

Explorations of the Book Market

Paweł Zajas

An Ethnography of the Production of Translation: Literatures from the (Semi) Periphery on the German Publishing Market

DOI: 10.18318/td.2016.en.2.11

1.

In the macrostructure of the global literary translation market, the German language plays a central, dominant role. A decisive factor in this respect is language's role as a vehicular medium between semi-peripheral and peripheral languages.¹ The Frankfurt Book Fair continues to figure among the most important cyclical industry events, while a translation into German paves the way for authors from smaller national literatures to achieve recognition on the global market and stimulates further translations into other languages. Since the Second World War, the proportion of translated literature in the German publishing market has ranged from 8 to 13 percent of all publications. According to data from 2008, two-thirds (66.9 percent) of the 7 342 translations published in Germany were from English, 11.5 percent were from French, 2.9 percent from Italian, 2.6 percent from Spanish, 2.3 percent from Dutch, 2 percent

Paweł Zajas –

Professor of literary theory at the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland) and research fellow at the University of Pretoria. Lately, he has worked on the cultural transfer and the sociology of literary transfer. Research into the connections and interfaces of German foreign cultural policy and the literary/publishing field will be continued in the course of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation senior scholarship awarded to him for 2017/18.

1 Johan Heilbron, "Towards a Sociology of Translation. Book Translations as Cultural World-System," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2(4) (1999): 434, 435. This article came about thanks to research stipends (Suhrkamp-Stipendium and Fellowship Marbach-Weimar-Wolffenbüttel) awarded by the German Literature Archive (Deutsches Literaturarchiv) in Marbach am Neckar.

from Swedish, 1.8 percent from Russian, 1.4 percent from Japanese, and 1.2 percent from Turkish. Between 0.5 and 1 percent of all the published translations were originally written in Norwegian, Finnish, Polish, Modern Hebrew and Danish.² Confining the statistics to fiction does not present a significantly different picture. Over half of all such publications (58.1 percent) are translations from English, 10 percent from French, 3.9 percent from Spanish, 3 percent from Swedish, 2.9 percent from Italian, and 2.4 percent from Dutch.³

In an attempt to take a closer look at this asymmetrical cultural exchange, which the Dutch sociologist Johan Heilbron calls a “core-periphery structure,”⁴ in this essay I will analyse the contemporary transfer of (semi-) peripheral European literatures into German using the example of Dutch literature, while referring to the status of Polish literature in Germany. The scope of the research material was dictated not so much by the “neighbourly orientation” of these smaller literatures towards the larger supranational language as by the striking disproportion in their transfer. While data shows that literature from the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium accounts for over 2 percent of all translations into German on the market, translations of Polish literature do not exceed beyond 0.6 percent.⁵ We also get a certain idea of the position of both literatures in the “global culture system”⁶ by looking at the Index Translationum – World Bibliography of Translation, founded by the League of Nations in 1932 and maintained under the auspices of UNESCO. Although the data it contains are only indicative, one should note that Dutch is ranked 11th on the list of original languages, whereas Polish is ranked 14th (behind Czech).⁷

2 Norbert Bachleitner and Michaela Wolf, “Einleitung: Zur soziologischen Erforschung der literarischen *Übersetzung* im deutschsprachigen Raum,” in *Streifzüge im translatorischen Feld. Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Norbert Bachleitner and Michaela Wolf (Wien: Lit Verlag, 2010), 15-16.

3 *Ibid.*, 16.

4 Johan Heilbron, “Translation as a Cultural World System,” *Perspectives. Studies in Translationology* 8(1) (2000): 12.

5 Slávka Rude-Porubská, “Who Chooses Literature for Translation? Translation Subsidies in Germany,” *Primerjalna književnost* 33(2) (2010): 284.

6 Abram de Swaan, *Zorg en de staat* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1989), 68-89; Abram de Swaan, “The Emergent Global Language System,” *International Political Science Review* 14(3) (1993): 219-226.

7 *Index Translationum. Top 50: Original Languages*, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsstatexp.aspx?crit1L=3&nTyp=min&topN=50>

Heilbron notes that the distribution of literary translations can be presented as a four-level structure. The original medium for over half of all translations is English, giving it a hyper-central position in the asymmetrical global cultural exchange system. The next two languages, German and French, occupy a central position, with each of them sharing approximately 10 percent of the global translation market. The group of around eight languages with between 1 and 3 percent of the literary transfer are called semi-peripheral, with the remaining languages occupying a peripheral position. These include Chinese, Arabic and Japanese, demonstrating that the number of native users of a given language is not a major factor in determining how central or peripheral it is in the “international translation economy.”⁸ We can thus describe the proportion of Dutch and Polish literature in the German language as semi-peripheral and peripheral respectively.

The presented empirical data comes from the publishing archive of Suhrkamp Verlag in Frankfurt, which in 2009 was bought by the German Literature Archive (Deutsches Literaturarchiv) in Marbach am Neckar. There are two fundamental reasons which make this material valuable. First, Suhrkamp Verlag has played, and continues to play, an important role in introducing both Dutch and Polish literature into Germany. Interestingly, the case of Polish literature often figures in internal correspondences as a point of reference for discussions on presenting Dutch literature and, *pars pro toto*, other smaller national literatures on the German publishing market. Dutch and Flemish authors occasionally appeared at Suhrkamp even in the 1950s (e.g. Paul van Ostaïen and Antoon Coolen), although over the next two decades only 12 titles appeared (including those by Jacques Hamelink, Ivo Michiels, Paul de Wispelaere, Lodewijk de Boer, Lucebert and Felix Timmermans). The next dozen publications came in the second half of the 1980s, when the publishing programme included such authors as Thomas Rosenboom, Renate Rubinstein and Cees Nooteboom, who even today is a “flagship” author for Suhrkamp.⁹ Their first foray into Polish literature came only in 1962, at a time when the

