> conception, he said. (2)

Maarten clearly questions whether there is a system "out there" at all, from his childhood on:

> A few times we saw a falling star. He tried to explain to an eight-year-old that what we could see up there in the evening sky was an ancient past, that we were unable to see the real state of the universe, that we could at best calculate it....I couldn't understand this, but I asked no questions. (2)

The adult Maarten points out to an empty room the failure inherent in imposing a human-centric order on the nonhuman world:

> The statistics and catch figures of the past year do not conform with reality and besides, no fish has ever let itself be guided in its movements by our computer forecasts. (35)

Maarten's father doubts only human comprehension of the system; Maarten doubts the system itself. Bernlef implies a generational difference in faith. Maarten was born during one war and was young during another. War and occupation do not figure obsessively as in Mulisch's work; instead Bernlef uses the Second World War as one proof in his deconstructive strategy. The world shattered even on a small scale:

> Uncle Karel had whiskers. Until 15 May 1940. When the Netherlands capitulated, Uncle Karel shaved off his proudly up-twirled whiskers. In protest. A first and last act of resistance. (27)

Maarten continues to shave long after Uncle Karel's death. Bernlef suggests a causal relation between the past war and this modern man's disavowal of traditional form, even in whiskers. If we follow Bernlef's symbolic (if not rational) argument, then the war broke the world's artificial order finally; and Maarten's mental breakdown lands as one symptom of modern fallout.

We also find a love-story alongside the fragments of previous beliefs. Most love-stories involve a chase and a capture. This one begins in Vera and Maarten's marriage and ends with her loss. True to form, Bernlef discusses the imminent disunion in every mortal bond. The finely written authorial discourse again lets us see around Maarten's oblivion to pick up hints of Vera's conscious pain:

> She nods reassuringly and sits down on the edge of the bed. Why is she crying? Could it be that I am mistaken and that the war has just begun?...Why is she crying then? I'm glad she's here. She is the only one I still trust. "You must never leave again," I whisper and take her hand. "Do you hear, Vera, never." (111)

Any English translation loses Maarten's full isolation. So long as he retreats in an English-translation text to an American nursing-home, the snippets of English speech from the world outside his mind blend with Maarten's text insofar as English is common to both. With Maarten's original decay in Dutch, the English dialogue and community regain the strangeness of another language:

> deportation?...only English is spoken here... (119)

Otherwise the text's simplicity and pain survive in Adrienne Dixon's translation. Harold Pinter has given such praise to her new American translation that Bernlef has arranged to have him quoted on that edition's cover. In this British version Dixon chooses simple words that stand as transparent panes over Bernlef's spare style:

> ...other snowflakes chase along with us, accompany us like falling stars and so we fall through space Vera and glimmer briefly afterwards (or are we already dead) until we fade away and burn out... (119)

Falling stars figure in Maarten's end as in his childhood, while looking up at the night sky with his father. *Vallende Ster* (1987, "Falling Star"), Bernlef's next novel, traces the motif further. Bernlef has chosen the anomalous voice of an ancient, blind seer who speaks the new philosophy of the constellations. We can expect an accent of light, however small and however ready for extinction.

Bert Schierbeek: *Crossroads*. Translated by Charles McGeehan. Rochester MI: Katydid Books, 1988. 181p.
Gerrit Achterberg: *But This Land Has No End*. Selected poems translated by Pleuke Boyce. Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1989. 72p. $9.90.

Basil D. Kingstone
University of Windsor

It is perhaps the case with translations of poetry, as it is in Canada with all poetry, that we have to rely on

little presses to produce them. It is perhaps also true, both of translated and original poetry produced in this way, that some is very good and some is very bad. Certainly it is true of the two volumes reviewed here. Following the example of the Indian chief, 1 will give the bad news first.

