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1940	<i>terza rima</i>
Ralph Thomas Bodey, 1863–1952, scholar	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1938	blank verse
John Dickson Sinclair, 1865–1951, Church of Scotland minister	Scottish	<i>Inferno & Purgatorio</i> , 1939 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1946	prose
Thomas Goddard Bergin, 1904–87, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1948 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1953 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1954	blank verse
Lawrence Grant White, 1887–1956, architect	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1948	blank verse
Patrick Cummins, 1880–1968, priest	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1948	hendecasyllabic <i>terza rima</i>
Dorothy Leigh Sayers, 1893–1957, author	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1949 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1955 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1962 (XXI–XXXIII by Barbara Reynolds)	<i>terza rima</i>
Harry Morgan Ayres, 1881–1948, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1949 <i>Purgatorio & Paradiso</i> , 1953	prose
Thomas Weston Ramsey, 1892–1952, master wire worker and poet	English	<i>Paradiso</i> , 1952	defective <i>terza rima</i>
John Ciardi, 1916–86, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1954 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1961 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1970	defective <i>terza rima</i>
Howard Russell Huse, 1890–1977, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1954	prose
Glen Levin Swiggett, 1867–1961, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1956	<i>terza rima</i>
Mary Prentice Lillie, 1906–1998, scholar	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1958	hendecasyllabic blank verse
Warwick Fielding Chipman, 1880–1967, lawyer	Canadian	<i>Inferno</i> , 1961	<i>terza rima</i>
Clara Stillman Reed, 1879–1976	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1962	prose
Aldo Maugeri, born 1921, scholar	Italian	<i>Inferno</i> , 1965	blank <i>terzine</i>

William F. Ennis, died 1945	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1965	dodecasyllabic <i>terza rima</i>
Louis Biancolli, 1907–92, music critic	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1966	blank verse
BBC Composite Edition ⁷	—	<i>Commedia</i> , 1966	—
Allan H. Gilbert, 1888– 1987, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1969	prose
Charles Southward Singleton, 1909–85, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1970 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1973 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1975	prose
Mark Louis Musa, 1934– 2014, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1971 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1981 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1984	blank verse
Kenneth R. Mackenzie, 1908–90, ⁸ clerk	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1979	blank verse
Charles Hubert Sisson, 1914–2003, poet	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1980	blank verse
Allen Mandelbaum, 1926– 2011, poet and scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1980 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 1982 <i>Paradiso</i> , 1984	blank verse
Tom Phillips, born 1937, artist	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1985	blank verse
Nicholas Kilmer, born 1941, author	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1985	iambic tetrameter
Derrick Plant, 1925–94, scholar	English (?)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1986	prose
James Finn Cotter, born 1929, scholar	American (born in Ireland)	<i>Commedia</i> , 1987	blank verse
Tibor Wlassics, 1936–1998, scholar	Hungarian	<i>Inferno</i> , 1991	<i>terza rima</i>
The Ecco Press Composite Edition ⁹	—	<i>Inferno</i> , 1993	—
James S. Torrens, clergyman	American	<i>Paradiso</i> , 1993	blank verse
Robert Neal Pinsky, born 1940, poet	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1994	<i>terza rima</i>
Steve Ellis, born 1952, scholar	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 1994 <i>Purgatorio</i> , forthcoming	free verse

