DOING DOUBLE DUTCH

THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF LITERATURE FROM THE LOW COUNTRIES

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Leuven University Press
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CHAPTER 2

Studying the Circulation of Dutch Literature

Some Considerations

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This volume presents various contributions to the fascinating field of Cultural Transfer research. Notwithstanding the clear differences in approach, focus, and theoretical or conceptual orientation, a common ground can be found in the results. The study of the circulation of Dutch literature as conducted in this book produces valuable general insights that might warrant further reflection. I will try to tease out a handful of common strands, on the object level, regarding the specific processes studied, but also on the level of approach and methodology. In considerations like these, it is probably most appropriate to focus on the later, so I will take methodological considerations as a starting point and intersperse the discussion with specific observations drawn from the topics addressed in the papers compiled in this volume. For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will proceed point-by-point.

THE PROBLEM OF DESCRIPTION

Research on cultural transfer, including within Translation Studies, has the tendency to limit itself to pure description. That is understandable because processes of cultural transfer can only be studied if the data have been carefully assembled through archival work (publisher archives, correspondence between intermediaries, translators, authors, critics – all addressing the question ‘what are the mediation processes?’), library searches, newspaper depositories and other databases (‘what are the reception patterns?’), or comparisons between the source text and adaptations (‘what is left out, added, rearranged?’ paying special attention to the paratexts and the material presentation). But such dry descriptions of intermediary and recep-
tion situations in diverse contexts of the adaptation mechanism, as useful as they may be in themselves, ring somewhat hollow if no effort is made to formulate broader and interesting research questions or to posit a guiding hypothesis.¹

The problem is of course that without description the researcher is left empty-handed. This is why collecting many descriptions together can be productive: it allows us to inductively discern broad patterns that say something about transfer processes in general, or about the specific characteristics of particular cultural settings. Take, for example, the various articles about how Elsschot’s *Kaas* [*Cheese*] found its way to the former Soviet countries. Together, they give a broader perspective of the general mechanisms of and prerequisites for the process of intermediation and provide analogues of how the work was presented and received in Communist nations, whether it was to support the regime of the target culture or function as a horrific example of ‘capitalist decline’. These cues are made available to the reader via paratexts. (Indeed, we learn that the mediator (translator) and readers in the target culture were accustomed to taking these ideological ‘additions’ with a grain of salt, sometimes to the extent of mentally dismissing them entirely.)

A case study can also be a way of providing a concrete illustration of a more expansive research project. Or both types of research (macro and micro) can enhance one another in fruitful ways. Wilterdink formulates a hypothetical insight (one of his ‘five hypothetical explanations’ for the growing interest in contemporary Dutch literature abroad) about translation success thus: a flourishing domestic market is ‘an important condition for literary export’. Does Wilterdink’s hypothesis hold when confronted with Engelbrecht’s findings on the Czech book market before the war and the not-insignificant place Dutch literature held in it? It appears so. In the 1930s, literary production in the Netherlands flourished – certainly where the novel (and especially popular fiction) is concerned – partially thanks to an avid middle-class reading public. This in itself supports Wilterdink’s observation, but there is more. Thanks to a flourishing reading culture among the ‘stable middle class’ at the time, Czechoslovakia also enjoyed a robust book market, including strong sales of popular books. There is an evident homology between the two markets and reading cultures, which likely was a factor contributing to the success of Dutch literature in Czech translation.

As far as the methodological status of descriptions and case studies is concerned, they should ultimately be understood as works-in-progress to be refined in subsequent academic work, or as preliminary studies in route to more problem-driven and hypothesis-driven research. As Wilterdink puts it, his research ‘could serve as a framework for more detailed research’. But the opposite is also true: the detail-oriented research compiled here inspires us precisely to reach towards larger, broader research questions (and to find suitable methods to do so).
THE PROBLEM OF THEORY (AND METAPHOR)
Alongside the danger of getting bogged down in description and case studies is the threat of ‘theory’. In Cultural Studies, and thus also in the study of cultural transfer, there is a tendency to introduce a (novel) collection of concepts that serves to shed light on a certain cultural situation. This situation is presented, as it were, in terms of theoretical concepts. The danger with this is that we remain stuck in a restatement of something we already know in other terms. The theory serves only as a rubber stamp and fails to fulfill its essential function, namely, to be an instrument for formulating questions or hypotheses that respond to or can be tested against the data under scrutiny. Luckily, the contributions in this book are largely free of this purely conceptual use of ‘theory’.

