

# Translating Thomas Pynchon's *V.*

“Few books haunt the waking or the sleeping mind, but this is the one” (“Myth”).

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## Introduction

When *V*, Thomas Pynchon's debut novel, was published in 1963, it was nominated for the National Book Award and won the William Faulkner Foundation Award. This critically acclaimed book went on to be the subject of hundreds of literary analyses, discussing the complex and dense style of Pynchon his writing. Every novel Pynchon has written after *V* has been translated into Dutch. *V*, however, seems to have been left out, despite its status. The question remains why a translation of *V* in Dutch was never realized, despite the numerous essays on this novel, as well as the many essays on the author himself.

This thesis will begin by giving a short biographical sketch of Thomas Pynchon and a brief summary of the novel. Next, the most prominent problems in translating this novel will be discussed in a translation oriented text analysis of *V*, followed by an annotated translation of the first 3000 words of the novel.

## Biography

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr. was born in Glen Cove, New York on May 8, 1937. He grew up in a middle class family in the Suburbs of Long Island. After graduating as class salutatorian he enrolled in Cornwall University to study Engineering physics but dropped out in his second year to serve two years in the United States Navy where he was assigned to the Sixth Fleet that patrols the Mediterranean. After these two years he went back to school, but instead of continuing his study in engineering physics he

pursued a degree in English at Cornwall University, where he graduated in 1958. Thomas Pynchon likes to keep himself away from the public, which led to “only a few published pictures of him and many rumors about his identity and location” (Thomas). Most of these pictures date back to his time in college and the United States Navy. As Andrew Dixon puts it: “Everything about Pynchon and his texts is a ‘wild hypothesis’, a rumor, passed on third hand, from a friend of a friend who knew a guy. Rumors about Pynchon represent a mini-industry within Pynchon studies and fandom (39).”

Pynchon is often seen as a postmodern author. Postmodernism, as described by Meyer Abrams, is “not only a continuation of, sometimes carried to an extreme, the countertraditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms, which had, inevitably, in their turn become conventional [...]”(203). Where modernism focused on ways to reinvent subjects, concepts, form and style, postmodernism goes further than that and experiments with yet new and more complex ways to achieve that. In his article, “Pynchon’s Postmodern Sublime”, Redfield describes the effect that this has on the readers: “If Pynchon’s characters, not to mention his readers, often find it impossible to distinguish between overdetermination and randomness, the patterned and the patternless, the intended and the accidental, then it follows that at no point should language be more painstakingly honed than when it is used to invoke the proximity of semiotic chaos (155)”. Pynchon is also often called a Mathematician of language, and not without reason (Sissman 138). *V* might seem to be semiotic chaos to anyone who reads it for the first time, but the reader first has to make sense of the many sub-plots, the different styles, complex themes and

complicated structures that Pynchon uses in his novels before he can fully understand it.

## About *V*

*V* consists of two different storylines that, as the book progresses, intertwine. The chapters revolve around two characters, Benny profane, a discharged U.S. Navy sailor, and Herbert Stencil, who is obsessed with finding the mysterious entity only known by him as V. Chapters alternate between these two characters until they start to converge towards the end of the book. Herbert Stencil is an aging traveler who devotes his life to nothing more than finding V. This quest began when he read one of his father's journals: "Florence, April, 1899 [...] There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she" (Pynchon 53). Stencil travels the world by following clues of the whereabouts of V. As Michael Begnal observes: "The V sections of the novel are narrated by Herbert Stencil, are made up or are imagined so that he can swell his dossier of imaginary information" (61). Each Stencil chapter is set in a different international crisis, taking the reader through Egypt, Florence, New York, South-Africa, Germany and finally Malta, where Stencil finds that V, whoever or whatever she is, has already died.

The section translated here revolves around the exploits of Benny Profane, who, in 1955, reconnects with his old Navy buddies and a group of bohemian artists also known as The Whole Sick Crew. Contrary to Herbert Stencil, who is infatuated by anything and anyone that he can remotely connect to V, Profane does practically nothing, "attempting to keep himself uninvolved with everyone and everything,

watching old Tom Mix movies on television and yo-yoing up and down the East Coast, bouncing from one stop-gab job to another” (Begnaal 64). When Stencil’s quest of finding V brings him to New York, he and Profane meet and Stencil hires Profane to come along with him in search of V.

## **Translating *V*.**

In her article “Tekstanalyse en de moeilijkheidsgraad van een vertaling”, Christiane Nord distinguishes between subjective and objective translation problems. Subjective translation problems are caused by “the competence of the translator and the given circumstances of the situation (time pressure, lack of relevant reference works, bad presentation of the source text, etc.)”<sup>1</sup> (147, my translation, E.G.). Objective translation problems arise from the assignment in a broader sense and can be divided into pragmatic problems (extratextual), culture-specific problems, linguistic problems (intratextual) and text-specific problems.

An elaborate text-analysis can reduce the difficulty of these translation problems. Nord argues that making a text-analysis of the source text is “[a] way to guarantee a thorough understanding of the text that determines the direction of the translation process”<sup>2</sup> (145, my translation, E.G.). When these problems are dealt with

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<sup>1</sup> “de competentie van de vertalende persoon en de gegeven omstandigheden van de vertaalsituatie (tijdsdruk, gebrekkige naslagmogelijkheden, slechte representatie van de brontekst, enz.)

<sup>2</sup> “als middel om een grondig tekstbegrip te garanderen dat vervolgens de richting van het vertaalproces bepaalt.”

in a specific order, many translation problems can be avoided. By beginning with the pragmatic problems, which are the most general, the translator builds a framework that rules out certain ideas or constructions for the more specific problems in the text. For this reason, the categories mentioned above are ordered from general (pragmatic problems) to specific (text-specific problems) and will be discussed in this order below.

## Pragmatic Problems

One of the biggest problems in translating may be to estimate the level of (background) knowledge of the target audience. The American public may have a different level of (background) knowledge about the United States than the Dutch audience. In addition to a large part of the story that is set in America, *V* takes the reader through a number of different countries and places. Consequently, America and the Netherlands may have different conventions regarding place names that are mentioned in the novel. Americans may refer to a certain place name in a different way than Dutch readers would do. If this is the case, the translator has to translate or explain a place name according to Dutch conventions to prevent alienation, or even misinterpretation among the target audience.