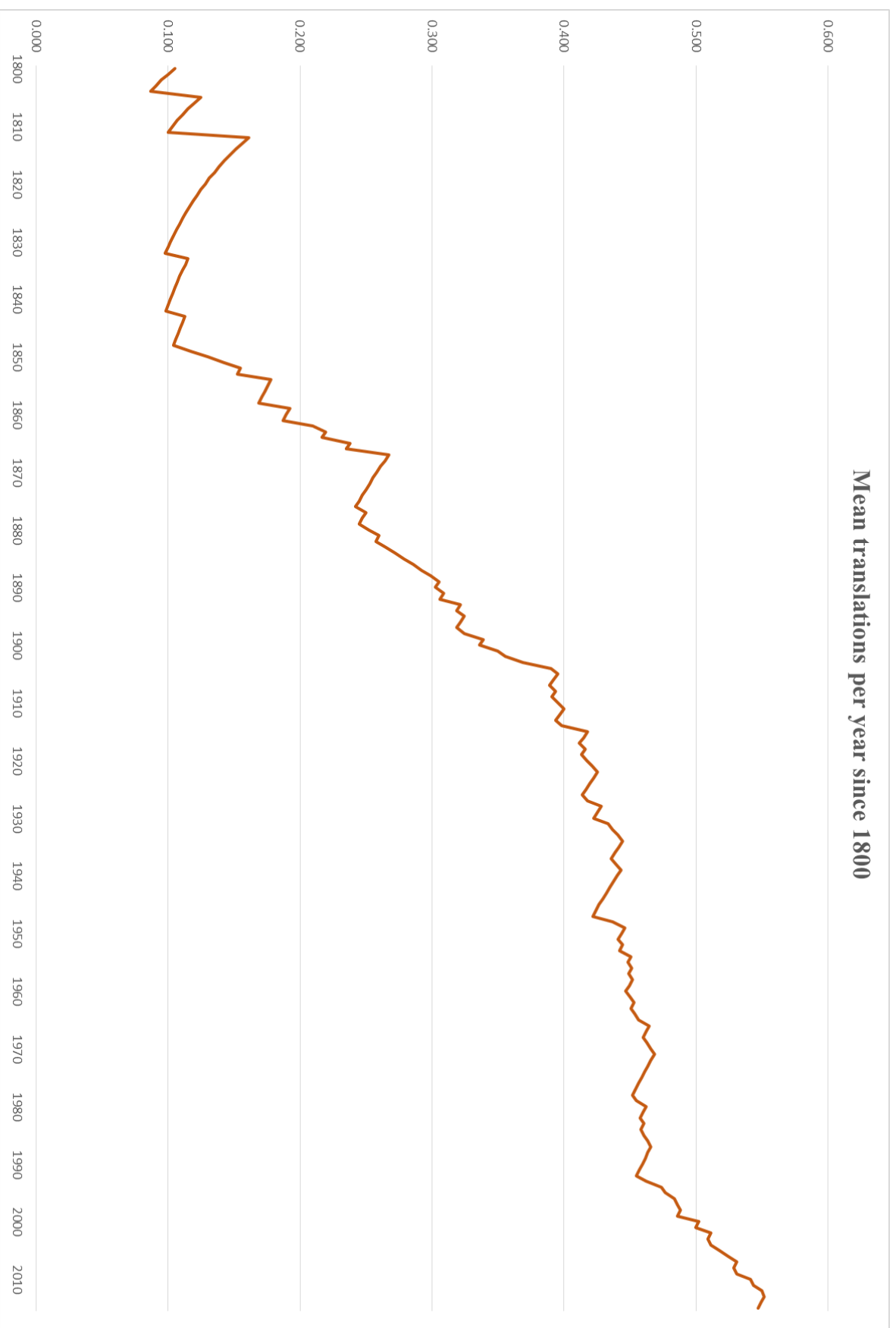
⁷ Translators: Margaret Bottrall, Ronald Bottrall, Patric Dickinson, G. S. Fraser, Robert Gittings, Denis Goacher, John Heath-Stubbs, G. W. Ireland, Elizabeth Jennings, Hugh Gordon Porteus, Terence Tiller (ed.), and Vernon Watkins.

⁸ The *ILET* incorrectly states that it was published posthumously by one Kenneth McKenzie (1870–1949), a professor of Italian at Princeton University. Nb. the difference in spelling.