Nothing about the background to the Schierbeek volume prepares us for a disappointment. Katydid Books has so far produced, by way of translations at any rate, eight volumes in a series of Asian Poetry, subseries Japan; this is their first venture in toEuropean poetry, and they have begun with the subseries The Netherlands. They have chosen a volume by the distinguished poet Bert Schierbeek (b.1918); the volume is *Betrekkingen* (Relationships, 1979). Since Schierbeek's poetry is no doubt little known in North America, and since they have chosen a fairly late work of his which needs to be located in his oeuvre,they have obtained an excellent introduction to the poet's work by the writer Yann Lovelock. From him we learn that Schierbeek has been experimenting for years with alternatives to the conventional novel, disliking the traditional system whereby the author organizes facts as he sees fit and presents them in a particular order that the reader has to accept. This falsifying structure he has replaced with various alternatives. In 1951-55 he layered personal experiences to show that all his experience is one; in 1957-64 he explored how the ordering of personal experience owes much to myth; and in 1968-70 he argued that our language inheritance is common to all and that our mode of expression is composed of pieces of every other possible mode of expression. In the 1970's he began to incorporate the external physical world into this internal system; the present work stresses the theme of personal interdependence.

After the introduction, alas, the work itself provides the first of the three (simultaneous) disappointments in store for us: it is frankly minor and uninteresting. A writer can perhaps be too easily self-deceived into thinking that the fact he has been to many places and met many people, some famous, is somehow important in itself.Or if he doesn't believe it, he may still believe that the fact he knows Teddy Kollek the mayor of Jerusalem, a Jewish death camp survivor, a crazy woman in San Francisco and a simple fisherman and his wife on Formentera, etc., is sufficient to link them all together and make up something more significant than the sum of the parts. Nay more, he believes that the fact of somebody he knows from one place suddenly turning up in another place shows these *betrekkingen* in action. It isn't so. The important interrelations between human beings are not at so banal a level.

The second disappointment arises from the translation. Charles McGeehan has translated Schierbeek before; his *Shapes of the Voice* (*De gestalte der stem.* 1957) was published in Boston by G.K.Hall in 1977, and the extracts from this volume that I have seen in *Living Space: Poems of the Dutch Fiftiers* (New Directions 1979) and in *Dutch Interior: Dutch Poetry of the Netherlands and Flanders* (Columbia UP 1984) are excellent. I do believe that a quickfire series of bold images forces you to translate literally, but this text is in plain colloquial Dutch, and one cannot translate so literally that the result is not plain colloquial English, e.g. "he becomes 90" or "so we go on a trip / with a day in staves" (i.e and it pours down rain), or "it's about time they go"(went), "an outlook across all that cabbage" (a view), "been in the madhouse twice by now" (already)... there are plenty more. Especially annoying is the inversion of subject and verb before long quotations, direct or indirect: "claims Pepe / that he'd really like to fly."

And the third disappointment is that a well-presented volume should have so many misprints. With foreign words they are no doubt bound to happen: thus *moralenfrei* becomes *moraleinfrei*. But how to excuse "can barely put into words" (i.e. can barely *be* put into words), "grip" (grippe; why not the flu?), "gives away" for "gives way","Recrute Battalion" (recruit),"kinds" for "kids", "lay" for "laid", and so forth? And this from a press, however small, in a university city.

One turns with high hopes to Pleuke Boyce's volume, and this time one is not disappointed; on the contrary, one is delighted. Oolichan Press is located at P.O. Box 10, Lantzville, B.C. V0R 2H0, and Ms. Boyce lives in Errington. Both are small places near Nanaimo. Clearly one need not be in a big city to do excellent work. There is only one misprint in the entire volume: "montains" for "mountains" (p.22). Unfortunately we are not given the press's backlist. We do learn about the translator: she moved from Holland to Canada in 1974, and has published poetry and fiction of her own as well as translations into Dutch of such major Canadian novelists as Alice Munro. Her interest in Achterberg is of long standing. She has already published some of his poems in translation, and our readers will remember her review in the September 1989 *CAANS Newsletter* of Wim Hazeu's monumental biography of the poet.