The first chapter of *V* takes place in Norfolk, Virginia. In this chapter, several references to places or buildings in Norfolk are made, some of which are well known and thus will not be very problematic. There are also references that are more abstract and problematic. One of these is mentioned in the beginning of the chapter: “He got there by way of **the Arcade**, at the East Main end of which sat an old street singer

with a guitar and an empty Sterno can for donations” (Pynchon 9). The translator has to choose whether he thinks the target audience will or will not be familiar with ‘the Arcade’ in order to make a good translation that the target audience will understand but that does not explain too much. A possible option would be to keep it as it is and translate the sentence into: “Hij kwam op weg ernaartoe langs **de Arcade**, waar aan de kant van East Main een oude straatzanger zat met een gitaar en een leeg Sterno-blikje voor geld.” Although the Selden Arcade, which is the full name, is an art gallery that is well known among most Americans, many Dutch readers will probably be less acquainted with the Arcade. Arcade can also bring the connotation of an arcade hall, where people can play arcade games. Even for Dutch readers who may know the Arcade, it can cause ambiguity that was not intended by the author. This may result in misinterpretation, which the translator has to avoid. Alternatively, the translator can insert some information that eliminates the ambiguity and makes it easier for the reader to understand. In Javier Aixelá her article “Cultuurspecifieke elementen in vertalingen”, she mentions that intratextual explanation “can be used when there is need to eliminate ambiguities [...] and the translator is looking for a variation on the original reference”<sup>3</sup> (201, my translation, E.G.). Also, Diederik Grit asks the question: “Is the translation as short as possible and as long as necessary?”<sup>4</sup> (191, my translation, E.G.). With that in mind, the translation can become “Hij kwam op weg ernaartoe langs **de Selden Arcade**, waar aan de kant van East Main een oude straatzanger zat met een gitaar en een leeg Sterno-blikje voor geld”. Adding the right information can be helpful at some times to the target audience. In this case, the translation is as short as possible and as long as necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> “Deze strategie biedt uitkomst wanneer de behoefte bestaat dubbelzinnigheden op te lossen [...] en gezicht wordt naar varianten van de originele verwijzing.”

<sup>4</sup> “Is de vertaling zo kort als mogelijk en zo lang als nodig?”



## Culture-specific Problems

Aixelá distinguishes between two kinds of cultural-specific problems that can be encountered in texts: proper names and idiom, idiom being “everything [...] that belongs to a certain culture and does not fall under the category of proper names”<sup>5</sup> (198-199, my translation, E.G.). Given the fact that Thomas Pynchon is an American writer and *V* takes place in different countries and different cultures, the translator is faced with a variety of problems. Most of the characters in the first chapter are or were in the United States Navy. Also, Pynchon gave many of them meaningful names. The problems caused by these factors will be discussed below.

### Idiom

The United States Navy, being of great importance in *V*, can be regarded as one of the many cultural institutions mentioned in the novel. The first problem the translator is faced with is the translation of ‘the U.S. Navy’. Most simply said, the translator has two options: keep the original reference or replace it with something else. Much of the dictionaries would give the option ‘Marine’ as the translation for ‘U.S. Navy’ in Dutch. However, this consequently changes two things in the translation that are not supposed to change. Firstly, the term ‘Marine’, makes it sound like the novel is set in the Netherlands, and secondly, the marines are only a part of the U.S. Navy, which would make it incomplete. Keeping the term will eliminate these changes. Given that the U.S. Navy is something that most Dutch readers will be acquainted with, the term can be maintained in the translation. A more difficult example of idiom can be found

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<sup>5</sup> “Alles [...] wat eigen is aan een bepaalde cultuur en niet binnen de categorie van eigennamen thuishoort.”

in the following sentence: “The word spread through the division, the squadron, perhaps all **DesLant**” (Pynchon 12). Division and squadron will not be a problem because these words have translations in Dutch that mean exactly the same. ‘DesLant’, however, is a very specific nautical term and is used to describe ‘the destroyer forces in the Atlantic’. Such a term does not exist in Dutch and explaining it would take away the flow of this sentence. Given that most of the destroyer forces in those days operated from the naval base in Norfolk, replacing ‘DesLant’ with, as Aixelá calls it, an ‘absolute universalization’, can be a good option (202). What the sentence is ultimately doing is describing that something is being talked about in a division (relatively small), and then spreads out to something much bigger (DesLant). The universalization can be to replace ‘Deslant’ with ‘Norfolk’, because almost all the destroyer forces are in Norfolk, and it is also much bigger than a division. This results in the sentence “Het ging als een lopend vuurtje door de divisie, het eskader, misschien zelfs wel door heel **Norfolk**”. The downside to this is that the nautical term ‘Deslant’ gets lost in the translation. On the other hand, the flow of the sentence is preserved and the general meaning is still the same.

### **Proper Names**

In *V*, Pynchon gave almost all the characters names that hold more meaning than just a name. Much of these indicate certain characteristic traits and foreshadow how this character is going to behave in the novel. Because most of these characters have meaningful names, there are advantages to translating them, as they would give the reader more insight into the characters. However, there are also exceptions, as, for example, the name Beatrice. All the barmaids that work on East Main are called Beatrice because “just as small children call all females mother, so sailors, in their

way equally as helpless, should call all barmaids Beatrice” (Pynchon 12). Beatrice would be translated to Beatrix in Dutch, but the connotations that the name has are lost in this translation. In the novel, as Grent observes, Beatrice “evokes Dante’s allegorical Beatrice” (6). Beatrice must in this case be kept as it is, in order for the readers to pick up on the connection with Dante’s Beatrice.

Many of the other names are not based on existing persons or figures and can, therefore, be translated to a Dutch equivalent. The main character in the first chapter is Benny Profane. Both his first and last name carry some deeper meaning. Profane can be defined as ‘everything that is not sacred’ and thus, can be easily be translated to the Dutch ‘Profaan’. The name Benny has some ambiguity. On the one hand Benny is closely related to the “lucky” Benjamin Graham, the first proponent of value investing, an investment approach with which he became very rich. This would give an ironic tone to his name considering Benny describes himself as a schlemihl. Secondly, Benny is also slang for Benzedrine, a kind of amphetamine. By translating ‘Benny’ to ‘Bennie’, Dutch readers will more easily lay a connection to the drug because they are known as ‘bennie’s’ in the Netherlands. In addition, they might even think of Benjamin Graham, considering that Pynchon’s audience consists of “quite learned academic readers who enjoy puzzles, especially costumed ones [and] who relish intellectual play (Poirier 152).

## Linguistic Problems

### Present participle clauses

A common linguistic problem that occurs when translating from English into Dutch is the use of present participle clauses. Although this construction does exist in Dutch, it is used far less frequently than in English. As Jack Hoeksema argues: “Until the 19th century, participial constructions could be used as predicates in copular constructions. With some lexical exceptions (e.g. *hij was stervende* ‘he was dying’[...]), this is no longer possible” (2). Without this option, the translator is left with the problem to pick the right verb form to maintain this continuous sense and still remain true to the style of the author. The following example is from *V*: “In their wake and through the breach clambered at least sixty more slaving bluejackets, **kicking, clawing, side-arming, bellowing** uproariously; some swinging beer bottles to clear a path” (Pynchon 16). This sentence contains six instances of this continuous form of which four are stacked together. Where before the 19<sup>th</sup> century this form could be simply translated to ‘schoppende’ for ‘kicking’, ‘krabbende’ for ‘clawing’, etc., this would now seem outdated in Dutch. Another option would be to use a more modern form to create the continuous. “In hun spoor en door de branding klauterden zeker nog zestig kwijlende zeemannen die **aan het schoppen, krabben, ellebogen geven waren, en luidruchtig brulden**; sommigen aan het zwaaien met bierflesjes om een pad vrij te maken.” This is of course a sentence that is very chaotic and will not likely to be spoken in Dutch. Instead of maintaining this form, all the verbs can be transformed to a past tense, which results in the sentence “In hun spoor en door de branding klauterden zeker nog zestig kwijlende zeemannen die **schopten, krabden, ellebogen gaven, luidruchtig brulden**; sommigen zwaaiden met bierflesjes om een pad vrij te

maken.” In this way, the continuous feeling is kept in the sentence and the flow with which the sentence is read remains exactly the same.

