

DOING DOUBLE DUTCH

THE INTERNATIONAL
CIRCULATION OF
LITERATURE FROM
THE LOW COUNTRIES

ELKE BREMS
ORSOLYA RÉTHELYI
TON VAN KALMTHOUT (EDS)

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Edited by
Elke Brems, Orsolya Réthelyi and Ton van Kalmthout



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CHAPTER 15

'BaBié, zivoublé!'

Ideology and Cultural Transfer: *De donkere kamer van Damokles*

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Willem Frederik Hermans' 1958 novel *De donkere kamer van Damokles* [*The Dark Room of Damocles*] is widely regarded as one of the major contributions to post-war Dutch literature. In the ranking of popular books among secondary school students, the novel is an annual top-ten contender. 'Nederland Leest' [The Netherlands reads] is an event for the promotion of reading literature which is the Dutch equivalent of the American 'One Book, One City' campaign that originated in Chicago in 2001; in 2012 it centered around *De donkere kamer van Damokles*. In 2013, the 50th edition of the novel was published. Furthermore, Hermans' work appears to have played quite a significant role in a paradigm shift in historiography and subsequently in the public debate concerning the German occupation of the Netherlands (1940-1945). In post-war society, the behavior of the Dutch during the occupation was long considered a case of people having been either good or bad, black or white. Inspired by *De donkere kamer van Damokles* and other Dutch novels set in the Second World War, a different outlook on the events gained momentum: the occupation came to be seen as a period of confusion in which right and wrong were often inextricably tangled up.

Quite to Hermans' own surprise, *De donkere kamer van Damokles* gained both critical acclaim and commercial success. This caught the attention of foreign publishers. A first wave of translations appeared in the early 1960s, with editions in the United Kingdom (1962), France (1962) and the four Scandinavian countries Denmark (1961), Sweden (1962), Norway (1962) and Finland (1963). With a Polish edition (1994) as the sole exception, other translations only appeared after Hermans had passed away in 1995. New translations in French (2006) and English (2007) were substantially more successful than the ones in the 1960s. Furthermore, the novel was published





for the first time in German (2001), Greek (2005), Spanish (2009), Czech (2010), Chinese (2011), and Croatian (2015).

In this chapter, we will consider some of the translations mentioned above in the light of the political-historical context of the novel. One may assume that this ‘ideological’ aspect is in various ways of interest when examining a translation. For instance, the blending of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is in the novel not only illustrated by the chain of events and symbolized by the main character’s heterogeneous identity, but also reflected in the role given to the English and German languages and objects. A translator needs to account for the historical embeddedness of the novel and at the same time deal with the presence of a foreign language in the original edition, both in a strictly linguistic sense and with regard to the importance of this ‘heterolingualism’ for understanding and interpreting the work. Another aspect is the national embeddedness of the political-historical context of the novel. A reviewer needs to familiarize his reading public with this context and at the same time relate it to the situation in the readers’ and his own country.

These examples are all aspects of ‘cultural transfer’ and/or ‘cultural transmission’, broad and rather vague concepts but here understood in the strict definitions of the Groningen-based Studies on Cultural & Transmission series.¹ Cultural transfer is then defined as ‘the one-way activity of translating a literary text’, cultural transmission as ‘the reciprocal activity of sharing cultural and literary information’. We will discuss the aspects of cultural transfer and transmission outlined in the previous paragraph in two short cases, although in reversed order. First, we will present a frame of reference by briefly discussing the ideological impact of the novel in its country of origin. The first case will then consist of a comparison of the reception of *De donkere kamer van Damokles* in Sweden, Norway and Germany, three countries with greatly differing positions in the Second World War. In the second case, the questions regarding translation will be discussed with reference to the 2006 French translation by Daniel Cunin. We are aware that many more aspects of the cultural transfer and transmission of *De donkere kamer van Damokles* are worth investigating, but for now we will focus on these two, in the end rather separate, issues in order to illustrate the variety of possible approaches.

BLACK, WHITE, GREY: DE DONKERE KAMER VAN DAMOKLES AND THE NETHERLANDS

De donkere kamer van Damokles is the story of the adventures and strange behavior of the ‘weakling’ Henri Osewoudt, or in other words his (as it is called on the dust jacket of the 2007 English translation) ‘fateful wanderings through a sadistic universe’. In the course of the utterly chaotic and confusing circumstances of the first days, weeks and months of the Second World War, Osewoudt falls under the spell of his enigmatic look-a-like Dorbeck, at whose





request he carries out heroic missions for the Dutch Resistance, not hesitating to commit brutal acts and murder for the good cause. At the end of the war, though, Osewoudt is not being considered a 'hero'. On the contrary, he is accused of treachery and is imprisoned amidst war criminals. Dorbeck, the only person left who would be able to plead for his freedom, seems to have vanished into thin air. When his situation has become desperate, Osewoudt tries to escape, is shot by a guard and bleeds to death.

Among the many reviews that were written directly after the novel was published, only a few touched upon the ideological dimensions of the story. Moreover, reviewers who did so, were predominantly disapproving of the ethical or moral aspect of the book. *Algemeen Handelsblad*-critic Ben Stroman called *De donkere kamer van Damokles* 'one of the most convincing novels that have been written in our country during the last couple of years', but at the same time 'the most perfidious novel':

Perfidious, first and foremost, because it takes the years of occupation as a standard for life in general. [...] Hermans has situated his story within the context of the Second World War in order to be able to present his ideology. An ideology that is maliciously cynical, maliciously negative. And it is exactly this malice, this willfulness that turns this novel into a disgusting product.