Some contributions, however, do show a tendency to use metaphors that seem to want to function as a theoretical notion. The question is how advantageous this really is. Walter Benjamin’s image of the ‘afterlife’ of a text is a case-in-point, as are André Lefevere’s ‘channel’ and ‘window’ metaphors with respect to translations. Within the essays of both cultural philosophers, these metaphors function well enough. But one could ask how wise it is to use them outside the context of an essay, particularly when the metaphor creates the suggestion of a theoretical concept. The ‘afterlife’ of a text, separated from the original, can only live as a concept if it has been undergirded with theoretical and empirical insights from Adaptation Studies, which, among other things, teaches us that each reception context transforms a (translated, modified, adapted) text according to the rules that apply to that particular circuit. This volume contains excellent examples of such research (and I will soon return to them). Concerning the ‘window’ and ‘channel’ metaphors, Lefevere himself deemed the ‘translation as a window opened to another world’ metaphor to be a pious platitude, preferring ‘channel’ instead: ‘foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it, and even contribute to subverting it’. This speaks to a sympathetic vision of the critical function of (translated) literature. But how to determine this critical effect (of a foreign work) remains altogether unclear. Using ‘window’ and ‘channel’ metaphors implies a value judgment and at the very least a general (operationalized) measure by which to determine the nature of cultural penetration. (The fact that cultural import in totalitarian states was surveilled with Argus-like rigor for possible subverting effects, as De Dobbeleer in this volume shows so well, is another, empirical question.)

OBJECT LEVEL AND META-LEVEL
The points in the above heading call out a two-part division in research levels which lies, in fact, at the basis of all research in the study of culture. Culture (processes, interactions, participants’ discourse, text revisions made by an adapter and all kinds of other phenomena) is the object of research. The
researcher then makes claims about these things at the meta-level. There is thus a fundamental difference between statements (originating from the cultural participants) at the object level and statements at the meta-level (originating from the researcher, informed by his theoretical framework, about the object). Building on this thought, one must also be aware that all kinds of cultural divisions, classifications, characterizations, hierarchies, genres – literature versus non-literature, for example – are constructions produced by the culture (i.e. the cultural participants) one is studying. They are thus to be situated at the object level. As mentioned, these differentiations are made by those participating in a culture; they must not be adopted as self-evident by the researcher. Rather, an effort must be made to study how they function in the object culture. The object, in other words, is a socio-cultural practice around which the researcher constructs his research questions and hypotheses (which, again, are also constructions but then on the meta-level).

CULTURE AS A SET OF SOCIAL-CULTURAL PRACTICES

The contributions in this book provide many good examples of the aspects of socio-cultural practices: the behavior and motivations of bloggers writing on Dutch literature and their networks; the quantitative patterns in translation flows; the transmission processes and the intermediaries involved in these flows; adaptations of Dutch works in diverse cultures – all of which have their own (political, economic, religious and literary) context and reception, which are largely determined by the perception patterns and interests of the actors and institutions involved (see the contribution by Hermann on Conscience’s *De Vlaamse leeuw* [*The Lion of Flanders*]); the niches of Christian spirituality and poststructuralist philosophy (Hadewijch alternatively as ‘orthodox nun’ and ‘free-spirited heretic’, as described by Fraeters). Researchers no longer ask whether an adaptation has done justice to its source text, as was once fashionable in Translation Studies, nor whether its reception was justified. Rather, as in the cases of Conscience and Hadewijch, they explore the behavior and motivations of the adapters or critics in the adaptation and reception process and the contextual factors that affect them.