## Text-specific problems

### Songs

Music has a prominent role in Pynchon’s work. “Thomas Pynchon’s novels are like a giant jukebox just waiting to happen. Some of the songs are real, some are imaginary. All of them Pynchon makes his own. No other American writer has put so much music into his fiction” (Feeney). *V* contains three songs in the first chapter. One of them is “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”, a well-known English hymn. Because no Dutch version of this song exists and it is quite famous, there is no need for a translation because that would only alienate the work for the Dutch audience. The two songs that are made up by Pynchon, however, do have to be translated for the reader to understand them fully. One of these songs will be discussed here.

“Every night is Christmas Eve on old East Main,  
Sailors and their sweethearts all agree.  
Neon signs of red and green  
Shine upon the friendly scene,  
Welcoming you in from off the sea.  
Santa's bag is filled with all your dreams come true:  
Nickel beers that sparkle like champagne,  
Barmaids who all love to screw,

All of them reminding you:

It's Christmas Eve on old East Main.” (9-10)

Apart from the usual translating problems that are mentioned in this essay, much thought must be given to rhyme and rhythm as well when translating songs. Although the songs are written by Pynchon, they can be sung and, with a little experience in music, the rhythm of the song can be found out easily. When translating, it can happen that there is no Dutch translation for an English word that fits in the rhyme scheme. An example of this is ‘Neon signs of **red and green**, Shine upon the friendly **scene**’. A normal translation would give ‘Neon lichten **rood en groen**, ...’. However, finding a translation for ‘scene’ that rhymes with ‘groen’ is very hard. To solve this, a subtle change can be made in the colors of the neon signs. Instead of using ‘rood en groen’, ‘groen en geel’, enables the translator to use ‘tafreel’ as translation for ‘scene’. The sentence now becomes ‘Neon lichten **groen en geel**, Schijnen op dit zacht **tafreel**’. Both the rhyme scheme and the meter are preserved with just a little modification.

## Conclusion

To summarize the above, *V* is a complex novel in structure and style that provides the translator with a variety of problems. Firstly, because of the difference between American and Dutch culture, some place names will have to be translated or explained to prevent alienation from the Dutch audience. Also different cultures bring different jargon that the target audience may or may not be familiar with. In addition,

the natural differences between the English and the Dutch languages provide some problematic sentences that have to be translated in a certain way to keep true to the style of the author. Finally, the novel contains many instances of song, in which, apart from slang or culture specific elements, rhyme and rhythm also play a big role while translating.

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## Appendix A: Translation

Hoofdstuk een, waarin Bennie Profaan, kluns en menselijke jojo, een apocheir bereikt.

Kerstavond 1955 liep Bennie Profaan, gekleed in een zwarte spijkerbroek, suède jasje, sneakers en cowboyhoed, toevallig door Norfolk, Virginia. In een sentimentele opwelling besloot hij naar Het Zeemansgraf te gaan, de stamkroeg van zijn vroegere scheepsmaten op East Main Street. Hij kwam op weg ernaartoe langs de Selden Arcade, waar aan de kant van East Main een oude straatzanger zat met een gitaar en een leeg Sterno-blikje voor geld. Verderop in de straat probeerde een onderofficier in de benzinetank van een Packard Patrician uit 1954<sup>1</sup> te urineren terwijl vijf of zes leerling matrozen hem stonden aan te moedigen. Met een welluidende, vaste basstem zong de ouwe man:

Elke avond is het Kerst op old East Main,

Matrozen en hun liefjes zijn het eens.

Neon lichten groen en geel

Schijnen op dit zacht tafereel,

Verwelkomen je als je komt vanuit de zee.

De Kerstman komt en maakt je dromen waar:

Tien cent voor bier dat wel champagne scheen.

De serveerstertjes gaan graag van bil

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<sup>1</sup> In Dutch, referring to a year in the 1900's is usually done by naming the whole year instead of the last two digits, so '1954' is a better choice than '54'.

En zeggen daarmee stil:

Het is weer Kerst op old East Main

“Jaa!<sup>2</sup>, chef,” riep een leerling-matroos. Profaan liep de hoek om. Zoals gewoonlijk zat hij voor hij het wist weer midden in East Main.

Sinds zijn ontslag bij de Amerikaanse marine had Profaan voor weinig geld als wegwerker gewerkt en wanneer er geen werk was, als een jojo de Oostkust op en neer gereisd; en dit was nu al zo'n anderhalf jaar gaande. Na zo lang van meer straatnamen dat hij geen moeite meer nam om ze te tellen, was Profaan de straten enigszins begonnen te wantrouwen, zeker straten als deze. Ze waren in feite samengesmolten tot één afzonderlijke Straat waar hij als het volle maan was nachtmerries over had. East Main, een getto voor Dronken Zeelui waar niemand meer iets Mee Kon Doen, werkte net zo op je zenuwen als een gewone droom die plots verandert in een nachtmerrie. Een hond in een wolf, daglicht in schemer, leegte in wachtende aanwezigheid. Hier vond je minderjarige Marinier kotsend op straat, serveerstertje met een scheepsschroef op elke bil getatoeëerd, een mogelijke gek die nadacht over de beste techniek om door een venster te springen (Geronimo schreeuwen voor- of nadat het glas breekt?), een dronken onderbootsman schreeuwend ergens achter in de steeg omdat de laatste keer dat de Shore Patrol –de Militaire Politie aan wal<sup>3</sup> - hem in deze toestand oppakte, ze hem een dwangbuis

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<sup>2</sup> This is a call of encouragement from a seaman deuce to the old man. ‘Yay!’ is something that will not be yelled in Dutch. By changing it to “Jaa!” the same enthusiasm is conveyed in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Shore Patrol is term that is not used in the Netherlands. U.S. Navy personnel would receive limited training in law enforcement and would act as Military Police ashore. They have the exact same function as the Military Police. Consequently, an intratextual explanation will make sure the readers will understand what it is they do while still keeping the ‘iconic’ term ‘Shore Patrol’.

aandeden. Onder zijn voeten voelde hij af en toe trillingen in de stoep van een SP officier die een paar lantaarnpalen verderop met zijn gummiknuppel sloeg om versterking te vragen<sup>4</sup>. De kwiklampen boven de straat die ieders gezicht groen en lelijk maakten, verdwenen in een asymmetrische V naar het Oosten, waar het donker is en er geen kroegen meer zijn.

Toen Profaan bij Het zeemansgraf aankwam was er een knokpartij gaande tussen matrozen en soldaten. Hij stond even te kijken in de deuropening. Toen hij zich realiseerde dat hij toch al met één voet in het Graf stond, dook hij weg van het gevecht en hield zich min of meer gedeisd bij de koperen voetensteun.

“Waarom kunnen mannen niet normaal met elkaar omgaan,” hoorde Profaan iemand zich achter zijn linker oor afvragen. Het was Beatrice het serveerstertje, het liefje van de 22e divisie torpedojagers, en niet te vergeten van het schip waar Profaan op gewerkt had, de torpedojager Schavot. “Bennie,” schreeuwde ze. Ze werden er emotioneel van, om elkaar na zo’n lange tijd weer te zien. Profaan begon een hartje in het zaagsel te tekenen, met een pijl erdoor, meeuwen die een banner in hun bekken droegen met Lieve Beatrice erop.