Stroman concludes: 'With this novel, the morality of art has turned into immorality.'²

Socialist critic Jef Last, in an essay published in the periodical *De Nieuwe Stem*, gives an even stronger rejection of the novel. According to Last, Hermans writes 'a kind of literature which has as its main task to insinuate, to state that everybody else is in fact nothing but a clumsy fool, or incapable of doing anything at all'. Last fulminates in particular against Hermans' portrait of the Dutch resistance: 'All of us who commemorate our fallen comrades, cannot feel but assaulted by the novels written by mister Hermans, containing only treacherous, spineless, insignificant, incompetent, and at any rate bald resistance workers with body odour and bad breath.' Last situates *De donkere kamer van Damokles* in the category of moral pornography, 'with all apologies the bastards need for their evil. And since the bastards and the stinkers will always be the majority, we foresee a huge number of admiring readers.'³

In spite of these negative and rather grim reviews, a great many other critics ignored the ideological aspect of the novel and focused entirely on its literary value. The clever composition of the plot, the frantic pace of the narrative, and the cogent display of the philosophy and poetics of the author dominated the reception, leading many a reviewer to conclude that *De donkere kamer van Damokles* was Hermans' best novel so far. A similar trend can be detected in academic criticism.





Over the years, scholars have written a respectable number of sometimes highly interpretive articles, dissertations and other books on the novel.⁴ Popular subjects were the literary *Doppelgänger*-motive, the Wittgensteinian linguistic play, and the Modernist claim of the unknowability of reality. The pivotal question was whether the Dorbeck character was real or ultimately a delusion of the mentally unstable Osewoudt. In general, academic literary criticism treated the novel ‘as a jigsaw puzzle that with some tricks and maneuvers eventually could be solved’.⁵

The most interesting debates actually took place among historians. In his inaugural lecture of 1983, Hans Blom made a plea for a more analytical historiography of war instead of one concerned with moral issues of right and wrong. It landed on fertile ground in the following decades, culminating in the ground-breaking monograph *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [Grey Past: The Netherlands and the Second World War] (2001) by Chris van der Heijden. The author contested the official multivolume *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Second World War] (1969-1994) by L. de Jong. Contrary to De Jong, Van der Heijden did not highlight the ostensibly transparent choices and heroic or perfidious deeds of individuals. Instead, he focused on ‘the mentality of the people at the time’.

Referring to the depiction of the war in novels of authors like Gerard Reve, Harry Mulisch and especially Hermans, Van der Heijden concentrated on ‘the doubts, uncertainties, the grey between black and white’. Within this frame, Van der Heijden exposed ‘the coincidence, the clumsiness, the littleness’ of it all, and stated that in exceptional circumstances everything is always unrealistically magnified: ‘Fear is turned into anxiety, nerve into bravery, toughness becomes cruelty. Sceptics turn out to be cowards, boasters in action are wimps, and the wallflower of the group is the only one capable of proper action.’ In line with Hermans, Van der Heijden described the situation in the Netherlands above all as chaotic: ‘*Non luctor et emergo sed fluctuo et fluo*, a laborious splattering and sputtering is typical for the behavior of the large majority of the Dutch people during the first years of the war.’⁶

So although there were some outspoken political dimensions in the reception of the novel within the first ‘interpretive community’,⁷ emphasis was laid mainly on the technical aspects and superb achievement of the novel as a literary work of art. Academic literary criticism did not quite focus on ideological aspects either, but in historiography the depiction of the war and the behavior of individuals in *De donkere kamer van Damokles* and similar war novels played a vital role in the scientific debate.

LEGACY OF THE WAR: RECEPTION IN SWEDEN, NORWAY AND GERMANY

As briefly mentioned in our introduction, several translations of the novel were published in the early 1960s. Initially, a German edition was announced





as well, but Hermans was unhappy with the quality of the translation made by Johannes Piron.⁸ Instead, *Die Tränen der Akazien* (1968) [*De tranen der acacia's* (1949)], also set against the background of the Second World War, became his first novel published in Germany. Jürgen Hillner was responsible for the translation. It hardly gained any attention, according to Hillner this was because of the post-war circumstances in Germany: in the 1960s, Germans were tired of reading about the war.⁹ Although more translations of his works were published in the following years, Hermans remained largely unknown in Germany. This changed when *De donkere kamer van Damokles* was finally translated, by Waltraud Hüsmert. *Die Dunkelkammer des Damokles* (2001) was an instant success: the first print of 15,000 copies sold out within two months' time, making it an official bestseller.¹⁰

Hillner's statement suggests that the depiction of the Second World War in the novel may very well be a crucial factor here: in the 1960s, Germans were not ready for a 'grey' war novel, forty years later the time was right. We might find some support for this hypothesis by examining the reception of the novel in other countries, with a different history of processing the events of 1940-1945. Swedish and Norwegian critics, for instance, tried to interpret the novel by delving into the specific experience of the Second World War in the Netherlands and connecting this to the situation in their respective home countries. Sweden, Norway and Germany thus provide interesting cases, for every single one of them was involved differently in the war: Sweden remained neutral, Norway was occupied and Germany was the occupier. This resulted into three different 'grand narratives' in the post-war period.