8 Johan Heilbron, *Structure and Dynamic of the World System of Translation*, UNESCO International Symposium “Translation and Cultural Mediation,” February 22-23, 2010, 2, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/40619/12684038723Heilbron.pdf/Heilbron.pdf>

9 Data on the basis of *Die Bibliographie des Suhrkamp Verlages 1950-2000*, ed. Wolfgang Jeske (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002), and internal materials of the publishing house prepared for Siegfried Unseld in April 1992 (“Niederländische Literatur im Suhrkamp und Insel Verlag,” April 27, 1992, Suhrkamp-Archiv, hereafter: SUA; Allgemeine Korrespondenz. Stiftung für die Produktion und Übersetzung Niederländischer Literatur, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar, hereafter DLA).

larger West German publishing houses already had significant translations from Polish to their names. The Frankfurt-based publisher's most important authors certainly include Zbigniew Herbert and Stanisław Lem. Many Polish authors appeared in the series "edition suhrkamp," founded in 1963, including Jerzy Andrzejewski, Wiesław Brudziński, Henryk Grynberg, Hanna Krall, Marek Nowakowski, and Zofia Romanowiczowa. The "Bibliothek Suhrkamp" series, established in 1951 and mostly publishing 20th-century "classics," included translations of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jan Józef Szczepański, Leszek Kołakowski, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska. The "suhrkamp taschenbücher" series, meanwhile, showcased Polish fantasy literature of Jerzy Żuławski, Stefan Grabiński and Stanisław Lem, as well as the works of Julian Tuwim, Roman Bratny and Władysław Terlecki. Suhrkamp's best-known project popularising Polish literature in Germany was "Polnische Bibliothek" ("Polish Library" – 1982-2000), initiated by the German Institute of Polish Studies in Darmstadt and funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation. The series' 50 volumes presented to German readers the most important works of Polish writers and volumes devoted to specific periods of Polish literature, from the Middle Ages to modern times.

Secondly, by studying the publishing house's archive in its original state (before it was converted into a literary archive, with the organizational structure and access to correspondences inherent in the latter type of documentation),¹⁰ it is possible to reconstruct the logic and structure of the communication and decision-making processes initiated (or imposed) by individual actors of the publishing sphere. The availability of data from the Suhrkamp archive provides an insight into the "manufacture of the translation"¹¹ of Dutch and Polish literature, and in a broader methodological perspective offers unique laboratory conditions for researching the microsociology of literary transfer. We can thus track the processes of choosing,

10 The data analysed in this article was acquired during research stays at the German Literature Archive in Marbach am Neckar in February and July/August 2013. The publishing documents that form the core of the analysis concerning Dutch authors at Suhrkamp Verlag and the publishing notes on Polish authors were found at the place of their "production" by individual actors of the literary sphere (publisher, editors, financial department etc.). A "disordered" archive presents the researcher with the obvious intuitive problem of finding the material of interest, but it does have the undoubted virtue of permitting the precise recreation of the dynamic of literary transfer. Work in a "raw" archive is impossible without the kind and expert help of archivists. At this point I would like to thank Anna Kinder, who supervises research on the Suhrkamp Archives, as well as Claudia Gratz, Iris Hoffmann, Elza Weber and Martina Stecker.

11 H el ene Buzelin, "Translations «in the Making»," in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, ed. Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2007), 141.

reviewing, confirming/rejecting and promoting aesthetic products within a relatively small team.

I am now getting closer to the key question in this essay: which specific factors of the publishing realm led to the relatively prominent position of Dutch literature in the German book market in the mid-1980s, whereas Polish literature was relegated to a peripheral position with less than half the number of translations? The presented material largely concerns Dutch literature, owing to the current state of my research. Polish literature mainly appears in those places where archival documents indicate points of contact within a specific, collective decision-making process (e.g. correspondence of the publisher and individual editors). The reconstruction of the decision-making processes concerning translations of Dutch and (to a more limited extent) Polish literature spans a period from the early 1960s to 1993, when the Netherlands and Flanders were guests of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Without a doubt, this event acted as a catalyst as Suhrkamp alone published over 138 translations from the Dutch between 1993 and 2014.¹²

Notwithstanding the undoubted importance of this turning point, I think that it is worth looking at the decisions that preceded it within the publishing house and accompanied the processes of producing translations. Based on the data I have gathered, I pose the following research questions: 1) which socio-aesthetic strategies and practices influence the dissemination of (semi-) peripheral national literatures in the German literary industry, and 2) how do these discussions and processes develop at large, prestigious publishing houses, and finally 3) which actors, elements and circumstances play a decisive role here?

2.

This framing of the research problem highlights the gap between the methodological postulates of the sociology of translation and actual research practice. Although there have been many voices highlighting the need to investigate research on literary translation from the perspective of the actors involved – including Daniel Simeoni, Johan Heilbron, Gisèle Sapiro and Andrew Chesterman¹³ – analyses of the archives of publishing houses have

12 Data on the basis of the Dutch Foundation for Literature (Nederlands Letterenfonds) databases, accessed May 11, 2014, <http://www.letterenfonds.nl/vertalingendb/zoek.php>

13 Andrew Chesterman, "Bridge Concepts in Translation Sociology," in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, 171-183; Gisèle Sapiro, "Editorial Policy and Translation," in *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol. 3, ed. Yves Gambier, Luc van Doorslaer and John Benjamins (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2012), 32; Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, "Outline for a Sociology of Translation. Current Issues and Future Prospects," in *Constructing a Sociol-*

been rare. Empirical studies done on the production process of translation are restricted above all by its “private status,” which generally makes it impossible to access data.¹⁴