These socio-cultural practices comprise all actions, including actors’ speech acts. These actors form a community and can be explicitly linked to one another as part of a network, or indirectly associated in some way through the positions they occupy in the field and through the relations these positions entail. That is, a translator can have no actual contact with another translator but the two can still be linked because both find themselves in a particular position as translators (in relation to writers, publishers and literature foundations). And yet when it comes to prestige they may find themselves in different positions (one may have won a prestigious prize for translators, the other may have only just debuted or may translate exclusively for Harlequin’s
Romances). Another dimension must be added to this conception of network relationships and so-called objective relations, namely, the perceptions of the actors and their accompanying logics of action (which could also be called their ‘conceptions of literature’). Depending on their position and associated relations, actors perceive reality in a certain way and make certain distinctions that are brought into interaction with the world in which they circulate. A translator makes a distinction between various types of publishers – publisher A, which has a well-regarded literary backlist and publisher B, which publishes exclusively commercial titles in translation – a distinction that the average reader probably would not be so quick to make. Cognition and action are thus closely connected with one another. And the actors are connected with one another, too, in what we call a world (or a field). In brief, a culture is thus understood as a collection of social-cultural practices expressed through actors that are connected to one another in a world, or field, and whose cognition and logics of action (or their conceptions of art) are determined by schemata that interact with these practices.

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES
To this we must add the idea of institutions as conglomerates of actors with shared practices, logics and cognitive schemata. In the literary world, this refers to such literary institutions as the (literary) publishing house (not just one specific publisher but the whole branch), the book market, literary criticism, literary education, the literary agency, etc. In the history of the literary world from the late-eighteenth century onward, we can speak of an increasing autonomy combined with an increase of structuring and differentiation, according to which institutional roles are divided. Early on, the publishing house, publisher and book store were one single entity; later they became separate institutions. Likewise, while publishing houses once published literary work alongside textbooks or juridical titles, they later gave way to specialized literary publishing houses. Thus, the literary world and the extent to which it is institutionalized is dynamic and in permanent development, even if some measure of institutionalization exerts a stabilizing effect. The literary world is an order which is determined by institutions. Actors act within (and between) these institutions and are always influenced by institutional logics.

In the useful methodological comments made by Meylaerts et al. on the analysis of cultural transfer, the institutional dimension of culture (and cultural transfer) are thematized clearly, especially when the ‘different levels of analysis’ are discussed. One of these levels concerns networks and the actor’s place within it (in this case, the mediator), whose transfer activities are facilitated or controlled by these networks. The characteristics of the actors (the mediators) are also analyzed in an institutional light: in this analysis, the focus is not on their broader biographical traits but rather on a ‘socio-biography’ or
better, their ‘social and biographic trajectories’ – the successive positions of a mediator and his perceptions in the various fields. Wilterdink approaches the transmission and reception of Dutch literature from a sociological perspective by which ‘the production, distribution and reception of literature is seen as being part of, and embedded in social relations or social networks of different scope, ranging from micro to macro’. In these networks (including those that are connected with organizational structures and policies), translators, publishers, literary agents, booksellers, literary critics and academic literary specialists all participate. Many of these actors and institutional settings are addressed in other contributions in this volume. Engelbrecht, for instance, provides a sort of social biography of two translators who did much to expand Dutch literature in Czechoslovakia. The ‘social’ characteristics he calls out for one of them include her education (which provides her with cultural capital), and her contacts via a small national network around an important Czech writer, which in turn fed into a larger international network of like-minded Francophone writers including Maurice Maeterlinck and Emile Verhaeren, both from Flemish households, which in turn led to contact with Dutch (and which provide her with symbolic capital). Her marriage to a leading politician and her decision to relocate to the political and cultural capital city of Paris further increased her status. Her relationships with the most prominent publishing houses and the (commercial) success of her translations meant that whatever she put forward to translate was easily accepted for publication. In this way, positions, behavior and the habitus of the translator can be interpreted from an institutional perspective.