⁹ Translators: Seamus Heaney, Mark Strand, Daniel Halpern, Galway Kinnell, Cynthia Macdonald, Amy Clampitt, Jorie Graham, Charles Wright, Richard Howard, Stanley Plumly, C. K. Williams, Robert Pinsky, Susan Mitchell, Carolyn Forché, Richard Wilbur, W. S. Merwin, Alfred Corn, Sharon Olds, Deborah Diggers, and Robert Hass.

Stephen Wentworth Arndt, born 1954, counsellor	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 1994	<i>terza rima</i>
Benedict Flynn, author	English (?)	<i>Inferno</i> , 1996 <i>Commedia</i> , 2004	blank verse
Robert M. Durling, 1929–2015, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1996 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2003 <i>Paradiso</i> , 2010	prose
Peter Dale, born 1938, poet	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 1996	<i>terza rima</i>
Kathryn Lindskoog, 1934–2003, author	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1997	prose
Elio Zappulla, born 1933, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 1998	blank verse
Robert (born 1933) and Jean Hollander (born 1928), scholars	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2000 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2003 <i>Paradiso</i> , 2007	free verse
A. S. Kline, born 1947, translator	English	<i>Commedia</i> , 2000	prose
Derek Philcox, born 1928, medical practitioner	South African	<i>Commedia</i> , 2000	unknown
William Stanley Merwin, born 1927, poet	American	<i>Purgatorio</i> , 2000	blank verse
Michael Palma, born 1945, poet	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2002	<i>terza rima</i>
Ciaran Carson, born 1948, poet	(Northern) Irish	<i>Inferno</i> , 2002	<i>terza rima</i>
Anthony Esolen, born 1959, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2002 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2003 <i>Paradiso</i> , 2004	blank verse
Sadow Birk (born 1962) and Marcus Sanders (born 1970), artist and author	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2004 <i>Commedia</i> , 2005	free verse
Paul S. Bruckman, 1939–2013, mathematician	American (born in Italy); Canadian citizen	<i>Inferno</i> , 2005 <i>Commedia</i> , 2011	<i>terza rima</i>
John Gordon Nichols, born 1930, poet	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 2005 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2011 <i>Paradiso</i> , 2012	defective <i>terza rima</i>
Leon Stephens, born 1945	Canadian / American	<i>Commedia</i> , 2005	free verse: syllable count always divisible by three
Robin Kirkpatrick, born 1943, scholar	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 2006 <i>Commedia</i> , 2007	blank verse
Sean O'Brien, born 1952, poet	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 2006	blank verse
Tom Simone, born 1943, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2007 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2014	free verse
Frank Salvidio, author	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2007	free verse

Stanley Lombardo, born 1943, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2009 <i>Purgatorio & Paradiso</i> , forthcoming	irregular hendecasyllabic blank verse
Burton Raffel, 1928–2015, poet	American	<i>Commedia</i> , 2010	defective <i>terza rima</i>
Anthony Cristiano, film director	Canadian	<i>Inferno</i> , 2010	prose
John Lambert, born 1952, author	English	<i>Inferno</i> , 2010 <i>Purgatorio</i> , 2011 <i>Paradiso</i> , 2012	iambic tetrameter
Robert Mitchell Torrance, born 1939, scholar	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2011	<i>terza rima</i>
Mary Jo Bang, born 1946, poet	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2012	free verse
Seth Zimmerman, born 1940, mathematician	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2012	<i>terza rima</i>
Clive James, born 1939, poet and broadcaster	Australian	<i>Commedia</i> , 2013	rhyming quatrains
Peter Thornton, lawyer	American	<i>Inferno</i> , 2016	blank verse



