

Discoveries and Pitfalls in Translating Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Frisian Literature¹

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Gearfetting

It ûndersteande is de artikelfoarm fan in lêzing dy't ik jûn haw op 'e First Conference on Frisian Humanities (Second Conference on Frisian Literature) yn april 2018 te Ljouwert. Ik haw it oer in stikmannich aspekten fan it oerset-proses út myn persoanlike fyzje as fertaler wei. Santjinde- en achttjinde-iuwske Fryske literatuer, sa hat my bliken dien, ken in grut ferskaat, is nijsgjirrich en komplisearre. Hoewol't ik, as fertaler, foar in grut part te seil gean koe op saneamde brêge-oersettings, smiet it oersetwurk dochs gâns útdagings en tûkelteammen op. Nim bygelyks it wurd oonlabberjen, as omskriuwing fan it (proses fan it) stadige kommen fan frede yn Simon Althuysen syn Op dy jinwurdige tyed (1755). By dat wurd moast mear kontekst jûn wurde as ynearsten foarriedich wie, om 'e Ingelske wjergader op syn minst begryplik te meitsjen.

De blomlêzing dêr't yn dit artikel nei ferwiisd wurdt, is Swallows and Floating Horses: An Anthology of Frisian Literature, besoarge troch Ernst Bruinsma, Alpita de Jong en André Looijenga (London: Francis Boutle, 2018).

Speaking as someone whose command of Frisian at the outset of this project did not extend much further than – you guessed it – *bûter, brea en griene tsiis*, I can say that working on this book was nothing short of a revelation.

My contribution would not have been possible at all without the expert help of editors Alpita de Jong and André Looijenga, and I cannot speak too highly of our Frisian-Dutch 'bridge' translators, Jantsje Post and Jetske Bilker. Their literal versions, often extensively annotated, were indispensable.

I was assigned mainly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (minus Japix, the preserve of David Mackay), with excursions into the Middle Ages (the Brookmer letter of 1276) and the nineteenth century (Halbertsma's memories of the poet Salverda).

1 Slightly modified text of a talk given in Leeuwarden at the Conference of Frisian Humanities on 24 April 2018.

An additional challenge was that most of the works were in rhyme. I should stress at this point that while I was heavily dependent on the Frisian-Dutch translations for the basic meaning, I studied the original Frisian in all cases, for the sound generally, the rhyme and the metre.² I should now like to look more closely at four of my translations, three from the eighteenth century, one from the seventeenth. The first dates from 1755: Simon Althuysen's *Op dy jinwurdige tyed* (On the Present Time), of which I will read a section in translation.

Op dy jinwurdige tyed

Ney't hyette Oorlogsfyoer, dat fræslyk blækte, in baernde,
Der 't al forwoastge, in fornielde, brette, in raernde,
Dat menning huwz, in Staed yn lyægte loagge stoe
Der jong nog âd byney dy dæd ontcomme koe;
Der field by field as dong mey dæden laey byditzten,
In tuwzennen forsleyn, formorde in trogstitzen;
Der d'ærme huwzman trog dy kryegers yn it field
Fordruwkt waard, in ontblæt fin Hynsers Ky in Jyeld;
In hy mey Wyef in Bern forsleyn waard, in forjagge,
In eltz al guwzjende zyn næd oon orre klagge;
Der menning for ien Stæd onsæft slæg ynne loft,
In hælf forbaernd forskurd wer ynne ierde ploft;
In dan wer stormje op Porten, Murren, Græften,
Mey pestdyers mordgeweer, in tuwzennen fin kræften;
Ôfgryeslyk for it æg, dat eltz dy moed byzwyek.
In menning Stæd, in Huwz yn glieonne flamme styek,
Ônder ien græt gekræk fin Bommen, in Graenaten,
Yn mordjen, dæslaan fin by tuwzennen soldaten,
Mar mey dit allis kaam oonlabberjen dy Free;
Dit jout ynt heelle Lân, dit jout yn Gæ, in Stee,
Wer moed, in hart ynt lyef: nuw barste los dy tongen.
Min hært oeral fin Free, fin Freede bly opsyongen.
It glieone slagswurd wurdt wer stitzen yn zyn plæts,
Der 'nimmen kwæ zil dwaan, as doa ze't fierden blæts.
Dy Kryegslieuw libje nuw wer mey eltsoor as lammen;
Min hært nin syetten meer, min syogt dy boere Fammen
Dy Ky wer meltzen als forhinne yn it grien.
't Is allis nuw yn ræst, it fieugten dat is dien.