The few existing studies on publishing data illustrate how little we know of the production process of translation in a commercial publishing house, from the selection of texts and copyright negotiations to the marketing of the final product. An interesting aspect of these studies is the analytical perspective chosen by their authors, which provides insights into practices to which researchers have previously paid little attention, instead using ready-made traditional categories. H el ene Buzelin proposes a kind of “thick description” of the decision-making processes in publishing houses, and was the first researcher to suggest applying Bruno Latour’s ethnomethodology to translation research. For a long time, Latour’s pioneering ethnographic insight into the practice of knowledge production and the processes of technical and scientific innovations which he described as “science in action”¹⁵ failed to provide inspiration for the sociology of translation. This is all the more surprising as the term “translation,” understood as “a relation that does not transport causality, but induces two mediators into coexisting,”¹⁶ compromises in a way the core of actor-network theory (ANT). Buzelin believes that the potential of ANT may be helpful in taking another step in the direction which Bourdieu and his followers propose within translation studies. Latour offers a perspective whereby the sociology of translation can be directed towards a process-oriented approach and reconfiguration of research analysing translation production. This in turn might make it possible to more accurately identify the mediators involved, as well as opening up to analysis new areas of action that may affect or be decisive in the publication of a translation.¹⁷

ogy of Translation, 93-107; Daniel Simeoni, “Translating and Studying Translation: The View from the Agent,” *Meta* 40(3) (1995): 445-460.

- 14 Buzelin, “Translations «in the Making»,” 142. In her book on the reception of Polish literature in the Federal Republic of Germany, Hedwig Nosbers also examines the question of the complete lack of access to data from publishers’ archives, which are treated as “confidential material,” as well as the reluctance of publishers and editors to cooperate. Hedwig Nosbers, *Polnische Literatur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945/1949 bis 1990. Buchwissenschaftliche Aspekte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 9.
- 15 Bruno Latour, *Science in Action. How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1987.
- 16 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 108.
- 17 H el ene Buzelin, “Unexpected Allies: How Latour’s Network Theory Could Complement Bourdieusian Analysis in Translation Studies,” *The Translator* 11 (2005): 215.

ANT, as used in translation research, seems not so much to be a specific analytical model as it is a way of thinking about the decision-making mechanisms within the structure of a given publishing house. The basis of this view is a kind of cognitive agnosticism which requires a departure from the intuitive explanatory macro-models also inherent in studies on the reception of Dutch literature in the German-language area.¹⁸ Owing to the lack of data on the core of the *Literaturbetrieb*, that is on the selection mechanisms and production of literature by specific publishers, the available monographs focus on published titles and completed initiatives of cultural intermediaries, meaning that they do not go beyond – if I may use a rather obvious metaphor – the tip of the iceberg, below which reveals the invisible processes of translation production. In this essay I argue for the “sociology of associations”¹⁹ in research on the production of translations, yet do not deny the agency of such elements as the “market,” “political context,” and “cultural policy,” while stressing the need for carefully tracing the connections between individual actors and avoiding limiting their scope and heterogeneity. The departure from reductionism typical of ANT, which reduces complex phenomena to a simple model of cause and effect, will work well in an analysis of empirical data acquired during the analysis of a publisher’s archive. The available literature on the subject employs a convenient interpretive shortcut according to which “changes in the book market,” “the principal orientation of the German-language literary landscape abroad,” “regained trust,”²⁰ or socio-political transformations either lead to a growth or decrease in interest in a given literature, accounting for the fluctuations in Dutch-German and Polish-German literary transfer. I would argue that this should be replaced with a time-consuming and labour-intensive path “into the deep,” using archival materials to test individual connections between actors.

3.

My ethnographic perspective on the analysis of associations between individual actors in the publishing field requires at least an abbreviated explanation of the structure of the archive in question. Owing to the organization

18 Key works in this area are Herbert Van Uffelen’s book *Moderne niederländische Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum 1830-1990* (Münster: Zentrum für Niederlande-Studien, 1993), and Hedwig Nosbers’ study *Polnische Literatur*.

19 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 13.

20 Van Uffelen, *Moderne niederländische Literatur*, 430, 443, 446.

I observed during my 2013 research stay, I can reconstruct the decision-making levels, and thus recreate the logic of individual actors' actions. The Siegfried Unseld Archive (SUA) acquired by the German Literature Archive in 2009 spans the period between 1945 and 2002. It was comprised of materials from four publishing houses – Suhrkamp Verlag, Insel Verlag, Jüdischer Verlag and Deutscher Klassiker Verlag – and divided into 11 departments: 1) publishing house management, 2) administration and personnel, 3) editorship, 4) production, 5) distribution, 6) advertising, 7) the press, 8) copyright and licences, 9) marketing, 10) readings, 11) accounting and finances. The SUA also contained the archive of the publishing house's founder, Peter Suhrkamp, from his split from S. Fischer Verlag until his death and Siegfried Unseld's acquisition of the house in 1959.

In the first phase of research on translation production from Dutch and Polish literature, I analysed the correspondences of the publishing house's management and editorial department. Particularly significant for understanding the decisions made by the publishers, from the managerial correspondences, are the "Notes" [*Notizen*] and "Siegfried Unseld's Travel Reports" [*Reiseberichte Dr. Siegfried Unselds*]. The "Notes" constitute a kind of index of the publishing house's annual correspondences in the form of brief notices for the publisher or composed by him personally; they give an idea of the titles, authors and events which the management viewed as important. The "Travel Reports," meanwhile, were lengthy circulars which all editors were required to confirm they had read by signing them. These documents clearly framed the publisher's expectations towards the editorial department. Apart from "Notes" and "Travel Reports," the managerial correspondences also include the so-called "General Correspondence" [*allegemeine Korrespondenz*] and "Authors' Volume" [*Autorenkonvolute*]. The former contains the publisher's correspondence and correspondence conveyed to the publisher between staff and writers, translators, journalists, critics, booksellers, agents etc. The "Authors' Volume" contains the publisher's letters and selected correspondences of the staff with certain authors whom the publishing house considered important. We must bear this selective nature of the data in mind later when analysing it. The most important source of knowledge on translation production is "Editorial correspondence," which encompasses not only authors, but also translators, publishers, literary agents, private intermediaries and external consultants.