Basic description of graph

This is a basic statistical line graph which demonstrates the cumulative growth in interest in translating Dante's *Commedia* over the years. On the y-axis is the mean number of translations per year. I have excluded Charles Rogers' 1782 translation to avoid the aberration of the mean starting at 1.0 in the first year. The rate of translations exploded in the second half of the nineteenth century, spiking at nearly 0.4 translations per year (four per decade) by the turn of the century. The rate of increase became more steady during the twentieth century, though there is almost persistent, albeit slow, turgescence. There is a notable dip in the 1940s, clearly owing to the Second World War. The rate of translation continued at a steady rate until the 1980s, preceding a very small drop-off. In the early 1990s, however, we see another surge of interest, lifting the rate of translation up to one every two years. Note that each translator (of at least one canticle) is counted as one translation, in the year in which their work was first published. So, Mark Musa's translation of the three canticles of the *Commedia*, for example, is registered just once in the year 1971 when his *Inferno* was first published (ignoring his 1981 *Purgatorio* and 1984 *Paradiso*). In a sense, then, I am counting translators, not translations.

***Inferno* I: A prose translation by Tim N. Smith**

The *skopos* of this translation is very simple: it is designed to help one to read the Italian, and to deal with some of the problems of translating some particularly tricky passages. Though by no means crucial to the overall study, it is equally designed to complement Chapter Three's study of translations of Canto I. My *skopos* rather falls between those of Singleton, Durling, Sinclair, and Hollander. It aims at philological accuracy, without the detailed philological paratext that Singleton provides. Biblical and Virgilian references will be provided only when absolutely necessary in my notes. The notes are there to help the elementary reader of Italian to translate, as it were, the mediaeval Italian into modern Italian. They are almost exclusively linguistic notes. It is almost an interlinear translation. It never aims at fluent English; it only strives to be grammatically correct in the target language. Thus, it does not hesitate to invert the syntax to allow for normal English subject-verb-object flow in order to preserve the grammatical function of the words as best as possible.

1	Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, ché la diritta via era smarrita.	In the middle of the path of our life I found myself through a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.
4	Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte che nel pensier rinnova la paura!	O it is so difficult to say what it was like – this wild and bitter and harsh wood – that the thought of it renews the fear!
7	Tant' è amara che poco è più morte; ma per trattar del ben ch'ì' vi trovai, dirò de l'altre cose ch'ì' v'ho scorte.	It is so bitter that death is scarcely more [so]; but to treat of the good that I found there, I will speak of the other things that I have seen there.
10	Io non so ben ridir com' i' v' intrai, tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto che la verace via abbandonai.	I do not know how I entered there, I was so full of sleep at that point that I abandoned the true way.

13	Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto, là dove terminava quella valle che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,	But once I had reached the foot of a hill, there where that valley ended, which had pierced my heart with fear,
16	guardai in alto e vidi le sue spalle vestite già de' raggi del pianeta che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.	I looked on high and saw its shoulders already clothed in the rays of the planet that leads one straight along every path.
19	Allor fu la paura un poco queta, che nel lago del cor m'era durata la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pietà.	So my fear was a little calmed which had endured within the pit of my heart [through] the night that I spent with so much torment.
22	E come quei che con lena affannata, uscito fuor del pelago a la riva, si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,	And, like he who, with breathless breath, having emerged from the deep sea to the shore, turns to the perilous water and stares,
25	così l'animo mio, ch' ancora fuggiva, si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo che non lasciò già mai persona viva.	like this, my soul, which was still fleeing, turned back to see again the pass that has never yet left any person alive.
28	Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso, ripresi via per la piaggia diserta, sì che 'l piè fermo era 'l più basso.	Once I had rested a little my weary body, I set off again up the deserted slope so that my strongest foot was my lowest.
31	Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta, una lonza leggera e presta molto, che di pel macolato era coverta;	And look: almost at the start of the incline, a light and very swift leopard that was covered with spotted hide!
34	e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto, anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,	And it did not leave before my face; instead, it impeded my path so much