EMBEDDEDNESS OF THE CULTURAL FIELDS
The literary (or cultural) field exists within other fields, particularly within the so-called fields of power: politics, state, market, religion. Despite the cultural world being relatively autonomous, with its own institutions, logics and even classification and value criteria and so forth, it is always embedded in fields of power. These fields exert influence (via rules, laws, financial constraints or subsidies and ideological or religious norms), which in turn can be affected by all kinds of cultural-identity conglomerates (variables such as nation, religion, gender and ethnicity). We can also appropriate the general institutional systems used by Patricia Thornton, William Ocasio and Michael Lounsbury from a more abstract Institutional Logics perspective: family, religion, state, market, profession and corporation. An important consequence of this is that cultural worlds usually have a national basis. Of course, there is also a transnational cultural world – the World Republic of Letters, for example, in which international streams of cultural (literary) goods are mediated. There are transnational cultural networks just as there are language-linked worlds that transcend the nation – such as the Netherlands and Flanders – or various
language-linked cultures within a nation – such as Belgium (see Meylaerts et al.). But even in these translational or transcultural structures, the national perspective plays a role. I will return to this point later in this article.

Subsidies for translators or translation projects are an important factor in the transfer of a book or an author to a new language area and can in large part be held responsible for the success of Dutch literature abroad at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century (see, for instance, Wilterdink). At the same time, the publically-funded foundation that provides these subsidies is dependent on the government for its financing and general policy goals. Censorship is another known phenomenon in which governments take part in a regulating capacity, this time in a negative sense. Legitimization of the norms of a totalitarian regime via paratexts in a published translation – for instance quoting Lenin in the introduction to a Soviet publication of Cheese (see De Dobbeleer in this volume) – is discussed in a number of contributions in this volume. The open approach to the translation of popular literature in the Czech market by which names were replaced with their Czech equivalents and the story was even resituated in Czech surroundings was undoubtedly meant to reach a broader readership and thus served economic purposes (Engelbrecht). The contributions on Vondel’s Lucifer show just how much the reception of a work varies across nationally-embedded frames. In this sense, in Poland we can speak of misreading Lucifer as ‘non-fiction literature’; through the mediation of a study about the figure of Lucifer, Vondel’s play is read as ‘a theological work’ popular in Catholic internet portals and Jesuit magazines, but also finds currency in ‘Satanist’ circles (as Stachura states in this volume). In Germany, Vondel appears as part of a broader German literature and as a proponent of the universalization of the national: he functions as an example of a ‘genuine central European dramatist’ and thus as an example of Weltliteratur. In South Africa, Vondel is woven into the (racist and politicized) discourse of ‘family kinship’ between South Africa and Afrikaans on the one hand and the Netherlands, Flanders and the Dutch language on the other (Beltrami Gottmer et al.). It is clear in all this that factors are in play from external fields (politics, state, religion, economy), all of which exert influence on the cultural and literary field.

SEGMENTATION OF A CULTURAL (OR LITERARY) FIELD
The above title focuses attention on the notion that a culture, but also each cultural segment within it (the cultural or literary field), is not homogenous. This is the case in two respects: 1.) Each field is a world of mutual cooperation, negotiation, competition, struggle. 2.) Within a field, various subfields can be found – individual circuits with their own logics and their own conceptions of art. These circuits can come into relation with one another and have permeable walls, or be relatively autonomous. This touches once again on the notion
of institutional structures. Moreover, it is clear that at this point there is still much conceptual work to be done: How do we delineate subsystems, subfields, discourse segments? What are their internal structures? How are they related to other circuits? Transmission of culture or literature is not carried out so much from country A to country B (for instance, from the Netherlands or Flanders to Germany), but, where the source culture is concerned, to and from a specific segment within those cultures. Meylaerts et al.’s criticism that ‘actual studies in cultural transfer mostly focus on exchanges between two national cultures […] thus reproducing the idea of “static” national entities’ touches on this same point. Other articles in this volume also speak to the idea that each culture (and within it, each cultural or literary field) has segments with their own behavioral norm patterns, value hierarchies and conceptions of literature: Jesuits and Satanists in Poland (see Stachura in this volume); different norms around a translation’s fidelity to the source text for highbrow versus popular literature sectors (Engelbrecht); the various specific niches – Catholic spirituality and poststructuralist philosophy – in which the reception of Hadewijch was inscribed in France (Fraeters); or the circuit of the subfield of young adult literature, which has its own history altogether (Hermann).