De bemanning van de Schavot was er niet, het schip was sinds twee avonden onderweg naar de Middellandse Zee onder hevig protest van de bemanning dat te horen was op de bewolkte Wegen (zo ging het zeemansverhaal) als de stemmen die van een spookschip kwamen; het was zelfs te horen tot in Little Creek, de

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Hey Rube!’ is a slang phrase that was commonly used by United States circus folk. It was used as a cry for help when someone was in, or about to get in, a fight with outsiders. The rest of the circus folk would come to assist him. Because no such thing exists in Dutch, the best option is to discard the ‘Hey Rube’ and describe it. The Shore Patrol officer is beating his night stick to ask for assistance. Hence, I translated it to ‘om versterking vragen’.

marinehaven in Norfolk<sup>5</sup>. Hierdoor waren er deze avond een paar serveerstertjes meer dan gewoonlijk, die tafels langs heel East Main bedienden. Er wordt namelijk gezegd (en niet zonder reden) dat zodra een schip als de Schavot het ruime sop kiest, sommige vrouwen van de mariniers hun burgerkloffie inruilen voor een serveersteruniform, hun armen waar ze bier mee dragen strekken en de lach van een hoer oefenen; precies op het moment dat de band van de marinehaven<sup>6</sup> Auld Lang Syne speelt en de torpedootjagers een vlag roet blazen over de bedrogen mannen in spe die in de houding staan en met spijt en een miezerige grijns afscheid nemen.

Beatrice kocht bier. Er kwam een snerpende gil van een van de tafels achterin, ze kromp ineen, bier klotste over de rand van het glas. “Mijn god,” zei ze, “het is List<sup>7</sup> weer.” List was tegenwoordig machinist op de mijnenveger Impulsief en een schandaal zo lang als East Main. Hij kwam met laarzen aan maar net boven de 1 meter 50 uit en zocht altijd ruzie met de grootste mannen op het schip omdat ze hem toch nooit serieus zouden nemen.

Tien maanden geleden (vlak voordat hij naar de Impulsief werd overgeplaatst) had de marine besloten om al List zijn tanden te trekken. List was woedend en pas nadat het hem lukte zich een weg te slaan door een hospik en twee tandarts-officieren

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<sup>5</sup> Little Creek is the name of the navel operations base in Norfolk. Most Americans will lay the connection, but the Dutch audience will most likely not know that this is a marine base. To give the reader a clue, I inserted ‘de marinehaven in Norfolk’. Now they know what it is, where it is, and thus how far away the voices of the ghost ship were heard.

<sup>6</sup> N.O.B. Band stands for ‘Navel Operations Base Band’ The navel operation base is ‘een marinehaven’, so the translation becomes ‘de band van de marinehaven’

<sup>7</sup> As I have discussed in the translation oriented text analysis, Pynchon has given most of the characters meaningful names. Ploy is one of them. The fact that he only has a first name makes him a mysterious character. In addition, a ploy is something that you plan, that nobody can find out about before it happens. This can be seen in the story as he files his teeth and plans on biting waitresses in the ass. The Dutch translation of Ploy is ‘List’. It is still a short name and foreshadows that he has something up his sleeve.

heen werd er besloten dat hij zijn tanden wel erg graag wilde houden. “Maar denk nou eens na,” riepen de officieren terwijl ze hun lach probeerden in te houden en zijn kleine vuisten afweerden: “wortelkanaalbehandelingen, tandvleesontstekingen....” “Nee,” schreeuwde List. Uiteindelijk moesten ze hem een injectie Penthotal in zijn bovenarm geven. Toen hij wakker werd zag List de Apocalyps en bleef onophoudelijk schelden. Twee maanden lang dwaalde hij doodsbleek rond op de Schavot en kwam zonder waarschuwing van het plafond<sup>8</sup> slingeren in de hoop een officier tegen zijn tanden te schoppen.

Hij stond vaak op het achterdek en viel iedereen die wilde luisteren lastig met zijn gladde praatjes, terwijl zijn tandvlees nog zeer deed. Toen zijn mond genezen was kreeg hij een glanzend, goed in elkaar gezet kunstgebit. “Oh god,” jammerde hij, en probeerde overboord te springen. Maar werd tegengehouden door een reusachtige Neger genaamd Dahoud. “Nou, nou, kereltje” zei Dahoud. Hij tilde List aan zijn hoofd op waardoor diens voeten een meter boven het dek heen en weer zwiëpten terwijl Dahoud deze combinatie van overall en wanhoop nauwkeurig bekeek. “Waar is dat nou voor nodig?”

“Man, ik wil gewoon dood,” jammerde List.

“Weet je dan niet,” zei Dahoud, “dat het leven het meest dierbare bezit is dat je hebt?”

“Hu hu<sup>9</sup>,” zei List door zijn tranen heen. “Waarom dan?”

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<sup>8</sup> Overhead is a nautical term that means ‘the top surface in an enclosed space of a ship’. Given the fact that it is a nautical term, it may be so that in Dutch, there is a specific term as well to indicate this. However, no such term exist and the first word that came to mind was ‘plafond’. Because it was already made clear that Ploy was on a ship, there is no need to add extra information on that it is not just ‘een plafond’ but ‘een plafond in een schip’.

<sup>9</sup> English and Dutch are very different when it comes to transcribing sounds. In the novel, Pynchon transcribes the sound of sobbing with ‘ho ho’. In Dutch, this would

“Gewoon,” zei Dahoud, “zonder zou je dood zijn.”

“O,” zei List. Hij dacht hier een week over na. Hij werd wat rustiger, ging weer met verlof. De overplaatsing naar de Impulsief werd werkelijkheid. Niet lang daarna, na TapToe, begonnen de andere snipes<sup>10</sup> vreemde knarsende geluiden te horen die bij List zijn bed vandaan kwamen. Dit herhaalde zich voor een paar-drie weken, totdat iemand op een morgen rond twee uur het licht aan deed in de cabine en daar zat List op zijn bed met zijn benen over elkaar, zijn tanden scherp te vijlen met een metaalvijsl. Op de volgende betaaldag zat List, stiller dan gewoonlijk, ‘s avonds aan een tafel in het Zeemansgraf met wat andere snipes. Rond elfen kwam Beatrice voorbij lopen met een dienblad vol bier. Vrolijk stak List zijn hoofd uit, opende zijn bek breed, en stak zijn pas geslepen gebit in de rechterbil van het serveerstertje. Beatrice slaakte een kreet, bierglazen vlogen glinsterend in een parabool de lucht in en besproeiden het Zeemansgraf met waterig bier.

Het werd List zijn favoriete tijdverdrijf. Het ging als een lopend vuurtje door de divisie, het eskader, misschien zelfs wel door heel Norfolk. Mensen die niet van de Impulsief of de Schavot waren, kwamen kijken. Dit leidde tot veel knokpartijen zoals diegene die nu gaande was.

“Wie had hij te pakken,” vroeg Profaan. “Ik keek niet.”

“Beatrice,” zei Beatrice. Beatrice was een ander serveerstertje. Mevrouw Buffo, de eigenaresse van het Zeemansgraf, wiens voornaam ook Beatrice is, had een theorie dat net zoals kleine kinderen alle vrouwen mama noemen, alle matrozen, op hun

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immediately bring up the connotation of Santa and has nothing to do with sobbing. ‘Hu hu’ seems like a good transcription of the sound that people make when they are sobbing.