	ch'i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.	that, several times, I turned to go back.
37	Temp' era dal principio del mattino, e 'l sol montava 'n su con quelle stelle ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino	The time was the start of the morning, and the sun climbed up with those stars that were with it when divine love
40	mosse di prima quelle cose belle; sì ch' a bene sperar m'era cagione di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle	first moved those beautiful things. As such, [43] the time of day and the sweet season [41] were reason to hope well
43	l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione; ma non sì che paura non mi desse la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.	[42] of that beast with speckled hide; but not so that the sight of lion appeared before me did not give me fear.
46	Questi pareo che contra me venisse con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame, sì che pareo che l'aere ne tremesse.	It seemed that it came at me with its head high and with ravenous hunger, so that it seemed that the air trembled around it.
49	Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza, e molte genti fé già viver grame,	And a wolf, which seemed laden with all cravings in its thinness (and it has already made many men live wretchedly).
52	questa mi porse tanto di gravezza con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista, ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.	It put so much heaviness on me with the fear that came from the sight of her that I lost hope of the height.
55	E qual è quei che volontieri acquista, e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face, che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;	And like he who willingly acquires [riches], and the time arrives that makes him lose, who, in all his thoughts, cries and is saddened:

58	tal mi fece la bestia senza pace, che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.	the restless beast made me like this, who, coming to meet me, little by little repelled me to where the sun is silent.
61	Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco, dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.	While I was falling into a low place, before my eyes [someone] offered himself to me who, through his long silence, seemed faint.
64	Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto, "Miserere di me," gridai a lui, "qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"	When I saw him in the great waste I cried to him: "Have pity on me, whoever you may be, either shadow or real man!"
67	Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo già fui, e li parenti miei furon lombardi, mantoani per patria ambedui.	He responded to me: "Not a man, I was once a man, and my parents were Lombards, Mantuanans both by birth.
70	Nacqui sub Iulio, ancor che fosse tardi, e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi.	I was born under Julius, though it was late, and I lived at Rome under the good Augustus in the time of the false and lying gods.
73	Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto figliuol d'Anchise che venne da Troia poi che 'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.	I was a poet, and I sang of that just son of Anchises who came from Troy before proud Ilion was burned.
76	Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia? Perché non sali il dilettoso monte ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?"	But you, why do you return with such torment? Why do you not climb the delightful mountain that is the principle and reason for all joy?"
79	"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?"	"So you are that Virgil and that spring who spills out such a great river of speech?"

	rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.	I responded to him with shamefaced brow.
82	<p>“O de li altri poeti onore e lume, vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.</p>	<p>“O, honour and light of the other poets, may my long study and great love, that have made me research your works, [82] avail me.</p>
85	<p>Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore, tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi lo bello stile che m'ha fatto onore.</p>	<p>You are my master and my author, you are the only one from whom I took the beautiful style that has honoured me.</p>
88	<p>Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi: aiutami da lei, famoso saggio, ch' ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi.”</p>	<p>See the beast for which I turn around: help me away from it, famous sage, for it makes my veins and pulse tremble.”</p>
91	<p>“A te convien tenere altro viaggio,” rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide, “se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio;</p>	<p>“It is necessary for you to hold to another journey,” he responded, when he saw me crying, “if you want to escape from this savage place;</p>
94	<p>ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride, non lascia altrui passar per la sua via, ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;</p>	<p>for this beast, for which you shout, does not allow anyone to pass through its road, but impedes them so much that she kills them.</p>
97	<p>e ha natura sì malvagia e ria, che mai non empie la bramosa voglia, e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.</p>	<p>And it has such a malignant and wicked nature that its greedy desire is never satisfied, and after its meal is more hungry than before.</p>
100	<p>Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia, e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.</p>	<p>Numerous are the beings with whom it weds, and there will be more still, until the greyhound comes, that will make it die in pain.</p>

