



## Review

**Elke Brems, Orsolya Réthelyi and Ton van Kalmthout (eds.), *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017)**

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This volume of essays originates in the project CODL (Circulation of Dutch Literature, now renamed Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries, 2012-2015), which was funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The title 'Doing Double Dutch' refers to 'a popular rope-skipping game in which two people turn two long jump ropes in opposite directions while a third person jumps them'. The editors consider this a 'fitting metaphor for how literature circulates internationally: two dynamic spheres, the source culture and the target culture, engage one another in a complex pattern of movement resulting in a new literary work, translation, or adaptation formed somewhere in the middle' (22). The essays in *Doing Double Dutch* are concerned with the *export* side of Dutch literature, rather than with the *import* part or its function as a *transit*, and it focuses on transfer, translation and adaptation, rather than on circulation in its broadest sense. In spite of the change of the project's title from 'Circulation of Dutch Literature' into 'Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries', the Latin part of Dutch literature, which was important at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as the French part is not addressed. This is understandable, since Latin and French literary works could be received in many countries without translation, since Latin was read all over Europe and French was very prominent in politics and justice. The volume does not discuss ideas of people learning another language and reading its literature in the original Latin, French, German, Spanish or English, to name a few.

In their introduction, entitled: 'Dutch on the Move: Studying the Circulation of Smaller Literatures', Brems, Réthelyi and Van Kalmthout ponder about 'large' and 'small' languages, indicating that 'networks of interconnection, communication and mobility play a very important role in making a language influential' (11). They add that export of books is indicative of that influence, and the role of a language as a centre or a periphery in a global language system and in people's multilingualism (12). Implicitly they transfer the debate on 'small' and 'large' languages to 'large' and 'small' literatures, although they devote a few lines to 'less translated languages' (14). It has been demonstrated that Dutch is a 'more translated language'.

As already mentioned, the volume limits itself to the ‘transnational circulation of literature’ (13). Using this terminology, the editors seem to engage in Transnational Studies as a relatively young discipline. However, they do not discuss this concept but deal with Translation Studies and with the notions of ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’ (keeping the original traits of the translated work, or adapting it to the target culture, ‘acculturation’). The less such adaptations are necessary and ‘the smaller the socio-cultural difference between the two countries is, the larger the susceptibility to the literature from the other’s country’ (14). They also take into account Cultural Transfer Studies, which deals with ‘moving an object in space’ (16) and with the import, export, transport of culture, ideas and works of art and literature (17), combining it with, among other ones, the polysystem theory of Itamar Even-Zohar, the Cultural Memory Studies applied by Ann Rigney, and John Bryant’s concept of the ‘fluid text’. However, the reader is not informed about what the editors themselves consider to be the defining theory for their volume, although they seem to start from the idea of an ‘international literary space’ (20) and from Cultural Transfer Studies.

In the second part, concerned with theory and methodology, Gillis Dorleijn (in ‘Studying the Circulation of Dutch Literature: Some Considerations’) lists twelve issues to be addressed in the research of cultural transfer, among which are the problems of transcending ‘mere’ description, the problem of theory and metaphors, which all fail short in the end, the problem of distinguishing between statements at the object level and the meta-level, the idea of culture as a set of socio-cultural practices exerted within or outside institutional structures, and the tenacity of national or local perspectives. Nico Wilterdink in his chapter ‘Breaching the Dyke: The International Reception of Contemporary Dutch Translated Literature’ adopts a sociological approach, discussing the production, distribution and reception of literature as part of wider social relations and networks, and the reception of contemporary Dutch literature in translation as a result of an increasing transnational communication.

Reina Meylaerts, Maud Gonne, Tessa Lobbes and Diana Sanz Roig offer a theoretical discussion about cultural transfer activities in Belgium during the interwar years and manage to successfully link this case study to the theory. As the editors state in their introduction: ‘By investigating the whole range of official, semi-official and hidden transfer activity, they demonstrate the complexity of the process of cultural transfer and the shortcomings of traditional methodological concepts’ (21). They focus on the (often overlooked) important role of cultural mediators, who translated, organized exhibitions, wrote reviews, performed plays, etc. Research into the role of these mediators may nuance the idea of ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’ cultures, and adds to the understanding of the complexity and the dynamics of cultural exchange. In the final chapter (‘Is it Only the Original which Unfolds Anew in the Reception?’) of this part, Herbert Van Uffelen starts with the dynamic concept of reception studies and the idea of a two-way interaction in transfer studies: from source to target and vice versa, thereby pointing at the importance of the selection of the corpus in studying the reception of literature. For example, he points to the fact that certain selections of German translations of Dutch texts may cause ‘the influence of Dutch literature in German translation on Dutch literature’ (105) to be ignored.

The Case Studies of the third part discuss the presence of Hadewijch in France as a result of the film *Hadewijch* of 2009 (Veerle Fraters), the presence of *Elckerlijc* in Hungary (Orsolya Réthelyi), the canonicity of Vondel’s *Lucifer* and its reception in nineteenth-century Germany, twentieth-century South Africa and twentieth-century Indonesia (Chiara Beltrami Gottmer,

Marijke Meijer Drees, Marco Prandoni and Rita Schlusemann), and the cultural problems arising in translating *Lucifer* into Polish, as has been done for the first time in 2002 (Natalia Stachura). The next chapters treat the transfer of culture and ideology illustrated by the fictional characters of the Dutch novel by Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken, Sara Burgerhart (Jan Urbaniak), the ideologically loaded German adaptations of Hendrik Conscience's *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the reception of Louis Couperus' *De stille kracht* in the English-speaking world from 1921 to the present time (Caroline de Westenholz). Two essays deal with Willem Elsschot's short novel *Kaas*: Michel De Dobbelaar discusses its adaptation in the Soviet Union and the English-speaking countries, and Wilken Engelbrecht ('The Case of Kaas') explores its reception in the Czech language. Peter Kegel, Marion Prinse, Matthieu Sergier and Marc van Zoggel deal with the international resonance of W.F. Hermans's novel *De donkere kamer van Damocles* from 1958, which was translated into English, French, the Scandinavian languages, Polish, German, Greek, Spanish, Czech, Chinese and Croatian. The authors discuss how each translation functioned in a specific political-historical context. The last two chapters deal with the cultural transfer of Dimitri Verhulst's novel *De helaasheid der dingen* (Elke Brems, Pieter Boulogne and Stéphanie Vanasten), and with the role of online book reviews in the transmission of Dutch literature in the English-speaking world (Suzanne van Putten-Brons and Peter Boot).

The tripartite division of introduction, methodology and theory, and case studies gives us the opportunity to draw some further thoughts. 'Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries' deals with the reception of literature written in Dutch in mainly Germany and the Eastern European, but also in the English-speaking countries. Dutch literature enjoys an increasing dissemination, which is partly due to present-day globalization, and the resulting increasing cultural cohesion and even (some) uniformity of the (Western) world. The gap between source and target languages is decreasing, and therefore works of literature from foreign countries are more easily received. What remains somewhat underexposed in this volume is the role of publishers, the government and marketeers, who undoubtedly foster the dissemination of Dutch literature, as well as the role of readers. Perhaps this might be one of the clues to tackle the problem of the difference in international resonance between Dutch literature from the Netherlands and that from Flanders, at which the editors hint in their introduction. It would have advanced the coherence of the volume if the theoretical and methodological issues discussed in the second part of the book would to a larger extent be incorporated into the third part of the case studies. Yet, *Doing Double Dutch* offers a good overview of the transnational reception of literature written in Dutch across Europe and in Indonesia.