Incidentally, I note that 22 of Ms. Boyce's 55 poems are taken from the 113 selected by Paul Rodenko and published under the title *Voorbij de laatste stad* (The Hague: Bert Bakker, 1967). This suggests quite a high degree of agreement about which are the best of

Achterberg's poems (which ones kidnap you). Most of Achterberg's work, as we know, is about his lifelong attempt to recapture the dead (whether mother or beloved), to confront and know God, and about these things as content or metaphor for the poem that must be gently breathed to life. But all anthologies should include a few of his poems that are not on this obsessive topic, and this one duly does: the charming childhood recollection *Eben Haëzer*, for example, or the alarming poem of religious revolt *Deïsme*. The preface reminds us of the previous English versions of Achterberg: Stan Wiersma translated *A Tourist Does Golgotha* (Grand Rapids MI, Being Publications, 1972, out of print) and Michael O'Loughlin has offered us a selection of poems in *Hidden Weddings* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1987). It would be interesting to compare the choices made by Ms. Boyce and O'Loughlin.

Achterberg is a much harder poet to translate than a cursory reading might suggest. To begin with, although he is sparing with sound effects, there are still enough of them (including a variety of partial and complete rhyme and assonance schemes) to challenge the translator frequently. The vowels, it seems to me, account for the terrifying effect of the verse in "Thebe" when the dead person returns to life:

Totdat mijn voeten op u stuitten:
uit een volslagen duisternis
zag ik uw ogen opensplijten.
uw handen, die ik niet kon tillen,
voelde ik langs het leven strelen,
dat in mij sloeg;
uw mond, in dood verholen, vroeg.

The o's and ui's are opposed by the startling a's and ij's, a battle rages between life and death. And "vroeg" is far more powerful than the expected "sprak", perhaps because one surely ventures into the underworld to find answers to the ultimate questions, not to be asked them. But "asked", being a weak verb, is not as effective a rhyme word as "vroeg", which is strong. Given these difficulties, Ms. Boyce's version of the stanza is most creditable:

And then my feet struck you:
in absolute darkness I could see
your eyes break open
your hands I couldn't lift
I felt caress the life in me;
your mouth, hidden in death,
asked something, soundlessly.

But perhaps more important than the sound is the regularity of Achterberg's poetry, which indeed one would expect of a poet who is trying to impose order on the universe. A literal translation which ignored his rhythm would be unthinkable; one which did not reproduce the rhyme scheme, or at least provide one if Achterberg used one, would still be unsatisfactory. One must needs try to reproduce this *and* the meaning. But that doesn't mean one compromises between the two. An example of what not to do (and one can very rarely illustrate *that* from Ms. Boyce's translations!) is provided by "Monument" (Standbeeld), where she keeps some of the rhyme and adds a little padding for this purpose. On Achterberg's spare words, padding bulges indecently. Better perhaps to forgo rhyme for once and try to capture all the meanings in the same economical space.

These are, of course, examples of classes of everlasting translation problems. I raise these questions only in order to underline the fact that the less than perfect solutions in this anthology are darn few. Many versions are perfect. To name but a few: "Majesteit", thanks to a decision to use a less strict rhyme scheme. "Tableau mourant", which keeps the ironically jaunty rhyme and rhythm which is the little poem's essence. And the epigraph to the volume, which translates the stanza set as epigraph to *Voorbij de laatste stad*:

Aan het roer dien avond stond het hart
en scheepte maan en bossen bij zich in
en zeilend over spiegeling
van al wat het geleden had
voer het met wind en schemering
om boeg en tuig voorbij de laatste stad.

At the helm that night stood heart
and it shipped moon and forests in its hold
gliding over mirroring
of all it suffered until now
it sailed in wind and twilight
past the last city, rig and prow.

Thank you, Pleuke Boyce, and long live little presses which enable such work to be published.