<sup>10</sup> John Snipe was a person that stood up for the rights of enginemen and consequently they are called ‘Snipes’. Because earlier in the story Ploy was already described as being an engineman, keeping this term will not cause confusion and preserves a bit of U.S. Navy history in the story.

manier net zo hulpeloos, alle serveerstertjes Beatrice zouden moeten noemen. Om dit moederbeleid verder te verwezenlijken had ze voor de biertapinstallaties schuimrubberen tappen laten maken in de vorm van grote borsten. Van acht tot negen op betaaldagen deed zich iets voor wat Mevrouw Buffo het Zoog Uur noemde. Ze luidde het officieel in door van achter de kroeg binnen te stappen in een met draken erop geborduurde kimono die ze gekregen had van een minnaar in de Zevende Vloot, een gouden bootsmansfluitje naar haar mond te brengen en het startsein te blazen. Bij het horen van dit signaal dook iedereen naar voren en als ze genoeg mazzel hadden om er een te bereiken mochten ze even aan een tap zuigen. Er waren zeven van zulke tappen en een gemiddelde van ongeveer 250 matrozen die gewoonlijk aanwezig waren voor deze feestvreugde.

Het hoofd van List verscheen nu om de hoek van de bar. Hij beet naar Profaan. “Dit hier,” zei List, “is mijn vriend Dauwe Klier, een nieuw bemanningslid.” Hij duidde een lange, zielig-uitziende rebel aan die achter List aan liep met een gitaar die hij door het zaagsel sleepte. “Hé,” Zei Dauwe Klier, “ik wil graag een liedje voor je zingen.”

“Om te vieren dat je ontslagen bent<sup>11</sup>,” zei List. “Dauwe zingt het voor iedereen.”

“Dat was vorig jaar,” zei Profaan.

Maar Dauwe Klier zette een voet op de reling en zijn gitaar op zijn knie en begon te tokkelen. Na acht maten gitaar zong hij een wals:

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<sup>11</sup> This sentence, along with the song, is a pun in English. PFC stands for ‘Private First Class’, as well as for ‘Pore Forelorn Civilian’. This gives the song a certain irony that causes many problems when translating it into Dutch. ‘Soldaat Eerste Klas’ is the equivalent of PFC, but to find an equivalent for ‘Pore Forelorne Civilian’ is almost imposible. Because the important part of the song is that Benny left the U.S. Navy, I decided to focus on that part and replace PFC with ‘ontslagen’. The irony is lost but most of the connotations that the song brings are still noticeable in Dutch.

Arme Verloren Burger,  
 We gaan je zeker missen hier.  
 Ze huilen in het geitenhok en de kajuit,  
 Zelfs die waardeloze hoofdofficier.  
 Je maakt een grote fout  
 Al laat het je zo koud  
 Je gedraagt je voor geen meter<sup>12</sup>  
 Zend me uit naar zee voor twintig jaar,  
 Ik word nooit een Arme Verloren Burger

“Mooi lied,” zei Profaan in zijn biertje.

“Er is nog meer,” zei Dauwe Klier.

“O,” zei Profaan.

Een miasma van kwaad omhulde Profaan plotseling van achter; een arm viel als een zak aardappels over zijn schouder en in zijn ooghoek zag hij een biertje omhuld door een grote mof die, vrij ongepast, gemaakt was van aangetast bavianenbont.

“Bennie. Hoe ist ermee kerel, heughh, heughh.<sup>13</sup>”

Die lach kon alleen komen van Profaan zijn eenmalige scheepsmaat, Big Bodien.

Profaan keek om zich heen. Kon niet anders. Heughh, Heughh is een geluid dat

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<sup>12</sup> Rhyme words for ‘Burger’ are scarce in Dutch. In this song, it is impossible to maintain the whole rhyme scheme. Most of the rhyme scheme can be translated and maintained in Dutch, but for some sentences, the meter or meaning of it would change to must. This would change the song more than to leave out one rhyme word.

<sup>13</sup> Slang causes many problems for translation, mainly because slang does not exist so prominent in Dutch as it does in English. A good way to maintain the slang is to change it to an informal accent in Dutch. By doing this, it will still be apparent that he is an obscene, drunk and rude person. In addition, the translation of his name, ‘Big Bodien’, also strengthens these character traits.



gemaakt wordt door het puntje van de tong tegen de voortanden aan te plaatsen en gorgelende geluiden uit de strot te drukken. Het was, zoals Big het bedoeld had, verschrikkelijk ongepast.

“Ouwe Big. Hoor jij niet op zee te zitten?”

“Ik deserteer. Pappie Bak de bootsmansmaat heeft me hierheen gereden.” De beste manier om de SP te vermijden is om nuchter te blijven en met jezelf. Vandaar het Zeemansgraf.

“Hoe is het met Pappie.”

Big vertelde hem dat Pappie Bak en het serveerstertje waar hij mee getrouwd was uit elkaar waren. Ze was weggegaan en bij het Zeemansgraf komen werken.

Die jonge vrouw, Paola. Ze had zestien gezegd, maar dat was niet zeker omdat ze net voor de oorlog was geboren en het gebouw met haar papieren verwoest was, net als de meeste andere gebouwen op Malta.

Profaan was erbij geweest toen ze elkaar ontmoetten. De Metro Bar op Strait Street.<sup>14</sup> Valletta, Malta.

“Chicago,” kwam van Pappie Bak met een gangsterstem. “Je kent Chicago,” terwijl hij onheilspellend werd in zijn pullover, iets wat Pappie Bak altijd deed rond de Mediterrane kust. Hij haalde dan een zakdoek tevoorschijn en niet zijn pistool of tommygun, snoot zijn neus en lachte dan hard naar het meisje dat op dat moment tegenover hem zat. Amerikaanse films hadden hen allen gestereotypeerd, iedereen behalve Paola Maijstral, die hem beheerst en doodserieus bleef aankijken.

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<sup>14</sup> I have chosen to leave out ‘The Gut’ in the target text, mainly because ‘the gut’ is short and strong and by translating it to ‘het darmkanaal’, it will kill the power of the sentence. Also, by including ‘het darmkanaal’, the translator only alienates the text for the Dutch audience. Including it has no relevance for understanding the story and the general impression of how sailors behave when they are on liberty is very strong throughout the rest of the book.

Pappie had uiteindelijk 500 voor 700 geleend uit het potje van Mac de kok om Paolo de Verenigde Staten in te brengen.

Misschien was dit voor haar alleen een manier om naar Amerika te komen- de waanzin van elk serveerstertje uit het Middellandse Zeegebied- waar er genoeg eten was, warme kleren, altijd warmte, gebouwen die nog intact zijn. Pappie zou liegen over haar leeftijd om haar het land in te krijgen. Ze kon zo oud zijn als ze maar wilde. En je verwachtte ook elke nationaliteit, ze sprak namelijk elke taal wel een beetje.

Pappie Bak had haar bij de bootsmanskuisjes in de Schavot voor het plezier van de onderbootsmannen beschreven. Hij sprak al een tijdje met buitengewone tederheid, alsof hij er langzaam achter kwam, misschien zelfs terwijl zijn lange verhaal vorderde, dat seks misschien een groter mysterie was dan hij in eerste instantie gedacht had en hij de stand uiteindelijk niet zou weten omdat zulke scores niet in cijfers uitgedrukt werden. Wat na vijfenveertig jaar niets was voor de lichtzinnigheden waar Pappie Bak achter zou moeten komen. “Goed spul”, zei Big terzijde. Profaan keek richting de achterste tafels in het Zeemansgraf en zag haar nu aankomen door de dichte rook die zich die avond had verzameld. Ze zag er uit als een East Main serveerstertje. Wat was dat toch met de prairiehaas in de sneeuw, de tijger in hoog gras en zonlicht?