According to the British historian Richard Overy, Swedish neutrality actually was a situation of 'permanent emergency':

Public opinion was divided over hostility to the Soviet Union and fear of, or dislike of, National Socialism. For the government, the delicate issue remained how far to go in rejecting or compromising German requirements without undermining Swedish independence.¹¹

In post-war Sweden there was little interest in the country's difficult position during the war. It was not integrated in the collective memory, because the Swedes could not relate to the classical elements characterizing this war, i.e. deportation, resistance, and Nazi persecution. According to historian Johan Östling, it was only during the 1990s that the socio-political narrative shifted towards a more universal approach of the Second World War.¹² Anyway, this narrative was not available in 1962 when the Swedish translation of *De donkere kamer van Damokles* was published.

The war had a more immediate and substantial impact on the mentality of post-war Norway. As Ole Kristian Grimnes states: 'The German invasion of Norway in 1940 came as a devastating shock to the Norwegians, who had





not participated in any war since 1814.¹³ Anti-German feelings only started to disappear gradually in the 1970s. Just a small part of the Norwegians had collaborated with the enemy, the majority of the inhabitants had sympathized with or even been a member of the resistance. The main narrative therefore was 'a resistance-oriented interpretation of the war years'. Norwegian historians 'did not have to face the difficult task of trying to reconcile political collaboration and resistance within the framework of an overall national narrative'.¹⁴

Germany was left destroyed and divided after the Second World War. There was hardly a German left who had not lost at least one family member, a friend or his home, and most of all there was the mental blow. As Bill Niven notes:

[F]or a long time, the main victims in the eyes of many West-Germans were the Germans themselves, who had been 'forced' to serve in Hitler's army, bombed by the Allies, treated unjustly in Soviet camps during and after the war.¹⁵

This self-perception persisted as long as the 1990s, when Germany finally came to grips with its National-Socialist past. The focus shifted towards guilt and responsibility at all levels, 'from the highest, namely Hitler himself, down to that of the "ordinary" German'. Various reasons can be seen as responsible for this change. Niven suggests it was a result of the unification of Germany, which 'brought to an end both the post-Hitler period and a certain way of looking at the Third Reich, one which was itself a product of German division, the Cold War, and conflicting political ideologies'.¹⁶ As Niven and Paver state: 'National Socialism became a legacy as of 8 May 1945, and to this day German memorialization concentrates almost obsessively on this legacy'.¹⁷ With these different afterlives of the Second World War in mind, let us now turn to the reception of Hermans' novel in Sweden, Norway and Germany.

The Swedish translation (1962), by Brita Dahlman, was titled *Mörkrummet*, extracting 'Damokles' from its title. The first literary critic to discuss the book was Folke Isaksson. His was the first of a total of twelve reviews. Three perspectives on the novel can be discerned in the Swedish reception: (1) the Second World War in Holland is of crucial importance for the novel's interpretation; (2) the War is partially important to grasp its message, but not vital; (3) the War merely serves as the background of the novel, the epistemological issues it contains are crucial. The first category is represented by just one review: U. Asplund discusses the German invasion in Holland and emphasizes the degree to which this had an impact on the daily life of Dutch citizens.¹⁸

The majority of the reviewers begin by giving information about the German occupation of the Netherlands but consider the war setting as merely a means for the author to convey more general, existentialist ideas, also in vogue in Swedish literature at the time. For example, Wallqvist initially remarks that





Mörkrummet shows how small retailers struggled to keep their stores open, but he eventually interprets the novel as a more general discussion about mankind. It thus positions itself amidst war literature ‘which is less concerned with the war itself and more with the position of man which is dramatized in war circumstances’.¹⁹ And reviewer ‘I.S.’ argues that the wartime setting of these novels contributes to the creation of an environment in which individuals become entangled in their own ideas and lost in the labyrinth of their existence.²⁰

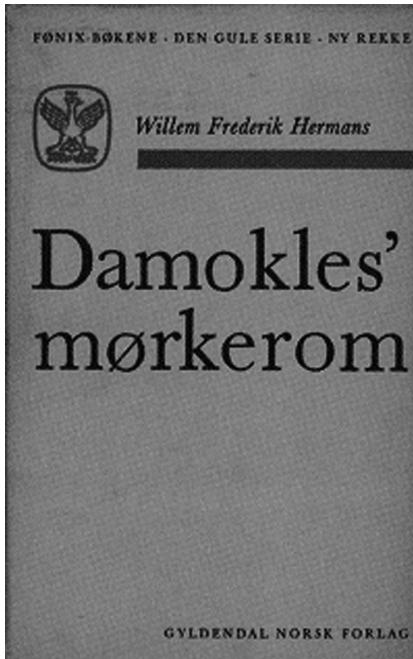


Figure 1. Book cover of the Norwegian translation by Bjørn Braaten of Hermans’ *De donkere kamer van Damokles* (1962)

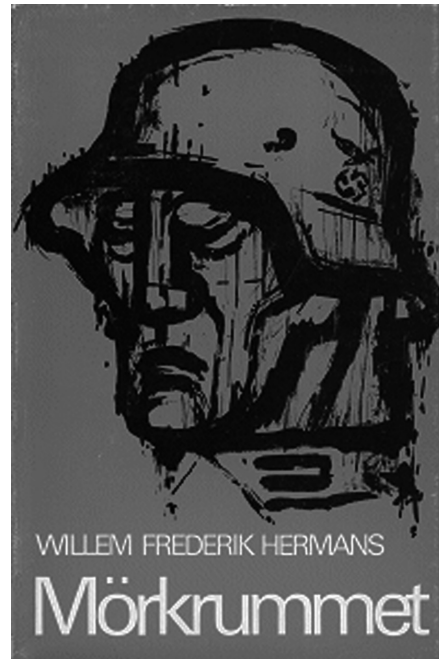


Figure 2. Book cover of the Swedish translation by Brita Dahlman of Hermans’ *De donkere kamer van Damokles* (1962)

