

therefore provides excellent insights into the internal linguistic history of Dutch. Moreover, many Anglo-Saxon students of Dutch tend to learn the language after they have already acquired German. For that reason it is to be hoped that Oxford University Press, unlike Donaldson's publisher in the 1980s, will soon allow a second edition of Willemyns' book to appear which can refer to Salmons. That would also provide an opportunity for a number of editorial improvements, for example in the use of English tenses. A number of maps and illustrations are not clear enough (e.g. on p. 95, where the difference between the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic has got lost), require an English version (e.g. the legend of the table on p. 136 is in German), and/or need an acknowledgement. An extensive list of recommended websites would be a further improvement.

Despite such imperfections, *Dutch. Biography of a Language* brilliantly closes a 30-year gap. It is required reading for students of Dutch not just in Anglophone countries but all over the world, even in Flanders and the Netherlands.

ROEL VISMANS

ROLAND WILLEMYS. *Dutch. Biography of a Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 9780199858712. 289 pp.

LITERATURE

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Cees Nootboom as Nomadic Writer

For a British scholar to have produced a major monograph on a prominent, internationally known Dutch writer would be a coup in itself. However, Jane Fenoulhet's ambitions extend much wider than the establishment of Cees Nootboom's 'national canonical status'. (As is well known, until comparatively recently Nootboom's critical acceptance in the Low Countries lagged behind international recognition, notably in Germany.)

What this book seeks to do, and does with admirable clarity, is examine the 'transnational nature' of Nootboom's literary presence. The key concept of 'nomadism' is defined with reference to such literary and sociological theorists as Gilles Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti and Michael Cronin. Focus is on the increasing porousness of national literatures and the role of translation in cross-border transfer.

Part 1 of the text concludes with the key chapter 'Nomadic Subjectivity and Identity, Or Cees Nootboom and Dutchness'. It includes a wide-ranging contextualisation of the author's position as a national outsider, a condensed biography and a brief discussion of the autodidacticism he shares with his contemporaries Mulisch and Claus. Fenoulhet writes of her own approach to Nootboom: 'I portray him as fundamentally nomadic with a multiple, shifting identity, emphasising the effect of his extreme mobility on his subjectivity – his sense of himself and his sensibilities.' A little later he is characterised as being 'without a trace of nationalistic pride' and adopting 'a firmly cosmopolitan position'.

In Part 2 the major components of the oeuvre are surveyed. In particular, the somewhat neglected poetry is reinstated at the core of his writing, as representing a 'home base' in language. Nootboom's consistent production of verse from the 1950s on is given the attention it deserves. Here, though, one is struck by the absence of any mention of Nootboom's predecessor Jan Jacob Slauerhoff (1898-1936), surely the archetypical

nomadic writer ('Only in my poems can I dwell') and an obvious antecedent. A fascinating exercise in close reading is the comparison of three English versions of the 'Basho' sequence.

In the travel writing Fenoulhet draws an illuminating parallel with the Italian writer Claudio Magris, biographer of the River Danube. There is a fuller analysis of the three major collections of travel writing, translated into English as *Roads to Santiago*, *Nomad's Hotel* and *Roads to Berlin*, quoting among other sources J.M. Coetzee's essay 'Cees Nootboom, Novelist and Traveller', which identifies the development of a deeper matrix in the later travel writing 'within which to reflect on the deeper currents of life of a foreign culture'. Fenoulhet sees this, in my view rightly, as a fruitful concept. In *Roads to Berlin* there is striking appeal to an endangered sense of European cultural community.

A chapter is devoted to Nootboom's 'English after-lives' in translation, reviewing his narratives of 'fictions of becoming' and highlighting his post-modernism, intertextuality, 'rhizomic' (i.e. subterranean associative structures), narrative complexity and characteristic 'vitalism in muted form'. The critical reception of the work is touched upon, but not dealt with in any great depth. There is an interesting and puzzling section on the contrasting fortunes of the German and English translations of the early novel *Philip en de anderen* (Philip and the Others): the former became a bestseller (in a second translation) while the latter remained rather marginalised. No explanation is proffered apart from the book's atypical, non-nomadic vision.

The conclusion of this study reiterates its guiding principle: 'I proposed a complex way of approaching a writer and his work which does not see literary texts as intrinsically connected with the country of the writer's birth, while in the second part I put it into practice.' One can say unequivocally that that stated aim is substantially achieved.

This book is an important contribution to literary studies and one that will undoubtedly engen-

der further research and publication: on Nootboom himself, and (pace the premises of this work) Dutch literature, as well as in the general literary and translation field.

PAUL VINCENT

JANE FENOULHET, *Nomadic Literature. Cees Nootboom and his Writing*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013.

Cees Nootboom © Simone Sassen