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL INTERACTION: BELIEF, JUSTIFICATION, IDENTITY

Not all actions involved in cultural transfer are spontaneous or undirected, of course. Rather, they are motivated by various substantively grounded imperatives (cultural or ideological ideals, etc.) and are channeled by certain mechanisms. This involves the very complex question of identifying the relevant moving parts in the cultural world, or in the worlds between actors. When we apply this perspective to culture and literature – acknowledging that similar mechanisms are at work in other areas – then at least three related concepts become relevant. The first involves belief. Participants in a culture (for example, those active in the literary world or sub-world) share a belief in the values they speak of and act on, within the construction we just discussed. This involves a fundamental cultural, sociological and anthropological insight that emphasizes once again the difference between object level and meta-level. At the object level, belief in distinctions, hierarchies, classifications, genres, values and ideals reigns. Researchers study these classifications, statements, behaviors, etc., at the meta-level (which, of course, is itself not unproblematic in that we researchers also are implicated in our own value-laden beliefs.)

The second concept is justification (or legitimization or consecration). Cultural actions are aimed at the justification of cultural products (‘this text is valuable’), the justification of specific ways of reading (‘this text should be read in this way’) and the justification of the right to make authoritative statements about valuable texts and about the right modes of reading. Within culture, it
is clear that there are various value regimes with their own justifications.\(^7\)

The third concept is comprised of norms and identity. Belief in values and the justification of values paired with this are so important because actors use them as a basis for establishing norms that go to the essence of what they are in their own eyes, what their community is, what their attitude to life is – in short, their personal and collective identity. This goes beyond the purely literary, of course, and has to do with gender, family, regional, social and ethnic origins and religious or ideological views.

This point certainly deserves further explanation, but treating even the smallest part of the expansive literature on the topic would bring us too far afield. At the same time, the contributions collected in this volume are full of illustrations of such concepts and mechanisms.

**CULTURAL TRANSFER: THE WORLD-SYSTEM OF CULTURES**

The eight interrelated methodological and theoretical points described above, when taken together with the various contributions in this book, are fundamental to the practice of cultural transfer research. There are other approaches, of course. For instance, the contributions by Meylaerts et al. and Wilterdink put forward essential insights from Cultural Transfer Studies and a cultural-sociological approach respectively, both of which are derived from the theory of the literary world-system. Building on their useful remarks, I would like to emphasize two aspects. Firstly, that each world is structured according to the eight points mentioned above. For the study of cultural transfer on the level of target culture or receiving culture, the goal is to examine all relevant factors. Characteristics of a world can explain the nature of the transfer within that world, or even its very existence. Secondly, the relationship between the two or more worlds must be taken into account. The theory of the world system of cultures or literatures, with its centrality hypothesis positing the unequal distribution of cultural power between central, semi-peripheral and peripheral cultural areas, is indispensable in this regard.\(^8\) This transnational space is actually a world of its own. To be clear, the Dutch-language language area has been peripheral or semi-peripheral for centuries, which implies that there is a relatively large amount of import and little export. In this transnational perspective as well, the concept of ‘world’ or ‘field’ maintains its justification through socio-cultural practices and all manners of field-specific and general societal obstacles and advantages.\(^9\)