In Norway, the novel was titled *Damokles’ Mørkerom*, a translation by Bjørn Braaten. The first reviewer who goes beyond the shallow interpretation of the novel as simply a representation of war time is Philip Houm. He praises the structure and composition and discerns a deeper, symbolic meaning.²¹ Egil Rasmussen states in a similar way that *De donkere kamer van Damokles* is more than just a war novel, although he does not elaborate on this.²² Niels Chr. Brøgger argues that the novel should be read as an inquiry into the identity of an individual.²³ However, the majority of the Norwegian critics found it difficult to interpret the work. Haavard Haavardsholm, for example, states that if the novel was intended to have some underlying, symbolic meaning, it must have ‘disappeared in the dark’.²⁴ Willy Dahl is confused as well: ‘What the writer eventually wants to convey to the reader is not easy to grasp.’ He cautiously presumes the





novel attempts to debunk the myth of the heroic resistance.²⁵

The emphasis on the Dutch resistance in many Norwegian reviews is an important deviation from the Swedish reception. Frequently discussed are the (lack of) efficiency of the Dutch underground, the ups and downs in the life of a resistance member and the possible motives Osewoudt has for joining this group. 'Home front' is a recurring notion in the Norwegian reception as well. In Norway, this is a wide-ranging concept, originating in the Second World War, and covering the resistance as an organized movement. Yet, the resistance is not the only war element being discussed: both the roles of the Jewish girl Marianne and the young SS member who talks to Osewoudt about the obsolescence of the humanistic concepts of right and wrong, are repeatedly mentioned. This differs from the Swedish reception, in which the young man is mentioned only once.²⁶

The reception of the 2001 German translation demonstrates a different attitude towards the legacy of the Second World War. Some of the reviews merely focus on the recent debates in the Netherlands: 'In the new, well-arranged post-war world, only in appearance is everything divided between good and bad, black and white.' Von Borman states that Hermans discusses a glorious theme of the Dutch post-war period: 'the patriotic resistance against "de Mof-fen"'.²⁷ And Jähner complains: 'In Holland, one willingly pushes aside that the National-Socialists were praised until the end, because there everything went smoothly like in no other West European country.'²⁸

Cees Nooteboom provided an epilogue for the German edition, in which he claims that *De donkere kamer van Damokles* created a thunderstorm in the Netherlands. Many critics incorporate this claim in their reviews and some of them add that the portrayal of the Dutch resistance in the novel 'as a grotesque, bloodstained joke, caused furious protests'.²⁹ This is in fact slightly exaggerated, since, as shown above, anger and protest were only present in a small section of the first interpretive community of *De donkere kamer van Damokles*.

Nevertheless, the altered mentality in both the Netherlands and Germany seems to have left its traces in the reception of the novel. German critics realize that neither the Dutch nor the Germans are to be judged as exclusively victims or perpetrators. This also clarifies why critics as Jähner and Henneberg stress that not every Dutchman (or -woman) was part of the resistance, and that in Germany not every person was a Nazi.³⁰ Although Hermans' philosophy can be considered separately from its origins in the author's experiences in the Second World War, like the Swedish critics had done, the German reviewers deliberately relate it to the German occupation of the Netherlands, although emphasizing other elements than the Norwegian critics tended to do.

Based on these observations, we may cautiously conclude that the difference in impact the Second World War has had in the three countries discussed, equally influenced the reception of *De donkere kamer van Damokles*. Sweden's neutrality during the war was responsible for the fact that it was not





until the 1980s that the war became incorporated in the nation's collective memory. The reception of *Mörkrummet* in 1962 reflects this, since in most cases the occupation is not seen as the fundamental theme of the novel; it merely functions as a backdrop for broader epistemological issues. Norwegian reception is almost diametrically opposed to this. Even now, the grand narrative of the Second World War in Norway is still largely a story of black-and-white, presenting the resistance and the collaboration as sheer good and evil. This leaves little room for a 'grey' narrative, as put forward by Hermans and picked up by historians like Van der Heijden. The reception of *Damokles' Mørkerom* mirrors this. By contrast, the grey image of the war that the novel sketches seems to have fitted perfectly in the changing grand narrative in Germany at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

'HETEROLINGUALISM' AND 'OTHERNESS': *LA CHAMBRE NOIRE DE DAMOCLÈS*

As was the case with Johannes Piron's translation of *De donkere kamer van Damokles*, Hermans was also dissatisfied with the first French translation (1962), by Maurice Beerblock. In the 1970s he terminated a contract with Philippe Noble when the translator did not respect deadlines.³¹ The 2006 French translation by Daniel Cunin hardly received media attention. Only after Milan Kundera had published an exultant review in *Le Monde* was the novel picked up by press and reading public.³² In what follows we will use this French translation in order to investigate some of the ideological issues involved in translation as a process of cultural transfer. We will compare so-called 'heterolingual' passages in the original novel with the equivalent fragments in *La chambre noire de Damoclès*. Myriam Suchet defines 'heterolingualism' as follows: '[T]he staging of a more or less foreign language along a continuum of otherness constructed in and by a given discourse (or text).'³³