Having established all this, let us now look at the empirical data. In the 1960s, selection of texts from Dutch literature took place in two relatively autonomous editorial teams. The first was headed by Karl Markus Michel and Walter Böhlich, while in the second department the editor of "edition suhrkamp," Günther Busch, made decisions entirely independently. In 1964

Michel was corresponding with a certain Judith Polak²¹ – an exchange that the publisher himself, Siegfried Unseld, had begun three years previously. In total, Polak reviewed three novels by the Flemish prose writer, playwright and poet Hugo Claus for Suhrkamp: *De koele minaar* (1956, *The Cool Lover*), *De hondsdagen* (1952, *Dog Days*) and *De verwondering* (1962, *The Surprise*). Although in this period Claus commanded an unquestioned position not only in the Flemish and Dutch literary system, but in the international one too (thirteen translations by 1964), Polak delivered a negative verdict on the first of these novels on account of its “lack of a sense of humour and of the grotesque, two characteristics of contemporary Dutch [sic] literature.”²² She regarded the second book as “incomparably better,” while *De verwondering* for her was distinguished by Faulkneresque features, “well-written, interesting and gripping.”²³ The correspondence with Judith Polak therefore visibly comes from the publisher’s individual initiative (supported by the editor), yet this, probably partly due to the decidedly amateurish character of the reviews, did not lead to any decisions to publish.

Between 1960 and 1970, Suhrkamp maintained contact with the Foundation for the Support of Dutch Literature Translations (Stichting ter Bevordering van de Vertaling van Nederlands Letterkundig Werk), founded in 1954 in the Netherlands, and also backed by the Belgian government from 1960. Although the Foundation’s activity until it was closed in 1989 was the first attempt at the professionalization and institutionalization of Dutch and Flemish cultural policy in the field of literature, it is viewed extremely negatively in the literature on the subject. The reasons for the failure of Dutch literature to advance notably in the global literature system were put down to limited funds, selection of titles usually dictated by personal preferences, chance relationships and the authors’ position in the Dutch literary system (ignoring the characteristics of the target market), as well as poor translation quality.²⁴

21 The only biographical reference to Judith Polak-Siliava that I have managed to find to date is in the Dutch historian Richter Roegholt’s book *De stad is een gesprek. Terugblik op mijn leven* [*The City is a Conversation. Memoirs*] (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2003). Roegholt remembers Judith Polak-Siliava as a short-statured Jew who emigrated from Berlin to France after Hitler came to power, before settling in the Netherlands. According to Roegholt, Polak-Siliava was the wife of the Dutch communist Karl Polak and an acquaintance of the well-known Slavacist Karel van het Reve (109–111).

22 Judith Polak to Siegfried Unseld, January 3, 1961, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA.

23 Judith Polak to Karl Markus Michel, August 10, 1964; Judith Polak to Siegfried Unseld, July 2, 1964, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA.

24 Sandra van Voorst, “Het goede litteraire werk uit Nederland’. De *Bibliotheca Neerlandica* en het vertaalbeleid van de Stichting voor Vertalingen 1954–1966,” *Internationale Neerlandistiek* 1 (2013): 43.

The correspondence between Suhrkamp and the Foundation was initiated by the poet, writer and translator Hans Magnus Enzensberger. The latter planned to include the Flemish poet Paul van Ostaïjen in an anthology of international literature he was preparing in early 1960, and a year later proposed a separate German edition of the poet's verse and prose work. Enzensberger's plan was then realised through Karl Markus Michel and Walter Böhlich, who spent the next four years unsuccessfully seeking the copyright (the contract was ultimately finalised in May 1965) and the Dutch edition of van Ostaïjen's prose (apparently there were no copies available in the second-hand market, so its purchase only became possible in 1966). The question of copyright and a lack of specialist support from the Foundation also proved to be an obstacle in the planned publication in 1965 of the books of Willem Frederik Hermans, one of the major figures and also the *enfant terrible* of Dutch literature. The Foundation's representatives did meet Suhrkamp editors at the Frankfurt Book Fair (notably Siegfried Unseld himself was not present at these meetings), but substantial support on their part was by default confined to reports submitted in the correspondence on contemporary Dutch-language writers. Their informational value took the form of encyclopaedic enumeration of titles and was similar to the Foundation's English-language promotional brochure *Writing in Holland* published in 1955.²⁵ Only in 1969 did Suhrkamp first receive translation samples from Foundation staff – the prose of Gerrit Krol, Dick Hillenius and Karel van het Reve. These received negative reviews, however, with the verdict that they did not fit the publishing house's programme.

Whereas editors Karl Markus Michel and Walter Böhlich were part of the publishing house's management, the decision to translate Dutch literature came from the second independent operation headed by Günther Busch, the director of "edition suhrkamp," which Siegfried Unseld called a "publishing house within a publishing house"²⁶ and established in 1963. Unseld emphasised the series' significance for the reception of Central and Eastern European literature in the German language and in other Western European countries:

It is to him [Busch] that we owe the gradual opening of the series to theoretical and critical texts and the considerably greater inclination towards East European literature. It is astonishing how fast the "edition"

25 Joost de Wit to Waltera Böhlich, April 27, 1965, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA.

26 Undated note by Siegfried Unseld from 1967, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA. In the next note, Unseld asks for information on the titles of series to which copyright has been acquired, and on those in the process of being translated or produced (May 8, 1967, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA).

has become known also in Eastern Europe. During a visit to Prague I was told more than once that it has opened a window to Europe for East European writers, with Herbert's *Poems* and Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* both mentioned. Zbigniew Herbert owes his fame and the Vienna Literary Award to his publications in "edition suhrkamp." *Dancing Lessons* has achieved great success; Qualtinger read the text for radio and television, and a record is being prepared. An Italian publishing house has acquired the copyright, now there are publishers in France and England trying to get it. The Dutch [sic] author Ivo Michiels assured me that the form and construction of the series inspired him to write.²⁷