103	Questi non ciberà terra né peltro, ma sapienza, amore e virtute, e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro.	He will feed off neither earth nor riches, but off knowledge, love, and virtue and his birth will be between felt and felt.
106	Di quella umile Italia fia salute per cui morì la vergine Camilla, Eurialoe Turno e Niso di ferute.	He will be the salvation of that humble Italy for which the virgin Camilla, Euryalus, Turnus, and Niso died of their wounds.
109	Questi la cacerà per ogni villa, fin che l'avrà rimessa ne l' Inferno, là onde 'nvidia prima dipartìlla.	He will hunt it through every town, until he sends it back into Hell, there from where envy first set her forth.
112	Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida, e trarrotti di qui per loco eterno,	Therefore, for your good, I think and perceive that you should follow me, and I will be your guide, and I will lead you from here through an eternal place,
115	ove udirai le disperate strida, vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti, ch' a la seconda morte ciascun grida;	where you will hear desperate screams, you will see ancient woeful spirits, each of whom cry for second death.
118	e vederai color che son contenti nel foco, perché speran di venire, quando che sia, a le beati genti.	And you will see those who are happy in the flame, because they hope to come, whenever it may be, to the blessed peoples.
121	A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire, anima fia a ciò più di me degna: con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;	To these then, if you wish to climb, there will be a soul who is more worthy than me: with her I will leave you in my departure;
124	ché quello Imperador che là su regna, perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge,	for that Emperor that reigns up there (because I was rebellious to His law)

	non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.	does not will that I should come into His city.
127	In tutte parti impera e quivi regge; quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio: oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"	In all places He reigns and there He rules; there is His city and high throne. O happy is he whom He elects [to be] there!"
130	E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richieggo per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti, acciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,	And I to him: "Poet, I ask you, by that God whom you did not know, so that I may flee this evil and worse,
133	che tu mi meni là dov' or dicesti, sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti."	that you lead me there where you have now said, so that I may see Saint Peter's gate, and those whom you call so mournful."
136	Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.	So he moved, and I followed behind him.

1. mezzo = halfway point

A reference to the Biblical belief that thirty-five years. For more detail on the first line of the *proemio*, see Mazzoni (1967, 14–23), Singleton (1970, 3–4), and Cassell (1989, 1–8).

1. nostra: our

Various interpretations have been applied to the first-person plural pronoun. Singleton maintains that "we [the readers] are necessarily involved in [his journey]" (1970b: 2–3); Durling posits that "the pilgrim is a representative human being, an Everyman" (1996: 34). Leonardi's analysis goes even further: "con questo aggettivo il singolo personaggio Dante accomuna a sé tutta l'umanità." His journey thus "diventa segno dell'universale vicenda umana" (1991: 2; cf. Mazzoni 1967: 23–4).

2. Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura

This sentence has no clear English equivalent. The traditional translation, as pointed out by Durling, is "I found myself in". Durling however stresses the importance of conveying a "moral awakening" through the verb, so he translates it as "I came to myself in". Grandgent offers a similar alternative: "I came to my senses" (1933/1972: 11). Kirkpatrick (2006: xcv), determined to preserve the "forward movement" of the poem, stresses the view that "per" should be translated as "through", not "within" as most translators have rendered it (Durling, Singleton, Hollander: "in"; Mazzoni and Bosco and Reggio too in Italian render it as *entro*).¹⁰ But Leonardi and Kirkpatrick agree that it should convey the sense of motion through. But how to translate it? Kirkpatrick opts for all of the aforementioned options in a lengthy paraphrase: "I came around to find myself now searching through". I have instead left this passage translated literally; it covers both senses discussed above without choosing a side. It is deliberately ambiguous and organic.

3. ché: for

¹⁰ Bosco & Reggio (1982: 5). Cf. Mazzoni (1967: 26).

Poetic and archaic contraction of “perché”. There is debate as to whether there should be an acute accent over the vowel, whose absence would alter the sense slightly (Leonardi 1991: 3).

4. *ahi quanto a dir*

A modern Italian version may be “quanto è duro ripetere in parole” (Leonardi 1991: 4). “Ahi” is an exclamation of grief or pain (*Enc. dant.* I 84).