Ze lachte naar Profaan: droevig, met enige inspanning.

“Kom je terug om weer dienst te nemen?”

“Ik kom gewoon even langs<sup>15</sup>,” zei Profaan.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Just passing’ might be a normal phrase in English, but in Dutch it is very ungrammatical. A personal pronoun has to precede the sentence in order for it to make any sense. The most important word of this sentence is ‘just’, which can be translated to ‘gewoon’ and stresses that Profane is not staying long.

“Kom met me mee naar de Westkust,” zei Big. “Is geen SP auto die mijn Harley bijhoudt.”

“Kijk, kijk,” riep kleine List terwijl hij op één been op en neer sprong. “niet nu jongens. Wacht even.” Hij wees. Mevrouw Buffo was op de bar verschenen, in haar kimono. Er viel een stilte in de kroeg. De soldaten en matrozen die de ingang versperden sloten een tijdelijke wapenstilstand.

“Jongens,” kondigde Mevrouw Buffo aan, “het is Kerstavond.” Ze haalde het bootsmansfluitje tevoorschijn en begon te spelen. Met vibrato kwamen de eerste noten naar buiten, vurig en fluitachtig terwijl iedereen in het Zeemansgraf met grote ogen en open mond toekeek. Ze luisterden vol ontzag, terwijl ze zich langzamerhand realiseerden dat ze *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* speelde binnen het beperkte bereik van het bootsmansfluitje. Helemaal achterin begon een jonge reservist die ooit nachtclub acts gedaan had rondom Philadelphia zachtjes mee te zingen. List zijn ogen straalden. “Het is de stem van een engel,” zei hij.

Ze kwamen nu bij het stuk “*Piece on the earth, good will to men, From Heav’n’s all-gracious king,*” toen Big, een militant atheïst, besloot dat hij er niet langer meer tegen kon. “Dat,” kondigde hij met een luide stem aan, “klinkt als het startsein.” Mevrouw Buffo en de reservist vielen stil. Een seconde ging voorbij voordat iemand het begreep.

“Zoog Uur!” Schreeuwde List.

Daarmee kwam dit magische moment wel ten einde. De sneldenkende bewoners van de Impulsief verenigden zich op de een of andere manier in de knokpartij om de dronken pekbrokken heen, hezen List boven zich uit en haastten zich met het kleine kereltje naar de dichtstbijzijnde tepel in de voorhoede van de aanval.

Mevrouw Buffo, kalm in haar bescherming als de trompettist van Krakau, kreeg de volle laag van de hevige aanval en tuimelde achterover in een bak met ijs toen de eerste horde over de bar kwam razen. List had zijn handen uitgestrekt en werd over de bar geholpen. Hij greep zich vast aan een van de handvatten en tegelijkertijd lieten zijn scheepsmaatjes hem los; de stuwkracht duwde hem en het handvat in een neerwaartse boog: het bier gutste uit de schuimrubberen borst en vormde een witte waterval die List en Mevrouw Buffo overspoelde, samen met vierentwintig andere matrozen die, terwijl ze de flank dekten, achter de bar vandaan waren gekomen en elkaar nu bewusteloos aan het rammen waren. De groep die List naar de bar gedragen had verspreidde zich en probeerde zich meer tapkranen toe te eigenen. List zijn leidinggevende onderofficier zat op handen en voeten om List hoog te houden, klaar om zijn benen weg te trekken en zijn plaats in te nemen zodra List genoeg had gehad. Het detachement van de Impulsief had in hun aanval een vliegende punt gevormd. In hun spoor en door de branding klauterden zeker nog zestig kwijlende zeemannen die schopten, krabden, ellebogen gaven, luidruchtig brulden; sommigen zwaaiden met bierflesjes om een pad vrij te maken.

Profaan zat aan het einde van de bar en keek naar de met de hand bewerkte zeelaarzen, opgerolde levis mouwen; zo nu en dan een kwijlend gezicht aan het eind van een gevallen lichaam; kapotte bierflesjes, kleine zaagselstormen.

Al snel zag hij het<sup>16</sup>; daar zat Paola, haar armen om zijn been, haar wang tegen het zwarte denim gedrukt.

“Het is vreselijk,” zei ze.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Looked over’ is something that can be translated with ‘kijken’. However, because in the sentence previous to this one, Profane is already looking at something, this would make a confusing construction. Instead of translating it to ‘al snel keek hij erneen’, it is less confusing to use the verb ‘zien’, which gives the sentence ‘al snel zag hij het’.

“O,” zei Profaan. Hij gaf haar wat zachte klopjes op haar hoofd.

“Vrede,” zuchtte ze. “Is dat niet wat we allemaal willen, Bennie? Gewoon wat vrede. Niemand die zomaar tevoorschijn springt en je in je kont bijt.”

“Stil maar,” zei Profaan, “kijk: iemand heeft Dauwe Klier een dreun in zijn maag gegeven met zijn eigen gitaar”.

Paola prevelde tegen zijn been. Za zaten stil, zonder naar boven te kijken om de slachting te zien die daar aan de gang was. Mevrouw Buffo was onophoudelijk aan het huilen. Onmenselijk gejang sloeg tegen en kwam van achter het oude kunstmahonie van de bar vandaan.

Big had wat bierglazen<sup>17</sup> aan de kant geschoven en zat op de rand achter de bar. In tijden van crisis bleef hij liever van een afstandje kijken. Hij keek enthousiast toe hoe zijn scheepsmaten worstelden als kleine varkens om de zeven geisers onder hem. Bier had het meeste zaagsel achter de bar weggespoeld: schermutselingen en amateuristisch voetenwerk veranderde het nu in buitenaardse hiëroglfen.

Buiten luidden sirenes, fluitjes, rennende voeten. “O, o,” zei Big. Hij sprong van de rand en liep om de bar heen naar Profaan en Paola. “Hee, maat,” zei hij cool en kneep zijn ogen half dicht alsof de wind er in blies. “De Sheriff komt eraan.”

“Achterdeur,” zei Profaan.

“Neem het wijf mee,” zei Big.

Ze renden met zijn drieën zigzaggend door een ruimte vol wemelende lichamen. Onderweg pikten ze Dauwe Klier op. Tegen de tijd dat de Shore Patrol, wild zwaaiend met hun gummiknuppels, het Zeemansgraf ingestormd waren, renden

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Dozijn’ is a term that is very outdated in Dutch. By translating it to ‘wat’, it adds to the nonchalance with which Big retracts himself from the fight and observes everything from the end of the bar, where he now sits.

ze al door een steeg die parallel lag aan East Main. “Waarheen,” zei Profaan. “Waar we naartoe gaan,” zei Big. “Hup, lopen.”