Extremely significant for understanding the dynamic of translation production concerning Dutch literature at Suhrkamp is the correspondence of Günther Busch with the translator and disseminator of Dutch-language Belgium literature, Georg Hermanowski, from 1964-1979. Hermanowski (1918-1993) was stationed in Belgium during the Second World War, and after its conclusion, studied Dutch literature at the German studies faculty at the University of Bonn. In the first quarter-century after the war, he was among the most important and most active agents of Flemish-German cultural transfer: by the end of the 1960s he had translated 42 novels by Flemish authors, which represented some 12 percent of the total 355 translations of titles by authors from Flanders and the Netherlands.²⁸ However, at the same time, Hermanowski's accomplishments come with numerous reservations concerning the ideological character of the transfer he promoted. He apparently distanced himself from the broad conception of "Dutch literature" and advocated a consistent distinction between "Dutch" and "Flemish" literatures. He saw in the latter a "synthesis of the mystical and [practical] affirmation of life," "a call for freedom and self-determination" and "roots in the faith of the fathers."²⁹ According to Van Uffelen, his "conservative" translation programme outright rejected contemporary Flemish authors such as Hugo Claus, Louis Paul Boon, Hubert Lampo and Marnix Gijsen, whom he called "cynics," "realists of banal reality" and "defeatists."³⁰

27 Ibid.

28 Van Uffelen, *Moderne niederländische Literatur*, 426.

29 Georg Hermanowski, *Die Stimme des schwarzen Löwen. Geschichte des flämischen Romans* (München: Starnberg, 1961), 15.

30 Van Uffelen, *Moderne niederländische Literatur*, 419. See Daniel de Vin, "Hermanowski en Vlaanderen. «Vlaamse» literatuur in Duitse vertaling na de Tweede Wereldoorlog," *Ons Erfdeel* 2 (1979): 197-205.

An analysis of the 15-year-long correspondence between Hermanowski and Günther Busch casts doubt upon this assessment. Hermanowski's public image – that of a one-man office working under the aegis of the “Flemish course,” promoting traditional Flemish peasant prose – stands in stark contrast to the figure of Hermanowski as a literary intermediary offering commercial services to one of Germany's major publishing houses. It is notable that at no stage of the correspondence were his occasional negative verdicts on “avant-garde” writers motivated by ethical or ideological concerns; rather his reasons were literary or market-based. The latter factors were decisive for Hermanowski. For example, his critical evaluation of Hugo Claus's novel *Sakrament* (1963) was dictated not by the text's anticlerical overtones, but by its hermetic and excessively “Flemish” nature, which meant that only “initiated” readers would be able to understand his caricatures of different types of people.³¹

While working with Busch, Hermanowski presented 17 lengthy reports mostly concerning Flemish authors, on the basis of which four projects were carried out: publication of the two parts of Ivo Michiels's avant-garde prose cycle, a collection of poems by Paul de Wispelaere and a volume of stories by Dutch poet and prosaist Jacques Hamelink.³² Several caveats must be taken into account regarding this modest – at least in numerical terms – result. First, Hermanowski was the first professional consultant to the Suhrkamp publishing house for Dutch-language literature. Although the picture of Flemish literature which he painted as “traditional” and “Catholic” is confirmed both in his work as a publicist and his translation, one must also bear the market conditions in mind. Hermanowski estimated the number of readers of traditional Flemish novels at around six thousand. Only up to 1964, as part of the “Flemish course” which he ran, he published 30 volumes, whose average

31 Georg Hermanowski to Günther Busch, June 20, 1964, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA. In the same year Hermanowski gave a positive review of another of Claus's novels, *De verwondering* (1962, *The Surprise*), suggesting that the National Literature Fund at the Belgian Ministry of Culture might purchase a large number of copies of the book. Notably, Busch commissioned Hermanowski's review two months before Judith Polak's recommendation of the same title. This inconspicuous coincidence is one of many “simultaneous” and independent (and therefore inefficient) traces of actions taken by publishing actors working in the two editorial departments.

32 Ivo Michiels, *Das Buch Alpha*, trans. Georg Hermanowski (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965); Michiels, *Orchis Militaris*, trans. Hermanowski (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969); Paul de Wispelaere, *So hat es begonnen*, trans. Hermanowski (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966); Jacques Hamelink, *Horror vacui*, trans. Jürgen Hillner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967).

sales exceeded 7000 copies.³³ When acting as a consultant to Suhrkamp, Hermanowski was flexible in adapting to the publishing house's profile, following the characteristics of a particular series in selecting titles as well as their orientation towards avant-garde literature. He would visit the annual Antwerp Book Fair and reserve translation rights, making regular reports on new publications, and his direct contacts with the cultural attaché at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium in Bonn made it possible for the Belgian Ministry of Culture to purchase part of the edition. It was also through Hermanowski that Günther Busch was able to personally contact writer Ivo Michiels. His collaboration with Suhrkamp allowed Michiels to sell the rights to translations of his *Book Alfa* into Polish, Italian, English and the Scandinavian languages; he was also a regular guest at the Frankfurt International Book Fair and worked as a literary consultant himself.³⁴

The question therefore remains: why did Hermanowski's decade and a half of collaboration with Busch not translate into success in the market and media for the Dutch-language authors published by Suhrkamp?³⁵ The answer is complex. The first factor is certainly the position of the editor of the "edition suhrkamp" series – Günther Busch from 1963 to 1979 – who was relatively independent from the decisions of the main publisher. He had a separate budget and did not require management approval to distribute it. But this exceptional autonomy also meant a lack of information flow concerning the selection of manuscripts that did not go beyond the editorial department. The second significant factor was the elitist nature of the series, whose objective was to introduce readers to new literary, philosophical and social phenomena. Although it did not individually present national literatures, we can identify certain preferences on the basis of the available data. During Busch's term, a total of 951 books were published, of which some 616 were theoretical texts. Of the 335 works of fiction a little under 30 percent were translations; 21 from English, 13 from Polish, 12 from French, 11 from Czech, and six apiece from Serbo-Croat and Dutch.

33 Georg Hermanowski to Günther Busch, October 25, 1964, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA.

34 Correspondence between Günther Busch and Ivo Michiels, December 7, 1964 – October 24, 1969, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate, DLA.