5. *esta = questa*

From the Latin “iste” meaning this; rendered in modern Italian as “questa” (Leonardi 1991: 4).

8. *i’ = io*¹¹

11. *era = ero*

15. *compunto = pierced*

From the Latin “compunctus” meaning pierced or pricked, different from the more common modern Italian sense.

17. *pianeta: planet = sun*

19. *queta = quieta*

20. *lago = pit*

Frequently thought to refer to mediaeval anatomical beliefs about the heart’s function as a “ventricle where the blood gathered” (Singleton 1970b: 7; cf. Durling 1996: 35). Thus, it has almost invariably been translated as a (metaphorical) “lake”. However, recently, Richard Lansing has argued forcefully that this tradition is wrong. There is, after all, no contemporary evidence for such a medical belief (2009: 63).¹² Lansing preserves the Biblical meaning of “lacus”, which describes a pit or “the realm of the dead [...] as well [as] to moments of torment and abject misery in life, times of calamity, of darkness, isolation, and despair” (64).¹³ Lansing’s conclusion contrasts with practically all translations of the *lago del cor*, excepting more creative translations (see, for instance, Heaney: “those depths in me”; *Hlf* 3).

21. *through*

As with Singleton, I have added the preposition to indicate the passage of time.

22. *breathless breath*

My translation conveys the tautology of metaphor, and the limitations of English synonyms. A more elegant rendering might cite the shipwrecked man’s “labouring breath” (see all of Sinclair, Singleton, and Durling). This option, though more poetic, perhaps fails to convey the “frequenza del respiro” in particular to which the participle refers.

22. *quei = quegli*

24. *perigliosa = pericolosa*

24. *guata = guarda*

26. *a retro = indietro*

26. *passo = the “selva” of line 2*¹⁴

28. *èi = ebbi*

29. *piaggia*

The slope between the mountain and the plain.¹⁵

29. *diserta = deserta*

32. *presta = veloce*

33. *coverta = coperta*

34. *partia = partiva*

46. *parea = pareva*

46. *contra = contro*

36. *più volte vòlto*

¹¹ Clarifications of Italian words are provided by Grandgent (1933/1972) unless otherwise stated.

¹² Previously acknowledged by Mazzoni (1967: 74).

¹³ For his full explanation of why “these translations [that employ the word “lake”] are all in a fundamental way incorrect”, see Lansing (2009: 62–9).

¹⁴ See *Enc. dant.* IV 346.

¹⁵ See *Enc. dant.* IV 473 and Leonardi (1991: 9–10).

Alternatively, “I turned again and again and again” (Grandgent 1933/1972: 13). Note also that *più* is best rendered as “several”, since there is no comparative structure; see *Enc. dant.* IV 543 where “paracchi” is the considered the most appropriate synonym.

39. lui = il pianeta

44. ma non...

Leonardi’s modernization: “ma non tanto forte fu quella speranza, ch’io non mi spaventassi” (1991: 12).

49. lupa: wolf

See Giustiniani (1969) on why sexless “wolf” is more appropriate than “she-wolf”.

50. sembiava = sembrava

50. carica = carica

51. fé = fece

51. grame = gramo: wretched = wretchedly (*hic* adverbial)

53. uscia = usciva

55. quale = come

55. acquista

Synonymous with “guadagna” or “accumula ricchezze.” The “quegli” of this simile is a “speculatore” or a “mercante” (Leonardi 1991: 14).

55. volentieri = volentieri

56. giugne = giunge

56. face = fa

58. senza = senza

60. ripigneva = respingeva

61. rovinava = rovinavo

61. loco = luogo

63. fioco

Durling’s translation of this as “hoarse” is perfectly legitimate.¹⁶ A vast amount of interpretative literature has been devoted to this word alone. So Singleton: “the verse seems deliberately ambiguous, since ‘fioco’ can mean ‘faint’ either to the eye or to the ear” (1970b: 14; cf. Mazzoni 1967: 114–15). The English word, as he rightly identifies, preserves this ambiguity.