The techniques Hermans employs to show the otherness of the different languages in *De donkere kamer van Damokles* are rather traditional. The novel is essentially written in Dutch (or in French as far as the translation is concerned). The other languages are mostly – but not exclusively – spoken by the German and the English characters or written down on packings and signboards. The different languages spoken by the characters in the novel are, in most cases, clearly demarcated. Generally, when a character speaks another language, this is simply mentioned by the narrator of the text, while the text itself is in Dutch, as in the following example:

Toen zei de officier in zeer gearticuleerd Duits:
– Neemt u mij niet kwalijk dat ik u aanspreek, zuster! Maar als ik zulke mooie ogen als de uwe zie schreien kan ik niet doorrijden of er niets aan de hand is.³⁴





[Then the officer addressed him in clearly articulated German:
'Forgive me for bothering you, Sister! But I simply couldn't just drive
on after seeing such lovely eyes filled with tears.']*³⁵

In French:

C'est le moment que l'officier choisit pour lui dire en allemand et en
séparant bien les syllabes:

– Pardonnez-moi, mademoiselle, si je vous adresse la parole! Mais
quand je vois pleurer d'aussi beaux yeux, je ne peux poursuivre mon
chemin comme si de rien n'était.³⁶

In some cases, however, dialogues in German are rendered in German and not graphically indicated by quotation marks, italics or small caps. Such an *unannounced* way to render the other language disturbs the linear flow of the reading process and interferes with the reader's expectations of a smooth transition to the otherness of the other language. On the other hand, these quotes in German are limited in length and quite easy to comprehend, especially with the help of the context. Even the Dutch characters in the story do not seem to experience difficulties in understanding what is going on. An example:

De trein ging weer rijden. Hij reed nog geen minuut, of er kwamen
twee mannen in leren jassen in de doorloop.

Polizei! Ausweise bitte.

– Dat ook nog! zei de vrouw [...].

– Persohnsbeweise, bitte! zei de voorste man, terwijl hij zijn hand uitstak. [...]

– Da stimmt was nicht. Kommen sie mal mit.

Of 'Hé jij' erop gerekend had, stond zij onmiddellijk op en ging mee met de twee mannen in leer, zonder om te kijken.³⁷

[The train set off again. Almost immediately, two men in long leather coats came in from the corridor.

Polizei! Ausweise bitte.

'Not that too!' said the woman. [...]

'Identity cards please,' said the man in front, extending his hand.

'Da stimmt was nicht. Kommen sie mal mit.'

Something was wrong. As if expecting this, Hey You rose from her seat and went with the leather-coated duo. She did not look back.]*³⁸

Yet, the 'otherness effect' is somehow reduced in the French translation, which has italics for passages in German and sometimes footnotes with translations in French, or, as in the following example, passages that are translated into





French but with characters pronouncing the words with a thick and exaggerated German accent:

Le train se remit en route. Moins d'une minute plus tard, deux hommes en manteau de cuir s'engagèrent dans l'allée.

– *Polizei ! Ausweise bitte.*

– Manquait plus que ça ! fit la femme [...].

– BaBié, zivoublé ! dit le premier des deux hommes tout en tendant le bras. [...]

– *Da stimmt was nicht. Kommen sie mal mit.*³⁹

The clear separation between the different languages is accompanied by a lot of 'couleur locale', giving the impression of a well-defined, recognizable and thus authentic reality. The presence of other languages even contributes to the strict demarcation of topographical areas, for example in the form of placards announcing areas where German soldiers are not allowed to go:

Zij stonden voor een smal winkelraam. Osewoudt lichtte de bril op, knipperde een paar maal met zijn ogen en las op het raam

INDISCH RESTAURANT PEMATANG SIANTAR

Een witte kaart was rechts onder in de hoek van het raam achter het glas gezet en daarop stond in gotische letters

**Für Wehrmachtsangehörige verboten
Der Ortskommandant**⁴⁰

[They were standing in front of a narrow display window. Osewoudt raised the glasses, blinked a few times and read the sign on the pane:

EAST INDIAN RESTAURANT PEMATANG SIANTAR

There was a white card behind the glass in the lower right-hand corner, which said, in Gothic script:

Für wehrmachtsangehörige verboten.
Der Ortskommandant.]⁴¹

Again, there is a clear separation between Dutch and German. Moreover, the otherness of the latter language is highlighted by the use of a Gothic font. At the same time, however, it is as if the placard also demonstrates a possible 'porosity': in the occupied Netherlands not everything is completely occupied by the other and his or her language. Some areas remain exclusively Dutch, and in this case Dutch Indonesian.