35 In January 1974 both of Ivo Michiels's novels, Paul de Wispelaere's poems and a volume of Paul van Ostaijen's prose called *Grotesken* featured on a list prepared for the publishing house of titles of which more unsold copies were returned to them than the number of copies sold (Siegfried Unseld to Gisela Mörlner, January 4, 1974, SUA: Suhrkamp/Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA).

The relatively privileged position of Polish literature in “edition suhrkamp” was also visible in other series. The reason for this was not just the “Polish wave” on the German publishing market in the 1970s and ‘80s, but also the “centralised” decision-making process regarding Polish authors. Here a fundamental difference can be observed: while authors from the Netherlands and Flanders appeared almost exclusively at the level of editorial correspondence, all matters concerning Polish literature were dealt with in the correspondences of the managerial department between 1960 and 1985. From March 1962, Siegfried Unseld was in regular contact with Karl Dedecius, who was until 1999 one of Suhrkamp’s regular collaborators. From 1965 until 1967, Unseld was advised by Juliusz Stroynowski, whom he had met at the Warsaw Book Fair, and after 1967 he also worked with Klaus Staemmler who, apart from Dedecius, was one of the most active translators of Polish literature. The Slavist Peter Urban was responsible for editing Polish authors from 1966 to 1968, followed by Werner Berthel, who contributed particularly to the promotion of the writing of Stanisław Lem. Lem himself (whose work with Suhrkamp began in 1971), as well as Zbigniew Herbert (at Suhrkamp from 1963), more than once advised the publisher on specific issues concerning the publication of individual books. Hedwig Nosbers’s implication that nobody with a background in Polish studies worked at Suhrkamp and that the publisher only contacted authors in exceptional circumstances, being reliant on translators’ suggestions, therefore appears wide of the mark.³⁶ It is also interesting to note that it was not just editors, translators and writers themselves who acted as intermediaries for Polish literature: the Warsaw-based Authorial Agency mediated in copyright sales too, and there were also private agents active in West Germany (including Wolfgang Thadewald and Ernst W. Geisenheyner).

To conclude this essay it is worth examining the period between 1985 and 1993, when the work of Dutch-language authors gradually became a priority for Suhrkamp, while at the same time Polish literature lost its relatively privileged position. What factors led Suhrkamp client Cees Nooteboom, a writer with a relatively marginal position in his native literary milieu, to become the “face” of Dutch literature in Germany, garnering sales of almost half a million books within a decade of his debut?³⁷

In an article published in 1993, Herbert Van Uffelen put the explosion of interest of publishers and readers in Dutch literature down to the so-called “Nooteboom effect”:

³⁶ Nosbers, *Polnische Literatur*, 125.

³⁷ Ulrich Sonnenberg, “Verkaufsübersicht Cees Nooteboom,” January 4, 1994, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate/Rainer Weiss, DLA.

In the mid-1980s Nootboom was discovered in the German language area. After his novel *Rituelen* [...] received the Ferdinand Bordewijk Prize in 1980, and the International Pegasus Literatuurprijs in 1982, the [East German] publisher Volk und Welt [...] issued a German translation of the novel. A year later Suhrkamp published the licensed edition of this translation, before continuing to publish translations of the Dutch author. Between 1985 and 1990, the following appeared: *In Nederland (In den niederländischen Bergen, 1987)*, *Een lied van schijn en wezen (Ein Lied von Schein und Sein, 1989)* and *Mokusei!* (1990). [...] In Nootboom a new master of literary technique had been unearthed.³⁸

More nuanced information can be gleaned by analysing the publishing house's archive. The "discovery" of Nootboom took place at Suhrkamp after the editor Elisabeth Borchers read the Volk und Welt translation of *Rituals* (first published in English in 1983), and suggested making use of the "pan-German rights" to the text, including it in the main programme for autumn 1985.³⁹ The remaining three books by Nootboom were published *despite* the editorial department's negative appraisal, on the express wish of the publisher. In May 1985, Siegfried Unseld went on a three-day study trip to the Netherlands, meeting representatives of the country's most important publishers. His Dutch contacts became regular thereafter, resulting in specific recommendations to the editorial department, which incidentally was represented by Dutch-speaking Raimund Fellingner from 1980. The year 1985 therefore marked a turning point in the process of translation production of Dutch literature at Suhrkamp: decision making become centralised, with the editors responsible for Dutch-language authors (who had previously enjoyed relative autonomy) coming under the jurisdiction of the head publisher. From 1987, Unseld maintained personal correspondence with Nootboom, and despite

38 Herbert Van Uffelen, "Cees Nootboom en het succes van de Nederlandse literatuur in het Duitse taalgebied. Het Nootboom-effect," *Literatuur* 10 (1993): 253. Quantitative data on Dutch literature in translation into German between 1990 and 1997 (and thus reflecting the impact of the 1993 Frankfurt Book Fair on the transfer of Dutch literature to Germany) can be found in Sandra van Voorst's article "Over de drempel. Nederlandse literatuur in Duitse vertaling 1990-1997," in *Object: Nederlandse literatuur in het buitenland. Methode: onbekend. Vormen van onderzoek naar de receptie van literatuur uit het Nederlandse taalgebied*, ed. Petra Broomans, et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2006), 111-122.

39 Elisabeth Borchers to Siegfried Unseld, November 1, 1984, SUA: Suhrkamp/03Lektorate/ Elisabeth Borchers, DLA. We should add that the poor quality of the translation meant that thorough corrections were necessary before Suhrkamp could publish the book, and owing to the lack of qualified translators, the French version of the novel was consulted for the German translation.

the highly unsatisfactory sales of the author's two books published to date, ensured that his visits to Germany were given extensive media coverage, initiated reprints of specific titles and appealed to his colleagues to grant Nootboom a special status. It is important to note that the Dutch author not only adeptly promoted his own work, but was also active as a literary intermediary, successfully recommending texts of Dutch-language authors to Suhrkamp, including Thomas Rosenboom and A. F. Th. van der Heijden.