65. miserere

Latin, meaning have pity (“abbia pietà”).

66. sii = sia

66. omo = uomo

67. rispuosemi = mi rispose

67–75. Virgil and the classics

Dante presents a simplified version of Virgil’s life here (“under Julius” wrongly implies that Caesar was a singular ruler of Rome at this time); however, the account that is provided here is enough to reveal Virgil’s identity (before it is made explicit at line 79).

69. mantoani = mantovani

69. ambedui = ambedue

80. sì = così

83. vagliami = mi valgano

Note that this is the subjunctive singular form of *valere*, not the indicative present form of *vagliare*. A modern Italian equivalent of this line may be: “mi valga ora ad ottenere il tuo aiuto” (Leonardi 1991: 20). Nb. that, although the subject of this clause is plural (studio *e* amore), “Dante frequently uses a singular verb with a plural subject” (Singleton 1970b: 16). Thus, the verbs in this clause may be conceived in their plural forms (valga = valgano, ha = hanno).

84. cercar = ricercare

Or “leggere con minuziosa attenzione” (Leonardi 1991: 20–1).

¹⁶ The semantic link to its Latin precedent (*flaccus*) seems to be lost, but the *AEIt* (170) draws a direct etymological link between *fioco* (*flaccus*) and *rauco* (*raucus*), which, of course, translates to “hoarse”.

84. volume = “opera letteraria” (*Enc. dant.* V 1146).

86. tolsi = presi (*Enc. dant.* V 615).

87. stilo = stile

89. da

Motion away from the beasts is conveyed in this preposition alone.

91. convenire

A complicated verb, with several different sense. Its most common in Dantean writing has it as a verb of necessity (followed by an infinitive); it thus may be equated with “bisognare” in modern Italian (*Enc. dant.* II 188; fifth sense of the word).

93. Campare = scampare

93. d’esto = da questo

94. gride = gridi

96. lo

The pronoun of course refers to altrui, which is singular in Italian. In English, the sense is best expressed in the plural.

97. ria = rea

Slightly tautological; reo and malvagio have very similar meanings.

98. empiere = saziare

99. pria = prima

100. animali

There are two main threads of interpretation of this. Most scholars have taken it as a literal inclusive noun, meaning “beings” (*viventi*) which includes both animals and humans. Thus Durling’s translation of this may be reductive (“animals”). A second thread suggests that it may be more metaphorical, representing instead the vices of greed that she unites with. I favour the former, although there are clear underlying metaphors of greed in this passage.

100. s’ammoglia

If we run with the reasoning that the “animali” are indeed souls, then the above verb becomes more humanized. The literal sense of the word (wed) seems more appropriate than the possible bestial or sexual implications. The wolf really “si unisce” with the *animali* (*Enc. dant.* I 214).

101. infin che = fino a che

103. peltro

This could be translated literally as “pelf” (see Durling), or more colloquially as riches or money.

104. virtute = virtù

105. feltro

I will avoid drawing any conclusions on this. Suffice it to say that there is no singular definitive interpretation of this phrase. Durling’s explanation is succinct (1996: 38–9), but the *Enc. dant.* provides the greatest depth (II 833–5). A more polemic interpretation of this tercet is provided by Cassata (1999: 19–21).

106. fia = sarà

112. me’ = meglio = bene

114. trarrotti = ti trarrò

118. vederai = vedrai

121. quai = quali

123. partire

See *Pg.* XXX 49–57 for Virgil’s departure.

124. imperador = imperatore

125. ribellante = ribelle

126. per me si vegna = io venga

“Curious passive impersonal construction” common in Dante’s writing (Grandgent 1933/1972: 17).

127. quivi = qui

130. richeggio = richiedo

134. veggia = veda

135. fai

Make out to be; term; describe.

136. tenni dietro = seguirlo

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