## Appendix B: Source text

Chapter one, in which Benny Profane, a schlemihl and human yo-yo, gets to an apocheir

Christmas Eve, 1955, Benny Profane, wearing black levis, suede jacket, sneakers and big cowboy hat, happened to pass through Norfolk, Virginia. Given to sentimental impulses, he thought he'd look in on the Sailor's Grave, his old tin can's tavern on East Main Street. He got there by way of the Arcade, at the East Main end of which sat an old street singer with a guitar and an empty Sterno can for donations. Out in the street a chief yeoman was trying to urinate in the gas tank of a '54 Packard Patrician and five or six seamen apprentice were standing around giving encouragement. The old man was singing, in a fine, firm baritone:

Every night is Christmas Eve on old East Main,  
Sailors and their sweethearts all agree.  
Neon signs of red and green  
Shine upon the friendly scene,  
Welcoming you in from off the sea.  
Santa's bag is filled with all your dreams come true:  
Nickel beers that sparkle like champagne,  
Barmaids who all love to screw,  
All of them reminding you  
It's Christmas Eve on old East Main.

"Yay chief," yelled a seaman deuce. Profane rounded the corner. With its usual lack of warning, East Main was on him.

Since his discharge from the Navy Profane had been road-laboring and when there wasn't work just traveling, up and down the east coast like a yo-yo; and this had been going on for maybe a year and a half. After that long of more named pavements than he'd care to count, Profane had grown a little leery of streets, especially streets like this. They had in fact all fused into a single abstracted Street, which come the full moon he would have nightmares about: East Main, a ghetto for Drunken Sailors nobody knew what to Do With, sprang on your nerves with all the abruptness of a normal night's dream turning to nightmare. Dog into wolf, light into twilight, emptiness into waiting presence, here were your underage Marine barfing in the street, barmaid with a ship's propeller tattooed on each buttock, one potential berserk studying the best technique for jumping through a plate glass window (when to scream Geronimo? before or after the glass breaks?), a drunken deck ape crying back in the alley because last time the SP's caught him like this they put him in a strait jacket. Underfoot, now and again, came vibration in the sidewalk from an SP streetlights away, beating out a Hey Rube with his night stick; overhead, turning everybody's face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars.

Arriving at the Sailor's Grave, Profane found a small fight in progress between sailors and jarheads. He stood in the doorway a moment watching; then realizing he had one foot in the Grave anyway, dived out of the way of the fight and lay more or less doggo near the brass rail.

"Why can't man live in peace with his fellow man," wondered a voice behind Profane's left ear. It was Beatrice the barmaid, sweetheart of DesDiv 22, not to



mention Profane's old ship, the destroyer U.S.S. Scaffold. "Benny," she cried. They became tender, meeting again after so long. Profane began to draw in the sawdust hearts, arrows through them, sea gulls carrying a banner in their beaks which read Dear Beatrice.

The Scaffold-boat's crew were absent, this tin can having got under way for the Mediterranean two evenings ago amid a storm of bitching from the crew which was heard out in the cloudy Roads (so the yarn went) like voices off a ghost ship; heard as far away as Little Creek. Accordingly, there were a few more barmaids than usual tonight, working tables all up and down East Main. For it's said (and not without reason) that no sooner does a ship like the Scaffold single up all lines than certain Navy wives are out of their civvies and into barmaid uniform, flexing their beer-carrying arms and practicing a hooker's sweet smile; even as the N.O.B. band is playing Auld Lang Syne and the destroyers are blowing stacks in black flakes all over the cuckolds-to-be standing manly at attention, taking leave with rue and a tiny grin.

Beatrice brought beer. There was a piercing yelp from one of the back tables, she flinched, beer slopped over the edge of the glass.

"God," she said, "it's Ploy again." Ploy was now an engineman on the mine sweeper Impulsive and a scandal the length of East Main. He stood five feet nothing in sea boots and was always picking fights with the biggest people on the ship, knowing they would never take him seriously. Ten months ago (just before he'd transferred off the Scaffold) the Navy had decided to remove all of Ploy's teeth. Incensed, Ploy managed to punch his way through a chief corpsman and two dental officers before it was decided he was in earnest about keeping his teeth. "But think," the officers shouted, trying not to laugh, fending off his tiny fists: "root canal work, gum abscesses. . ." "No," screamed Ploy. They finally had to hit him in the bicep

with a Pentothal injection. On waking up, Ploy saw apocalypse, screamed lengthy obscenities. For two months he roamed ghastly around the Scaffold, leaping without warning to swing from the overhead like an orangutan, trying to kick officers in the teeth.

He would stand on the fantail and harangue whoever would listen, flannelmouthed through aching gums. When his mouth had healed he was presented with a gleaming, regulation set of upper and lower plates. "Oh God," he bawled, and tried to jump over the side. But was restrained by a gargantuan Negro named Dahoud. "Hey there, little fellow," said Dahoud, picking Ploy up by the head and scrutinizing this convulsion of dungarees and despair whose feet thrashed a yard above the deck. "What do you want to go and do that for?"

"Man, I want to die, is all," cried Ploy.

"Don't you know," said Dahoud, "that life is the most precious possession you have?"

"Ho, ho," said Ploy through his tears. "Why?"

"Because," said Dahoud, "without it, you'd be dead."

"Oh," said Ploy. He thought about this for a week. He calmed down, started to go on liberty again. His transfer to the Impulsive became reality. Soon, after Lights Out, the other snipes began to hear strange grating sounds from the direction of Ploy's rack. This went on for a couple-three weeks until one morning around two somebody turned on the lights in the compartment and there was Ploy, sitting crosslegged on his rack, sharpening his teeth with a small bastard file. Next payday night, Ploy sat at a table in the Sailor's Grave with a bunch of other snipes, quieter than usual. Around eleven, Beatrice swayed by, carrying a tray full of beers. Gleeful, Ploy stuck his head out, opened his jaws wide, and sank his newly-filed dentures into the barmaid's right

buttock. Beatrice screamed, glasses flew parabolic and glittering, spraying the Sailor's Grave with watery beer.

It became Ploy's favorite amusement. The word spread through the division, the squadron, perhaps all DesLant. People not of the Impulsive or Scaffold came to watch. This started many fights like the one now in progress.

"Who did he get," Profane said. "I wasn't looking."

"Beatrice," said Beatrice. Beatrice being another barmaid. Mrs. Buffo, owner of the Sailor's Grave, whose first name was also Beatrice, had a theory that just as small children call all females mother, so sailors, in their way equally as helpless, should call all barmaids Beatrice. Further to implement this maternal policy, she had had custom beer taps installed, made of foam rubber, in the shape of large breasts. From eight to nine on payday nights there occurred something Mrs. Buffo called Suck Hour. She began it officially by emerging from the back room clad in a dragon-embroidered kimono given her by an admirer in the Seventh Fleet, raising a gold boatswain's pipe to her lips and blowing Chow Down. At this signal, everyone would dive for and if they were lucky enough to reach one be given suck by a beer tap. There were seven of these taps, and an average of 250 sailors usually present for the merrymaking.

Ploy's head now appeared around a corner of the bar. He snapped his teeth at Profane. "This here," Ploy said, "is my friend Dewey Gland, who just came aboard." He indicated a long, sad-looking rebel with a huge beak who had followed Ploy over, dragging a guitar in the sawdust.

"Howdy," said Dewey Gland. "I would like to sing you a little song."

"To celebrate your becoming a PFC," said Ploy. "Dewey sings it to everybody."

"That was last year," said Profane.