Nootboom's status rose after the unprecedented commercial success of his *Berliner Notizen* [Berlin Notes] and *Die folgende Geschichte* [The Following Story], both published in 1991. The former came about in part by chance. In May 1988, Nootboom received a scholarship from the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, and his hot-off-the-press chronicle of the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall from the perspective of a Dutch writer with an excellent understanding of Germany was enthusiastically received. Just five months after publication, *Berliner Notizen* was recognised with the 3 October Literature Prize (Literaturpreis zum 3. Oktober) inaugurated the same year by the Bouvier Booksellers Association, with the justification that "the German unification process is not just an internal matter for Germans, but requires a critical view from the outside."⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the success of *The Following Story* in Germany began a month after its publication on 10 October 1991, when during the literary programme *Das literarische Quartet* Marcel Reich-Ranicki called Nootboom "a European author of great importance," and his novel "one of the most important books" of the year.⁴¹

Although Reich-Ranicki's words are usually quoted in the context of the establishment of Cees Nootboom's position (and with it that of Dutch-language literature as a whole) on the German publishing market, we should also note that the German critic was distinctly talking about a "European" author. Siegfried Unseld also saw in Nootboom one of "the most important European prose writers,"⁴² and did not link his work with plans for presenting Dutch literature as a separate group of texts. Neither did other Dutch authors published by Suhrkamp during this period (including Renate Rubinstein,

40 Berliner Buchhandelsgesellschaft Bouvier to Suhrkamp Verlag, September 27, 1991, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Autorenkonvolute/Cees Nootboom, DLA.

41 A recording of the programme can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2ZiZP82lRs, accessed June 9, 2014. In August 1993, less than two years after publication, the sales figures for *Die folgende Geschichte* reached 100,000 (Siegfried Unseld to Rolf Staudt, August 6, 1993, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA).

42 Siegfried Unseld, "Reisebericht. Menorca," July 31 – August 2, 1993, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Autorenkonvolute/Cees Nootboom, DLA.

with whom Unseld made contact through Amsterdam-based Suhrkamp authors Norbert Elias and A. F. Th. van der Heijden) operate under the banner of national literature.⁴³ This *modus operandi* changed briefly only in time for preparations for the 1993 Frankfurt Book Fair, where Flanders and the Netherlands were guests of honour. Unseld then approached the Dutch foundation Stichting Frankfurter Buchmesse with the idea of preparing a joint presentation of Klett, Hanser and Suhrkamp's Dutch-language offerings. What Van Uffelen calls a "successful operation" of three publishing houses⁴⁴ was therefore in fact a marketing ploy formulated *post factum*, as part of which the consistent construction of the brand of specific authors in the mid-1980s was incorporated into the promotional strategy for literature from Flanders and the Netherlands.

At the same time, there was another cause for this "denationalisation" of Dutch authors taking place behind the scenes. Starting in the mid-1980s, Suhrkamp was engaged in a constant struggle with the "Polish Library" series, a success in terms of both political concerns and image, but not a market success, and in the correspondences of the management department, there were regular signals of alarming sales figures of specific titles and a call for marketing ideas to find a solution to the problem.⁴⁵ It is interesting to note

43 From the outset, Unseld regarded Nootboom as a writer of "European literature" (and on his initiative on November 3, 1989 the Dutch author gave a lecture at the headquarters of Deutsche Bank with this very title). According to Unseld, Nootboom's novel *Ein Lied von Schein und Sein*, published by Suhrkamp in 1989, was an expression of the "central European fate," and its author was one of the mainstays of the planned, but never realised, "European Library," within which the novels of the Dutch prose writer Simon Vestdijk were also supposed to appear (Siegfried Unseld to Cees Nootboom, May 20, 1988; Siegfried Unseld, note, October 16, 1990, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Autorenkonvolute/Cees Nootboom, DLA). An expression of the "denationalised" perception of authors from Flanders and the Netherlands on the German publishing market is the Hermann Wallman's 1997 essay with the telling title "There is no such thing as Dutch literature." "Why," he asks, "should I be interested in Dutch literature just because it happens to come from Belgium or the Netherlands? A writer [...] does not represent a country, let alone a government, but rather his own particular qualities." Accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.letterenfonds.nl/en/essay/7/there-is-no-such-thing-as-dutch-literature>

44 Van Uffelen, *Moderne niederländische Literatur*, 446.

45 For example, in 1991, sales of 30 of the 39 volumes published to date did not exceed 800 copies (Christoph Groffy, undated note from 1991, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA). The general view is that Suhrkamp displayed insufficient engagement in promoting Polish literature and the "Polnische Bibliothek" (Nosbers, *Polnische Literatur*, 130-132) are in contrast with the regular comments at the managerial correspondence level from the mid-1980s onwards concerning diverse proposals for pro-

that in the internal correspondences of the managerial department, the “Polish Library” was a (negative) point of reference in promotion of other, “lesser” national literatures. At a conference on the reception of Dutch literature in the German-speaking publishing market held in Stuttgart in March 1989, the head of Suhrkamp’s editorial department warned against presenting Dutch and Flemish authors in the “ghetto of the ‘Dutch Library.’”⁴⁶ Publishing individual national literatures in the form of a “concise” series starkly contradicted Suhrkamp’s previous policy of promoting the complete works of authors, and the fortunes of the project presenting Polish literature *in toto*, launched in 1982 (doubtless for political reasons) by the German Institute of Polish Studies and financed by the Bosch Foundation, was a lively and current illustration of the merits of the previous approach.

4.