One could also argue that the previous examples demonstrate that the Dutch language allows some porosity with respect to the German language: the novel is written in Dutch, but other languages interfere with it. In fact,





the Dutch language is much more occupied (and thus porous) than seems to be the case at first sight. This less obvious form of heterolingualism enables a better understanding of some of the ideological issues in the text, for instance with regard to the presence of proper nouns (brands included) and placards in the novel. Osewoudt does not experience them in their otherness. When the placard 'Für Wehrmachtsangehörige verboten' is mentioned for the first time, the female character Elly asks him for its meaning ('What does it mean?'), to which Osewoudt answers: 'It means,' said Osewoudt, 'that this part of town is unsafe for Germans, which makes it all the safer for us.'⁴²

One can even argue that from the moment Osewoudt starts imitating Dorbeck – of whom the narrative never unambiguously discloses whether he is a resistance hero or a henchman of the German occupier –, the narrative marks him as having both an English and a German identity. This contradictory identity is in the first place evoked by his ambivalent deeds and his physical resemblance to Dorbeck, but it is also demonstrated by the brand names of certain products he possesses. For example, he repeatedly shows off his English cigarettes:

He took a packet of Gold Flake from his pocket and said:
'Care for a smoke, Mr Meinarends? A real English cigarette. Do have one, I run a tobacco shop, you see.'⁴³

This 'Englishness', which can be regarded an addition to Osewoudt's Dutch identity, has as its counterpart certain German objects, in particular the Leica-camera he possesses. Bearing this in mind, it is revealing that precisely this object is unable to prove his 'English' identity at the very end of the novel, when the roll of film in the Leica does not contain a picture that should have been on the film roll and that would have proved the existence of Dorbeck and subsequently Osewoudt's innocence.

In short, Osewoudt is not completely 'Dutch', he is marked by a certain 'Englishness' and by some 'Germanness' as well. Actually, this is consistent with Osewoudt's lack of genuine patriotism and passion for the good cause:

My country, he thought, what's that supposed to mean? The blue tram? The yellow tram? The service is the same as before, except for the lights being dimmed after dark. A tobacco shop with empty packaging in the window? Dr Dushkind? North State? Havana cigars? I still have a packet of real English cigarettes on me. If Dorbeck hadn't asked me to develop a film for him I wouldn't have got mixed up in any of this. I'd be at home, safe and sound.⁴⁴

After he is arrested, Osewoudt is transported to England where he is interrogated by English officers. The dialogues are predominantly in Dutch, even when the narrator mentions that they are in fact speaking English. In other





words, when we read grammatically and orthographically correct Dutch spoken by the English officers, it is as if the narrator simultaneously translates what is being said. The narrator adds, however, that the English is difficult to understand for Osewoudt. In other situations, for instance when the officer ‘really’ speaks Dutch, quotations are rendered with an exaggerated English accent, unexpected word choices and with a distorted syntax:

– De chef is niet vroeg vandaag, zei de jongeman in het Engels, dat is hij trouwens meestal niet.

Osewoudt kon het met moeite verstaan, maar durfde geen antwoord te geven.

Toen ging de deur open en een lange man in een bruin tweed pak stapte naar het bureau, waar hij een blauwe map op legde.

– Ik toevallig ben kolonel Smears, zei hij in het Nederlands, ik ben zeer gelukkig een kleine conversatie met oe te kunnen hebben.

Well Percy, how’s everything this beautiful morning?

– Quite well sir, thank you. [...]

– Well, well, een mooie dag voor de tijd van het jaar. Maar eerst een drop van whisky, juist een drop.⁴⁵

[‘The boss did not arrive early today,’ said the young man in English. ‘He seldom does.’

Osewoudt understood with some difficulty what he was saying, but did not trust himself to reply.

Then the door opened and a tall man in a brown tweed suit entered.

He went up to the desk, on which he deposited a blue folder.

‘I am Colonel Smears, by the way,’ he said in heavily accented Dutch.

‘I am very glad of this opportunity to have a little conversation with you.’

Turning to the young man at the typewriter, he switched to English, saying: ‘Well Percy, how is everything this beautiful morning?’

‘Quite well, sir, thank you.’ [...]

‘Well, well, a fine day for the time of year,’ he said, reverting to his anglicized form of Dutch. ‘But we’ll start with a drop of whisky, just a drop.’⁴⁶

Osewoudt’s difficulties in understanding the other are less stressed in the French translation. The proper English is italicized and when Smears tries to speak Dutch, these (now French) passages have an accent that is less ‘English’ than was the case in the original:

– Le chef n’est pas en avance aujourd’hui, constata le jeune homme en anglais, il ne l’est d’ailleurs pas souvent.





Avec quelques difficultés, Osewoudt comprit ce que l'autre disait, mais n'osa pas lui répondre.

La porte s'ouvrit et alors un homme élancé, vêtu d'un costume de tweed brun, s'avança vers le grand bureau sur lequel il posa une chemise bleue.

– Je suis par chance le colonel Smears, dit-il en hollandais, je suis très content de faire une petite conversation avec vous. *Well, Percy, how's everything this beautiful morning?*

– *Quite well, sir, thank you.* [...]

– *Well, well,* belle journée pour la saison. Mais pour commencer, une gouttelette de whisky, juste une gouttelette.⁴⁷

In other words, in the French translation the Dutch is less altered by the other's language than in the original. There is still noticeable heterolingual porosity in this passage, but this time the porosity is no longer a component of Osewoudt's identity. The language porosity is now externalized as a phenomenon situated outside of him. Moreover, this phenomenon is threatening rather than positive, as it forces Osewoudt to reconcile himself with a given but well-delineated identity: a dangerous war criminal. In other words, Osewoudt experiences his identity as positive as long as it is porous and occupied by otherness and/or other languages. This is consistent with Osewoudt's fear that his Jewish girlfriend Marianne might in fact be more in love with Dorbeck than with himself. Osewoudt knows that he is attractive and heroic since he obeys Dorbeck and acts and looks like him.⁴⁸

The heterolingual discourse can contribute to the recognition of otherness. We all are somehow heterolingual subjects, and our singularity, as others perceive it, is partly based on the identity we construct through our languages. The heterolingual discourse functions as a ratification of this distinction-creating process: the heterolingual 'I', through the singular discourse he or she produces, radically constructs himself or herself as 'other' than 'I'. This process of creating a distinctive identity also takes place in Hermans' novel, except that it is exclusively one-sided, exclusively oriented towards the otherness in which the 'I' projects his self-image, until the moment the 'I' has to realize that this otherness – which is supposed to have its 'own', consistent identity – is always already something else than what he thought it was. In the case of Osewoudt, it means that the otherness, unfortunately, has become a kind of black hole that he will never succeed to define, and in which he has lost his way.