But Dewey Gland propped one foot on the brass rail and the guitar on his knee and began to strum. After eight bars of this he sang, in waltz time:

Pore Forlorn Civilian,  
We're goin to miss you so.  
In the goat hole and the wardroom they're cryin,  
Even the mizzable X.O.  
You're makin a mistake,  
Though yore ass they should break,  
Yore report chits number a million.  
Ship me over for twenty years,  
I'll never be a Pore Forlorn Civilian

"It's pretty," said Profane into his beer glass.

"There's more," said Dewey Gland.

"Oh," said Profane.

A miasma of evil suddenly enveloped Profane from behind; an arm fell like a sack of spuds across his shoulder and into his peripheral vision crept a beer glass surrounded by a large muff, fashioned ineptly from diseased baboon fur.

"Benny. How is the pimping business, hyeugh, hyeugh."

The laugh could only have come from Profane's onetime shipmate, Pig Bodine. Profane looked round. It had. Hyeugh, hyeugh approximates a laugh formed by putting the tonguetip under the top central incisors and squeezing guttural sounds out of the throat. It was, as Pig intended, horribly obscene.

"Old Pig. Aren't you missing movement?"

"I am AWOL. Pappy Hod the boatswain mate drove me over the hill." The best way to avoid SP's is to stay sober and with your own. Hence the Sailor's Grave.

"How is Pappy."

Pig told him how Pappy Hod and the barmaid he'd married had split up. She'd left and come to work at the Sailor's Grave.

That young wife, Paola. She'd said sixteen, but no way of telling because she'd been born just before the war and the building with her records destroyed, like most other buildings on the island of Malta.

Profane had been there when they met: the Metro Bar, on Strait Street. The Gut. Valletta, Malta.

"Chicago," from Pappy Hod in his gangster voice. "You heard of Chicago," meanwhile reaching sinister inside his jumper, a standard act for Pappy Hod all around the Med's littoral. He would pull out a handkerchief and not a heater or gat after all, blow his nose and laugh at whatever girl it happened to be sitting across the table. American movies had given them stereotypes all, all but Paola Maijstral, who continued to regard him then with nostrils unflared, eyebrows at dead center. Pappy ended up borrowing 500 for 700 from Mac the cook's slush fund to bring Paola to the States.

Maybe it had only been a way for her to get to America - every Mediterranean barmaid's daftness - where there was enough food, warm clothes, heat all the time, buildings all in one piece. Pappy was to lie about her age to get her into the country. She could be any age she wanted. And you suspected any nationality, for Paola knew scraps it seemed of all tongues.

Pappy Hod had described her for the deck apes' amusement down in the boatswain's locker of the U.S.S. Scaffold. Speaking the while however with a peculiar

tenderness, as of slowly coming aware, maybe even as the yarn unlaaid, that sex might be more of a mystery than he'd foreseen and he would not after all know the score because that kind of score wasn't written down in numbers. Which after forty-five years was nothing for any riggish Pappy Hod to be finding out.

"Good stuff," said Pig aside. Profane looked toward the back of the Sailor's Grave and saw her approaching now through the night's accumulated smoke. She looked like an East Main barmaid. What was it about the prairie hare in the snow, the tiger in tall grass and sunlight?

She smiled at Profane: sad, with an effort.

"You come back to re-enlist?"

"Just passing," Profane said.

"You come with me to the west coast," Pig said. "Ain't an SP car made that can take my Harley."

"Look, look," cried little Ploy, hopping up and down on one foot. "Not now, you guys. Stand by." He pointed. Mrs. Buffo had materialized on the bar, in her kimono. A hush fell over the place. There was a momentary truce between the jarheads and sailors blocking the doorway.

"Boys," Mrs. Buffo announced, "it's Christmas Eve." She produced the boatswain's pipe and began to play. The first notes quavered out fervent and flutelike over widened eyes and gaping mouths. Everyone in the Sailor's Grave listened awestruck, realizing gradually that she was playing *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*, within the limited range of the boatswain's pipe. From way in the back, a young reserve who had once done night club acts around Philly began to sing softly along. Ploy's eyes shone. "It is the voice of an angel," he said.

They had reached the part that goes "Peace on the earth, good will to men, From Heav'n's all-gracious king," when Pig, a militant atheist, decided he could stand it no longer. "That," he announced in, a loud voice, "sounds like Chow Down." Mrs. Buffo and the reserve fell silent. A second passed before anybody got the message.

"Suck Hour!" screamed Ploy.

Which kind of broke the spell. The quick-thinking inmates of the Impulsive somehow coalesced in the sudden milling around of jolly jack tars, hoisted Ploy bodily and rushed with the little fellow toward the nearest nipple, in the van of the attack.

Mrs. Buffo, poised on her rampart like the trumpeter of Cracow, took the full impact of the onslaught, toppling over backwards into an ice-tub as the first wave came hurtling over the bar. Ploy, hands outstretched, was propelled over the top. He caught on to one of the tap handles and simultaneously his shipmates let go; his momentum carried him and the handle in a downward arc: beer began to gush from the foam rubber breast in a white cascade, washing over Ploy, Mrs. Buffo and two dozen sailors who had come around behind the bar in a flanking action and who were now battering one another into insensibility. The group who had carried Ploy over spread out and tried to corner more beer taps. Ploy's leading petty officer was on hands and knees holding Ploy's feet, ready to pull them out from under him, and take his striker's place when Ploy had had enough. The Impulsive detachment in their charge had formed a flying wedge. In their wake and through the breach clambered at least sixty more slaving bluejackets, kicking, clawing, side-arming, bellowing uproariously; some swinging beer bottles to clear a path.

Profane sat at the end of the bar, watching hand-tooled sea boots, bell-bottoms, rolled up levi cuffs; every now and again a drooling face at the end of a fallen body; broken beer bottles, tiny sawdust storms.

Soon he looked over; Paola was there, arms around his leg, cheek pressed against the black denim.

"It's awful," she said.

"Oh," said Profane. He patted her head.

"Peace," she sighed. "Isn't that what we all want, Benny? Just a little peace. Nobody jumping out and biting you on the ass."

"Hush," said Profane, "look: someone has just walloped Dewey Gland in the stomach with his own guitar."

Paola murmured against his leg. They sat quiet, without raising their eyes to watch the carnage going on above them. Mrs. Buffo had undertaken a crying jag. Inhuman blubberings beat against and rose from behind the old imitation mahogany of the bar.

Pig had moved aside two dozen beer glasses and seated himself on a ledge behind the bar. In times of crisis he preferred to sit in as voyeur. He gazed eagerly as his shipmates grappled shoatlike after the seven geysers below him. Beer had soaked down most of the sawdust behind the bar: skirmishes and amateur footwork were now scribbling it into alien hieroglyphics.

Outside came sirens, whistles, running feet. "Oh, oh," said Pig. He hopped down from the shelf, made his way around the end of the bar to Profane and Paola. "Hey, ace," he said, cool and slitting his eyes as if the wind blew into them. "The sheriff is coming."

"Back way," said Profane.

"Bring the broad," said Pig.



The three of them ran broken-field through a roomful of teeming bodies. On the way they picked up Dewey Gland. By the time the Shore Patrol had crashed into the Sailor's Grave, night sticks flailing, the four found themselves running down an alley parallel to East Main. "Where we going," Profane said. "The way we're heading," said Pig. "Move your ass."