Based on Suhrkamp’s publishing archive, the ethnography of translation production thus provides us with interesting information concerning the dynamic of (semi-) peripheral national literatures on the German publishing market. By analysing the processes concerning both selected and rejected titles in the form of a chronological narrative, I see it as important to be aware of the level at which the processes of interaction and negotiation occur and are recorded. By studying the editorial correspondences and comparing them with other layers of the archive, we can observe when the actors interested in achieving a specific objective were successful in securing the action of other actors, and so in essence what Latour calls “translation.”⁴⁷ Latour follows Michel Callon in identifying three clearly separate phases. In the first, actors look for points of contact between themselves and the identities and interests of other actors,

motional campaigns. In September 1993, the Bosch Foundation, which had so far provided subsidies of 9000 marks for each of the books published, did not agree to increase this amount, a step that the publisher deemed to be necessary. The gap in funding for further volumes in the Polish Library was to be filled by the Foundation purchasing 200-300 complete sets as a gift for “East German, and possibly also Silesian libraries” (Rolf Staudt to Siegfried Unseld, September 2, 1993, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA).

46 Raimund Fellinger to Siegfried Unseld, “Reisebericht Fachtagung ‘Unbeschreiblich Niederländisch. Die Rezeption „kleinerer“ europäischer Literaturen auf dem deutschsprachigen Buchmarkt am Beispiel der Niederlande’, vom 3. Bis 5. März 1989 im Waldhotel Deckerloch, Stuttgart,” March 7, 1989, SUA: Suhrkamp/01Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA.

47 Renate Grau, *Ästhetisches Engineering. Zur Verbreitung von Belletristik im Literaturbetrieb* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006), 58.

thus stabilising the system of mutual relations. In the second phase, actors look for the acceptance of other actors for their own interests, in order in the third phase to gain it in the form of mutual obligation.⁴⁸

As for the publishing house's correspondences concerning Dutch literature, contacts between Dutch/Flemish and German actors in the publishing field did not go beyond the first two phases of translation for many years, understood as a process of mutual interaction. Owing to the lack of professional "services" from literary consultants, translators and institutions responsible for cultural policy, the publishing house's interests entirely missed recommendations solely concerning the hierarchy and specifics of the Dutch-language book market (a problem best illustrated by the editorial department's contacts with the Foundation for the Support of Dutch Literature Translation between 1960 and 1970). It remains paradoxical that the editorial departments' comparative autonomy also ultimately hampered the wider transfer of Dutch literature. The lack of coordination in the process of choosing books and the idiosyncratic selection criteria (as in the case of Günther Busch's editing of the "edition suhrkamp" series) led to many projects being rejected without consultation with the management of the publishing house.

The year 1985 represented a turning point in Dutch literature, although the reasons for this watershed analysed from the "internal" perspective of the publishers differ from the political and market-based explanations cited by Herbert Van Uffelen. Referring to Latour's division into phases of translation, we can assume that in the second half of the 1980s, individual actors of the publishing field not only found mutual acceptance for their projects, but also committed to their realisation. Completion of the "translation" process took place at four complementary levels. First, the aforementioned "centralisation" of decisions led to a standardised policy of the publishing house towards Dutch literature. Second, there was a significant change in the way in which the editorial department worked with external consultants and translators. Suhrkamp began to collaborate on a permanent basis with the Munich-based specialist in Dutch studies Carel ter Haar, who not only recommended and reviewed specific texts, but also adapted them to the profiles of various series. In the early 1990s, Suhrkamp also signed a permanent contract with translator Helga van Beuningen, thus resolving the problem of inadequate translations. Third, there was a change in the relations between the publishing house and the Dutch institutions responsible for cultural policy which, prior to the 1993 Frankfurt Book Fair, subsidised the costs of translation, production and

48 Bruno Latour, *Die Hoffnung der Pandora: Untersuchungen zur Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 381 [English edition: *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999)].

advertising of various titles in a flexible and unbureaucratic manner (the subsidies sometimes amounted to 75 percent of the production costs of a given book).⁴⁹ Finally, Dutch publishers actively represented their own authors, undertaking activities typical of literary agents.

At the present stage, the correspondence concerning the transfer of Polish literature at Suhrkamp publishing house requires a more widespread, systematic analysis, encompassing all the layers of the archive detailed above. The data presented in this article are diagnostic in character, serving as a reference to the individual stages of translation which has taken place between the actors of the publishing field within my previous research on Dutch literature. Yet we are able to make an initial hypothesis that the “Polish Library” project, instrumental in promoting Polish literature at Suhrkamp, despite the apparent “commitment” of the interested parties, was in its very nature contradictory to the strategy of presenting national literatures in place at the time. The success of literature from Flanders and the Netherlands recorded in the last decade of the 20th century and still evident today resulted, apart from the aforementioned elements of how the production of translation was organised, from a radical break with the labels of “Dutchness” and “Flemishness.” Polish authors were not the subject of any such “denationalisation.” In February 1975, Siegfried Unseld noted that “publishing Polish literature remains an adventure. We love the Poles, but what we read is not always easy. The brilliant aphorisms of Polish authors are like sparks dancing above a catastrophe. Herbert’s poems shine like stars, which for light years will continue to permeate the dark of the night.”⁵⁰ Polish literature remained an adventure, while its Dutch counterpart became a lucrative business.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

49 The Foundation for the Support of Dutch Literature Translation (Stichting ter Bevordering van de Vertaling van Nederlands Letterkundig Werk), closed down in 1989, was replaced by two separate national organisations: from 1991 Het Nederlands Literair Productie- en Vertalingenfonds was responsible for promotion of literature from the Netherlands, while in Belgium cultural policy in initiating and supporting translations of Dutch/Flemish literature was the preserve of the Art Division of the Ministry of Culture and the Flemish Community. Today, on the Flemish side the Flemish Foundation for Literature (Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren), founded in March 1999, is responsible for promotion of Dutch literature abroad, while Dutch authors are represented by the Nederlands Letterenfonds, established in January 2010. The two organisations jointly presented Dutch literature at the 2016 Frankfurt Book Fair, at which Flanders and the Netherlands again featured as guests of honour.

50 Siegfried Unseld to Gottfried Honnefelder, February 24, 1975, SUA: Korrespondenz der Verlagsleitung. Notizen, DLA.