2 My main aid for Frisian was *Webster's Frisian-English Thesaurus Dictionary*, ed. P.M. Parker, San Diego 2008), which was useful but had some limitations.

De Huwzman kin nuw wer zyn Lânnen ræstlyk ploeye;
Dan fil' er oppe ny wer Weet, in Koon op groeye [...]

On the Present Time

After the fierce-fought war, which scorched all black and burned,
Which ravaged, wrecked everything, charred and molten turned,
So that many a house and town stood all ablaze,
So that few, old or young, could cheat death's dreadful gaze;
So that field on field, like dung, was strewn with dead,
And thousands were felled, stabbed, murdered in their bed;
The poor farmer was held by soldiers in the field
And stripped of horse and cow and also of their yield;
And he was rudely robbed of family and chased away,
And each bemoaned his lot to each that awful day;
Many were horribly blown up before a town,
Half-burnt and torn to shreds they once again came down;
And then again charged at gates, walls and moats and all,
With monstrous ordnance, hosts of weapons that appal,
Horrid to the eye, so that courage failed each one,
And many a town and house burned glowing like the sun,
Under a great thunder of bombs and hand grenades,
With murder, fierce slaying by dozens of brigades.
Yet despite all this, peace, waddling on, gained ground;
This brings in the whole land, in the house and around,
New heart to mind and body, while throats gladly ring,
One hears of nought but peace, peace that we bravely sing.
The flaming broadsword now is put back in its place,
Where it can do no harm: unlike its unsheathed face.
The fighters live together again like lambs all full of curls.
One hears no shooting now, one sees the peasant girls
Milking the cows as they used to, sitting in lush grass.
All is now at rest, and the sighing can now pass.
The farmer calmly now to plough his land can go;
There both wheat and barley now once again will grow. [...]

The author depicts the grim devastation visited by war on the towns and farms of Friesland and rejoices at the ensuing peace. When I submitted my first draft, the editor felt that I had not done full justice to the 'sensuousness' of the original. As a result, the word 'lush' was added to the image of the Frisian milkmaids milking their cows in peacetime. The line '*Mar mey dit allis kaam oonlabberjen dy Free*' was more of a problem. I was informed by the editor that *oonlabberjen* evoked the slow waddle

of a hunting dog. This was hard to accommodate in my English line, and I settled uneasily for 'Yet despite all this peace, waddling on, gained ground'. But I'm still not sure whether I've captured the original image. Perhaps someone here can enlighten me on the precise connotations of *oonlabberjen*. (How big and heavy is the dog, how fast and purposefully is it moving?) Or perhaps the perfect translation and rhyme will occur to me on the plane home. Maybe something with 'lumbering along'.³ The second poem was of a slightly earlier date, 1727, and in it the anonymous author addresses one Martinus Laurman, who has just gained his doctorate in theology from the University of Franeker. The humour of the piece derives from the author's assuming the role of a country bumpkin blundering into a degree ceremony. My blushes were saved in the interpretation of the title by the Frisian-Dutch translator. In the original it read 'Oon dy selde', which of course means 'To the Same', not 'On Yourself' as I first had. (A number of poems had already been addressed to the new doctor.)

Oon dy selde

JK gyng nou Lest te FRÆNTIER lans de striete;
Da kamen de studinten my te miete,
Jk toagt wer ofse hinne vlæn,
Jk wol har Laever reis nei gaen.
Ja gyngen ijn ien hoes oft wier ien tjerkje,
Jk sei, ik sil 't besjen, en wol op merkje;
Jk saeg da ta nei mijn verstaon,
'T wier volle moyer as ijn 't loan,
Der wier nen boere hier of bonte doeken,
Mar wijtte dassen en heel grætte proeken.
En sa mids onder al 't gewoel.
Da gijng ien ijn ien heege stoel.
Æk gijng 'er jit ien man moij teltsjes rinne,
Sa nei him ta, maar just het leeger hinne.
Jen oore trop dij spriek him tjin,
Mar dog sa makk' hij 't alles schjin,
Jk sæg ja koen het alle heel net reitse,
Da vreeg ik ien, het ofse der nou meitse?
(Dat wier æk al ien slimme goet.)
Hy naemde 't mij da ien dispoet,

3 After my talk, Laura Watkinson came up with the plausible suggestion of 'shambling', given the right context.

Mar hokker saak hy hie te disputærjen,
Da twist ik net, en haerd 't net verklærjen.
Dij leste vierd 't heegste wurd,
En spriek dog de oore viers te hurd,
Ja 't wier him næt, hy koe har maklijk krije,
As hy mar woe, dan moostens' alle swije,
Jk sels dij kom ven 't botte loan,
Sis dat hy toond ien gauw verstaon.