As we have seen, the French translation has the tendency to reduce the effects of this heterolingual discourse upon the reader. Accordingly, the ideological issues which the Dutch original discloses are partially lost in the process of cultural transfer, although not fundamentally. This is borne out by Milan Kundera: what he appreciated most in *La chambre noire de Damoclès*, was in the end the 'black poetry' of the novel: the moral ambiguity that always sur-





rounds Osewoudt and his actions. Kundera's review is in fact an exposé of his own literary poetics, and in Hermans he found a writer whom he considered a soulmate. In their view, characters who are morally confused frequently end up as a victim of their own illusions.

CONCLUSIONS

We briefly examined some ideological aspects of cultural transfer and transmission on two different levels, one text-external and one text-internal. In the external case, we looked at the reception of translations of *De donkere kamer van Damokles* in Sweden, Norway and Germany. The references to the political-historical context show that there is a connection between the interpretation and evaluation of the novel and the receiving culture's socio-political situation during and in the wake of the war. In the internal case, we examined the ways in which a translator might cope with the covert ideology within a text, for instance in cases of problematic communication caused by language differences and hierarchies. Certain 'heterolingual' aspects and 'otherness effects' disappeared in the transfer process, some of which were a result of decisions made by the translator.

Similar explorative inquiries into other translations of the novel can contribute to our knowledge of the processes of cultural transfer and transmission of Hermans' *De donkere kamer van Damokles*. From a comparative perspective, research could be extended to other texts of the same author, and even extrapolated to other forms of adaptation of his works, such as plays and movies. The production of *Beyond Sleep* (2016), an international film adaptation of *Nooit meer slapen*, shows that Hermans is still crossing borders in a variety of ways, creating new opportunities for future research.

NOTES

- 1 See for example P. Broomans and M. Ronne (eds.), *In the Vanguard of the Cultural Transfer: Cultural Transmitters and Authors in Peripheral Literary Fields* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2010), and P. Broomans, S. van Voorst and K. Smits (eds.), *Rethinking Cultural Transfer and Transmission: Reflections and New Perspectives* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012).
- 2 B. Stroman, 'Inhalen verboden: wanhoop en sterf: De onvolwaardige held als stuk van overtuiging voor het immoralisme', in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 February 1959. (Unless stated otherwise all quotations from Dutch sources have been translated into English by the authors.)
- 3 J. Last, 'De defloratie van het verzet', in *De Nieuwe Stem* 14 (1959), pp. 306-310.
- 4 See for example D. Betlem, 'De geboorte van een dubbelganger', in *Merlyn* 4: 4 (1966), pp. 276-290; D. Betlem, 'Van Jean Paul tot Van der Waals: Nogmaals "De geboorte van een dubbelganger"', in *Raster* 1: 1 (1967), pp. 71-94; J. Weisgerber, 'Proefvlucht in de literaire ruimte (4)', in *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift* 21: 4 (1968), pp. 358-380; R. Delvigne, 'Als twee druppels water?', in *De Revisor* 1: 9-10 (1974), pp. 14-22; G.J.P. Hoek and C.B.M. Wingen,