**THE TENACITY OF LOCAL/NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

Moreover, the transnational perspective can easily lead to misunderstandings. It is often said that globalization has shifted academic research and education into a post-national context and that the nation-state is losing its unique position as a benchmark.\(^10\) That may be so, but we must not allow ourselves to
be swept away by an unchecked post-nationalist idealism. The article in this volume by Beltrami Gottmer et al. seems to speak to this phenomenon. In it, the argument is made that cultural transfer ‘analyses the non-national aspects of culture and in fact denies the concept of the national’. Cultural transfer, according to these authors, must be described as ‘border-free’, which implies ‘thinking beyond or outside of national categories’. It is obvious that cultural transfer should not be seen solely as a nationally-embedded object. As Mey-laerts et al. point out, it is crucial to take ‘the reciprocity of transfers on all the cultures, including the source culture’ into account. Meanwhile, most of the contributions collected here show that it is the national context – particularly when it comes to the context of reception, and thus also national (and nation-alistic) parameters – that is most important, and that it engenders all kinds of material, political and symbolic borders. The irony is that Beltrami Gottmer et al. confirm this in the cases they choose to highlight: their analyses of the reception of Vondel in Germany, South Africa and the Dutch East Indies are all situated within locally-rooted frames.

Recognizing that the national or local perspective is operative is of utmost importance when studying cultural transfer. The well-known paradox of globalization is at work here as well: globalizing tendencies also exert a localizing effect. Cultural globalization may be a fact, but cultures differ in the extent to which they process these effects. It is precisely the local processing mechanisms that are most important in much of transcultural research, and that is the case for this volume, too. Despite the increasing international orientation of the last half century, cultural practices (including the media) remain strongly tied to national institutions. The perceptions of actors are also determined by this local perspective, inter alia through the media and through national cultural and education policy. Additionally, the national frame of reference determines to a large extent the perspective with which many actors approach literature: the selection of external elements (brought in from foreign literatures) and their functioning in a target culture depend on local classification and hierarchization strategies. Paradoxically, a transnational or transcultural approach forces us to look very closely at local mechanisms, actors, networks and institutions.

Likewise, Wilterdink’s contribution shows how the reception of Dutch literature differs strongly per (national or language) area. He provides an explanation for this on the basis of the specific characteristics of each receiving area (Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States) and on the basis of the characteristics of the relationship between the source and target culture in terms of their different positions in the world system of cultures and their shared ‘specific social (cultural, economic, political) relations’. Instances of reception are social facts; they are part of cultural exchange and must be understood in terms of power relations both an intercultural/transnational respect (the prestige of the source culture) and in a national respect, because upon arrival in a target country, a certain re-presentation of the source coun-
try takes place, to which local perceptions, conceptions and positions then respond. The field – the local literary world – is thereby a national entity that is crucial in transnational processes of mediating, processing and assigning meaning and value.13

The logic of reception in a target culture is thus once again dependent on specific groups in specific sub-segments of the cultural world (see point 7). To speak of the ‘reception’ of a foreign work in a national culture – reception is often spoken of in such broad terms, e.g. ‘Dutch literature in Germany’ – is thus inadequate. Among whom, in which segment, in which group, in which institutional setting precisely does the reception take place, and what are the interests of the receiving group and the intermediary actors? In this respect, it is important to distinguish three circles in which the reception and visibility of migrating cultural products (including authors, or literature) takes place in the target culture. This is what Bevers, Heilbron and Wilterdink do when they speak of the Netherlands: the protected Dutch circuit abroad (Dutch actors take the lead here), the broader circle of the art world (which includes the literary world) in the receiving country (local actors in a sphere of limited production take the lead here) and, finally, the broader public in the receiving country that welcomes a writer or a book into its fold (the national media in the target culture take the lead here).14 Meanwhile, specific consecration agents (or justification agents) are also involved (reputable or niche publishers, university Dutch departments with a limited impact, a television show with a broad appeal, etc.). The mediators and their often-overlapping roles: translator, critic, agent, lecturer, editor (see Meylaerts et al. in particular) deserve special attention in this respect. Additionally, the mediator must adjust to the dominant norms of the field or subfield into which he is introducing the foreign author, and adapt to these norms when acting strategically. Here we converge once again with the local perspective, or a crossway of local perspectives.15