To Martinus Laurman

I was walking down a FRANEKER street,
When a crowd of students I happened to meet.
I thought: why are they rushing there?
I'd better follow and find out where.
They went into a house or was it a church?
I said, I'll observe and do my research.
I looked as intently as I'd planned.
It was much nicer than on the land.
No coloured shawls or farmers' pigs
But fine white ties and very big wigs.
And so, amid that commotion there,
Someone went and climbed a high chair.
A man with lots to say walked round,
And approached him now from lower ground.
Another group disagreed with him,
But he had an answer for every whim.
I saw they could not hit the mark,
Then I asked someone what was their lark.
He was an extremely crafty cub,
And said it was a debating club.
What matter they were debating
I didn't know and was left waiting.
The latter man had the last word,
And outtalked the rest of the heard.
It meant nothing to him, he had the will.
If he'd wanted they'd all have been still.
Even I, the dense country kind,
Must say he showed an agile mind.

Ed: A. Feitsma, *Frysk út de 18de ieu*, vol 1: 1700-1743, Estrikken XX (Grins 1957). Source: Martinus Laurman, Frisius, *Dissertatio theologica tertia, Pars I*.

De velamina Mosis. Ad Exod. XXXIV, 31-33 (...) 19. Mart. MDCCXXVII, Franequerae, excudit Henricus Halma 1727.

Next, a short sample of battlefield prose from the War of the Spanish Succession. The text alternates between the military lingua franca, French, and Frisian, which serves as a secret code between the two officers concerned.

Two letters from F. van Grovestins to Vegelin van Claerbergen, 1712

P.S. stjoer my de kranten, âlde en nije, Stjoer my ek in postiljon.

[French text]

Soene jimme net foar sân of acht dagen brea meinimme kinne en hjirhinne komme? Men kin sa folle brêgen slaan as men wol en dytjingen dy't oer komme rinne gjin gefaar oerfallen te wurden. Je kinne mei de rjochter nei de mieden dy't nei Roelx rinne stean en mei de linker nei it moeras dat fan Marquette komt. Jawis, it is in goed ding dat jim derop wize dat har hynders yn minne kondysje binne en der binne in soad siik, en ik rekkenje dat se yn in moanne tiid om ende by 12000 soldaten ferlern ha. Stjoer my ris 600 hynders en meitsje dat se yn Mons foar trije dagen iten foar de hynders meinimme. Der stean 400 fjannan foar de doar dy't ik wol goeie dei sizze wolle soe. As jim dêrta ree binne (dat dwaan wolle) moatte dy't yn Mons binne derfan op de hichte brocht wurde, en dan moat Diemer it ek witte. As dy mei kin, moat der mar in majoar mei komme doarre. Der moatte ek 100 Hongaren wêze. As dy lju hjir allegearre twa oere (two oere foar de dei) moarns wêze kinne en as se der neat fan witte, hoopje ik jo al dy 400 te leverjen. Jou de 'brenger dezes' twa gieltsjes, ik woe him meiertiid nochris foar oare dingen brûke. Hy is goed útsliept. Skriuw my hoe ik it oanpakke sil mei it hospitaal, de man hat gjin jild en seit dat er in soad minsken wat skuldich is, en dat er trochinoar 150 lire ha moat. It wurdt neat better mei de sykte. Goeie moarn freon, it giet jo goed.

Frits

[French text]

As de fijân sjocht dat jim it lâns dy kant net dwaan kinne [hjr net hinne komme kinne], dan soene se wolris wat folk stjoere kinne nei de kant dêr't Joost west hat om fan dy kant wei te 'beletten' dat as se dêr brêgen meitsje, dat hjir wat hinne komt. Dêr moet jim wol oan tinke. Skriuw my of dizze (brief) oerkaam is.

Frits

[French date]

Je moatte oan ús oerste, dy't dat kwea wiif hat, sizze dat ik jo allinnich skriuw omdat nimmen Frysk lêze kin.

P.S. Send me the newspapers, old and new. Send me a postillion too.