- ‘De donkere kamer; perspectief en interpretatie van het gebeuren in *De donkere kamer van Damokles* van Willem Frederik Hermans’, in *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 67: 2 (1974), pp. 89-118; M. Dupuis, *Eenheid en versplintering van het ik: Een onderzoek naar thema’s, motieven en vormen in verband met de problematiek van de enkeling in het verhalend werk van Willem Frederik Hermans* (Hasselt: Heidelberg-Orbis, 1976); W. Smulders, *De literaire misleiding in De donkere kamer van Damokles* (Utrecht: Hes, 1983); A. Kooyman, “‘De donkere kamer van Damokles’: een constructie-analyse”, in *Forum der letteren* 29: 2 (1988), pp. 116-123; S. Pos, *Dorbeck is alles! Navolging als sleutel tot enkele romans en verhalen van W.F. Hermans* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers, 2010).
- 5 W. Otterspeer, *Dorbeck, waar ben je? Een biografisch essay over De donkere kamer van Damokles* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2012), p. 86.
 - 6 C. van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2001), pp. 15-16.
 - 7 See S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 147-174.
 - 8 H. Eickmans, ‘W.F. Hermans in Duitsland’, in *Filter* 9: 1 (2002), p. 49.
 - 9 J. Glerum, *Willem Frederik Hermans (1921-1995) / De donkere kamer van Damokles (1958)*, informatiebrochure bij de tentoonstelling ‘Willem Frederik Hermans terug in Amsterdam’, Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam, Fall 2011.
 - 10 Eickmans, ‘W.F. Hermans in Duitsland’, p. 50.
 - 11 R. Overy, ‘Scandinavia in the Second World War’, in J. Gillmour and J. Stephenson (eds.), *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy: The Consequences of the German Invasion for the Scandinavian Countries, Then and Now* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 29-30.
 - 12 J. Östling, ‘Realism and Idealism: Swedish Narratives of the Second World War: Historiography and Interpretation in the Post-War Era’, in Gillmour and Stephenson (eds.), *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 185.
 - 13 O.K. Grimnes, ‘Hitler’s Norwegian Legacy’, in Gillmour and Stephenson (eds.), *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 160.
 - 14 Grimnes, ‘Hitler’s Norwegian Legacy’, p. 168.
 - 15 B. Niven, ‘Introduction: The Inclusive Picture’, in B. Niven (ed.), *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.
 - 16 Niven, ‘Introduction: The Inclusive Picture’, p. 2.
 - 17 B. Niven and C.E.M. Paver, ‘Introduction’, in B. Niven and C.E.M. Paver (eds.), *Memorialization in Germany Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.
 - 18 U. Asplund, ‘Krig på fy’, in *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfarts Tidning*, 25 September 1962.
 - 19 Ö. Wallqvist, ‘Ny holländsk mästare’, in *Stockholms Tidningen*, 7 November 1962.
 - 20 I.S., ‘Vilse i kriget’, in *Jönköpings-Posten*, 15 September 1962.
 - 21 Ph. Houm, ‘En bok av usedvanlig slagkraft?’ in *Dagbladet*, 20 April 1962.
 - 22 E. Rasmussen, ‘Hvem er Dorbeck?’ in *Aftenposten*, 4 April 1962.
 - 23 N.C. Brøgger, ‘Den gule serie gjenoppstår’, in *Nationen*, 10 April 1962.
 - 24 H. Haavardsholm, ‘Ny “gul” fra Nederland’, in *Arbeiderbladet*, 26 March 1962.
 - 25 W. Dahl, ‘Frihetskampen som galehus’, in *Bergens Arbeiderblad*, 20 March 1962.
 - 26 F. Isaksson, ‘Mannen i mørkrummet’, in *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 June 1962.





- 27 A. von Bormann, 'Der Pfahl im Fleische: Ein großer Niederländer zum Wiederentdecken: Willem Frederik Hermans', in *Die Welt*, 15 December 2001.
- 28 H. Jähner, 'Die Doppelgänger: Einer der berühmtesten niederländischen Romane erscheint endlich auf Deutsch – nach mehr als vierzig Jahren', in *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 January 2002.
- 29 W. Höbel, 'Henri, der Held', in *Der Spiegel*, 14 January 2002.
- 30 Jähner, 'Die Doppelgänger'; N. Henneberg, 'Die Tränen des Herrn Osewoudt wiederentdeckt: Ein Agententhriller des holländischen Existenzialisten Willem Frederik Hermans', in *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 January 2002.
- 31 See for example A. Franssen, *W.F. Hermans, een Hollander in Parijs* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2005) and J.P. van der Sterre, 'De duistere hoeken van de donkere kamer: W.F. Hermans in het Frans, Duits en Engels', in *Filter* 14: 4 (2007), pp. 39-50.
- 32 M. Kundera, 'La poésie noire et l'ambiguïté: "La chambre noire de Damoclès", une oeuvre capitale, pourtant passée inaperçue, de Willem Frederik Hermans', in *Le Monde*, 26 January 2007.
- 33 M. Suchet, *L'Imaginaire hétérolingue: Ce que nous apprennent les textes à la croisée des langues* (Paris: Garnier, 2014), p. 19. ('[L]a mise en scène d'une langue plus ou moins étrangère le long d'un continuum d'altérité construit dans et par un discours (ou un texte) donné.')
- 34 W.F. Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3. Romans. De donkere kamer van Damokles; Nooit meer slapen*. Jan Gielkens and Peter Kegel (eds.) (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2010), p. 283.
- 35 W.F. Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*. Transl. Ina Rilke (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), p. 268.
- 36 W.F. Hermans, *La chambre noire de Damoclès*. Transl. Daniel Cunin (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 338.
- 37 Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 165.
- 38 Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, p. 156.
- 39 Hermans, *La chambre noire de Damoclès*, pp. 196-197.
- 40 Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 80.
- 41 Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, p. 73.
- 42 "Wat betekent dat bord?" / "het betekent [...] dat deze buurt voor Duitsers onveilig is, maar voor ons des te veiliger." Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 68. English translation: Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, p. 61.
- 43 "Hij haalde een pakje Gold Flake uit zijn zak en zei: 'Wilt u roken, meneer Meinarends? Een echte Engelse sigaret. Gaat u gerust uw gang, ik heb een sigarenwinkel.'" Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 85. English translation: Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, p. 78.
- 44 "Vaderland, wat is dat? dacht hij. De blauwe tram? De gele tram? Ze rijden nu even goed als vroeger, alleen 's avonds met weinig licht. Een sigarenwinkel met ledig expositiemateriaal achter het glas? Dr. Dushkind? North State? Karel Eén? Ik heb echte Engelse sigaretten op zak. Als Dorbeck mij niet gevraagd had een rolfilmpje voor hem te ontwikkelen dan zou ik nergens wat mee te maken hebben. Dan zat ik nu rustig thuis." Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, pp. 89-90. English translation: Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, pp. 82-83.
- 45 Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 312.
- 46 Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*, p. 297.
- 47 Hermans, *La chambre noire de Damoclès*, pp. 373-374.
- 48 Hermans, *Volledige Werken, 3*, p. 216.





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