POLICY
This volume illustrates the richness of a programmatic approach. By compiling studies on the circulation of Dutch literature (and grouping them together in this volume), new academic insights and new research questions emerge (see point 1 above). The nice thing about this is that the research results presented here can also be used to inform policy. Here, the national perspective comes to the forefront once again. Take, for example, the contribution by Wilterdink. His findings show how a targeted cultural policy on the 1993 Frankfurter Buchmesse was an important factor for the success of Dutch literature abroad, particularly for the ‘Dutch wave’ in Germany.16 But the study also signals a ‘recent tendency of declining foreign interest in Dutch literature’.17 The focus in this volume on the ways in which Dutch literature circulates abroad, the prerequisites for success that held in the past, and a comparison of the con-
ditions then and now all can provide lessons for a targeted policy, the goal being to make a new Dutch wave possible. The importance of studying the circulation of Dutch literature extends beyond academics. 

And let us not forget that many cultural transfer researchers are also lecturers and are engaged in one way or another in literary life (and are thus themselves actors at the object level). They lecture, for instance, on Dutch literature at universities abroad, compile reading lists, select works to be discussed, provide interpretation frameworks, invite literary authors as guest speakers, translate Dutch works with students or on their own, involve themselves in national (and foreign) debates on Dutch literature, and so forth. In other words, they make normative choices and become mediators themselves. Insights gained from research – always keeping in mind the approach described in the points above and maintaining a strict distinction between the two levels in order to separate normativity from objective analysis as much as possible – can also be put to use when acting as a mediator.

**REVERSING THE PERSPECTIVE**

Another lesson that can be drawn from the study of the circulation of Dutch literature once again has to do with the national perspective. Research on the dissemination of one literature (Dutch literature) shows time and again how the characteristics of the receiving national, local contexts constitute the frames within which (and provide the rules by which) Dutch literature is produced, processed, adapted and received (or rejected). This volume focuses *inter alia* on Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Poland, the former Soviet Union, Czech/Czechoslovakia, Hungary, South Africa, and the Dutch East Indies, and there is currently also research available on Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Scandinavian countries. As mentioned, this has produced interesting scholarship. But taken as a whole, the image of Dutch literature in the world remains fragmented, unfocused or even quasi non-existent. In the final analysis, Dutch literature maintains its peripheral (or at best semi-peripheral) status and its visibility in the world system of cultures is negligible.

Nevertheless, the fact that foreign literature, including Dutch literature, is always processed according to the rules of the receiving culture (or a segment within it) leads us to a turn in perspective for transcultural research. The focus of this kind of research then shifts to transcultural exchange *within* a culture or cultural field (even more radically than what Meylaerts *et al.* call for). Dirk de Geest once noted that scholars of Dutch should not study and teach Dutch literature but rather should study, as their object, what he calls ‘literature in the Netherlands and Flanders’. This implies studying translated literature (and the way in which it is brought in by mediators) alongside non-translated literature in order to tease out how it functions in the process of literary negotiations, for instance with reference to conceptions of literature. ¹⁸ This, again,
concerns the national prospective, but also includes an analysis of the role of transcultural processes, which are also multicultural. Such an approach, as all transcultural research, will hopefully be well-served by the modest considerations presented here and find application as the interesting research program initiated by CODL moves forward.

NOTES
2 Cited in this volume by Michel De Dobbeleer in his article ‘A Communist Compromise: Introducing Willem Elsschot’s *Kaas* Soviet Style’.
4 Compare with D. Cannadine, *The Undivided Past: History Beyond Our Differences* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), which calls into question these variables (to which clan and civilization are added), particularly when they are used by historians to legitimize (politically-motivated) differences between ‘them and us’.
14 Bevers et al., Nederlandse kunst in de wereld, pp. 15-16.
15 Kalinowski, ‘Der französische Hölderlin’.
16 See also J. Heilbron and N. van Es, ‘In de wereldrepubliek der letteren’, in Bevers et al., Nederlandse kunst in de wereld, pp. 20-54.
17 See also N. Wilterdink, ‘Schrijvers en hun reputaties’, in Bevers et al., Nederlandse kunst in de wereld, pp. 96-146 (p. 145).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