[French text]

Could you not bring bread sufficient for seven or eight days and come here? One can build as many bridges as one likes and those who cross are in no danger of being attacked. One can advance with the right-hand column to the lowlands that run towards Roeulx and with the left-hand column to the bog that rises in Marquette. It is certainly good to point out that their horses are in poor condition and many of them are sick and I calculate that in the space of a month they have lost around 12,000 soldiers. Send me 600 horses and ensure that they take three days' fodder for the horses in Mons. There 400 of the enemy are at our door, whom I would like to bid good day to. If you are prepared for that, the people of Mons must be informed and Diemer must know too. If he can come, a major should dare to come too. There must also be 100 Hungarians. If these people can be here at two in the morning (two hours before daybreak) and if they know nothing about it, I hope to be able to deliver you those 400. Give the 'bearer of this' two gold ducats, I'd like to use him for other purposes. He is bright. Write and tell me how I should approach things with the hospital, the man has no money and says that he owes lots of people and needs about 150 lire. The sickness is not improving at all. Good morning, friend, may all go well with you.

Frits

[French text]

If the enemy see that you can't manage it in that direction they might send some people in the direction where Joost was in order to 'prevent' anything from reaching us from that side, if they build bridges there. You must bear this in mind. Write and let me know if this has got through.

Frits

[French date]

You must tell our colonel, who has that evil-tempered wife, that I am writing to you alone because no one can read Frisian.

Alpita de Jong kindly transcribed and regularised Grovestins' sometimes wayward spelling and contacted a military historian for advice on some finer points of strategy.

Jan Jansz Starter was of English parentage and this playful love poem dates from 1629. My only reason for including it here is the pleasure I had in translating it.

Friesch Pastorel

Stemme: La Dolphine, &c.

Hoe komt Jetske, sis het my
Dat ick fijn allinne dy
 Te wændre, te wændre?
Swiete diaer, dit het nin fly
't Js better te ferændre.

Jck hab socht jon minne langh
Den schaemte hiel my in betwangh
 Te swye, te swye
Nu tins ick o mey mijn sangh
Yens leafelijck te frije.

Wotte mey my ney het waad,
Jck sel dy litte op het paad
 My hoof sjæn, my hoof sjæn

Dir is nin schiener yne wraad
Dir moggen wy den grou gæn.

Pæen en patjes al den dey
So folle liæfste as ick mey
 By bringe, by bringe
Sel ick dy jaan, dus rin næt wey
Den dat sijn swiete tingen.

Liaefste wotte ney my tjaen
Jck sel dijn holle schien versjaen
 Mey kanckjes, mey kanckjes
End y twa ponjetjes jaen
Om dijn snie-wyte hanckjes.

Ringen mey stientjes dir in
So as 't mijn liæf ken ney her sin
 Betinsen, betinsen,
Sel ick dy jaen, dir to mijn min
En al mijn libben schinsen.

Djir om liæfjou my dijn haan
Den al wijr ick Heer fen het laen
 Goddinne, Goddinne
Sycker ick wens oors nin paan
Voor mijn getrouwe minne
Voor mijn getrouwe minne.

Frisian Pastoral
Melody: La Dolphine

Why now, Jetske, tell me true,
Do I all alone find you
Walking, walking about?
Sweet love, that's not nice to do:
You'd better change when you're out.

Long I sought your love, my dear,
But shame restrained me, I fear
And made me quiet quite.
Now I think: may my song clear
Bring you true loving delight.

Come now to the woods with me.
On the way there you will see
The garden, mine alone.
There is no better place to be.
We'll often go on our own.

Kisses, pecks the livelong day,
As many, dear, as I may
Complete now, oh complete,
I'll give you, don't run away,
For they are things so sweet.

Darling, won't you come to me:
I'll clothe you, so smart you'll be,
With pretty lace, in bands,
And two cuffs I'll give to thee,
All around your snow-white hands.

Rings inlaid with precious stone
That my love all on her own
Can contrive, contrive.
I'll give my love to you alone
All the time I'm alive.

Therefore, love, give me your hand,
For were I lord of all the land,
Goddess, o my Goddess.
I would want no tokens grand
For my true love's solace.
For my true love's solace.

Of course, my subjective choice of four items doesn't do justice to the range and diversity of the material on offer. I was impressed by the variety and quality of the poetry and by the anthology as a whole, and hope that this collection will help raise the profile of Frisian literature throughout Europe and beyond.

