



## ‘Vort paard, hu!’: Charlotte Mutsaers’ Animal Writing through Kafka’s Animal Stories<sup>1</sup>

‘Vort paard, hu!’: Charlotte Mutsaers’ animale schriftuur in het licht van Kafka’s dierenverhalen

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**Abstract:** Charlotte Mutsaers’ essayistic and literary work displays a complex relation to Kafka’s animal writing. While Mutsaers often refers in her work to Kafka’s animal texts, she also distances herself from Kafka’s representation of a ‘becoming-animal’ in his short story *Die Verwandlung* (1912). In order to better understand Mutsaers’ relation to Kafka and to gain insight into the underlying animal poetics and politics of the Dutch author, this article focuses on Mutsaers’ novel *Rachels Rokje* (1994). Using the framework of the *Cultural and Literary Animal Studies* (CLAS) and Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking on animality, it shows how Mutsaers both deterritorialises and reterritorialises Kafka’s animals in her novel. By referring to a *zoe*-approach as defined by Braidotti (2011), this article argues that Mutsaers’ zoopoetics not only occurs in a playful manner, but also in a biopolitical perspective in which a form of affinity and egalitarianism between species is put forward.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Mutsaers; becoming-animal; Franz Kafka; animal metaphor; zoopoetics; performativity; human-animal affinity; *zoe*; biopolitics / Charlotte Mutsaers; dierwording; Franz Kafka; dierenmetafoor; zoöpoëtica; performativiteit; mens-dier affiniteit; *zoe*; biopolitiek

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The books by contemporary Dutch writer and artist Charlotte Mutsaers are filled with references and allusions to Kafka's writing and in particular to his animal writing. While Mutsaers pays tribute to Kafka throughout her entire work, at times she is also critical of Kafka's depiction of a 'becoming-animal' in his well-known short story *Die Verwandlung* (1912). In one of her essays, she thus argues that Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* is

[e]en magnifieke metamorfose, dat wel, maar geen magnifieke metafoor, laat staan een overtuigende dierwording. Die metafoor is [...] te dik en ligt ook nog op haar rug. Zo glipt het leven eruit. [...] Daar valt uit te leren dat men in kunst juist graag omhelst wat niet tot leven komt. Om op die manier gebrek aan levenskunst te compenseren?<sup>2</sup>

[a magnificent metamorphosis [...] but not a magnificent metaphor, let alone a convincing becoming-animal. That metaphor is [...] too thick and even lies on its back. That's how life slips away from it. [...] This teaches us that, through art, one likes to embrace exactly those things that do not come to life... In order to compensate a lack of *savoir-vivre*?]

Regardless of whether Mutsaers' critique is justified, her metatextual comment both questions the very notion of becoming-animal in Kafka's story as well as its use in the creative process. She further emphasises what she regards as an important function of art, namely that artistic work should perform the artist's engagement with life by means of art's intrinsic devices.

Mutsaers' critical stance towards Kafka's *Verwandlung* is an interesting starting point to analyse her relation to Kafka's animal texts and to gain from this vantage point insight into the underlying animal poetics and politics of the Dutch author. How does Mutsaers express a form of animal writing that is both similar and different to Kafka's? How does this affect the central issue of the animal in her work? These questions are raised in an exemplary way through Mutsaers' *Rachels rokje* (1994, *Rachel's Skirt*), which is the novel under discussion in this article.

In order to understand Mutsaers' animal writing and relation to Kafka, this article uses the framework of the *Cultural and Literary Animal Studies* (CLAS)<sup>3</sup> as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concepts of *becoming-animal* and *detritorialisation/reterritorialisation*. These approaches prove useful for analysing how literary animal configurations can reflect non-anthropocentric views on the animal-human relationship. As epistemological background, this article also refers to Rosi Braidotti's 'bio-centred' thinking, in which an egalitarian position between humans and animals is put forward. Thanks to these animal-centred perspectives, this article argues that *Rachels rokje*, through allusions and references to Kafka's animal stories as well as to Mutsaers' own texts, performs a whole becoming-animal as the author herself called

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<sup>2</sup> C. Mutsaers, *Pedante pendules en andere wekkers (Pedantic Pendulum Clocks and other Alarm Clocks)* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2010), p. 37. All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> This inter- and transdisciplinary research field quickly expanded in the English- and German-speaking worlds from the 1990s onwards. It has resulted in both a quantitative increase of scholarly studies and in a 'qualitative revision of the established concepts and terminology, especially with respect to traditional dichotomies such as human and animal, subject and object, action and behavior, or culture and nature', in R. Borgards, 'Introduction: Cultural and Literary Animal Studies', in *Journal of Literary Theory*, 9.2 (2015), p. 155. *Literary Animal Studies* highlight, for example, non-anthropomorphic ways of reading the animal-human relation in art and culture.

her novel in *Paardejam* (1996, *Horse Jam*). As I will show this occurs not only in a playful manner in the novel, but it is also consistent with a biopolitical dynamic.

## Mutsaers and the Becoming-Animal

Dutch writer and multitalented artist Mutsaers (1942) started her artistic career as a painter before devoting herself entirely to writing. Success ensued and she was awarded a number of prizes, including the important Constantijn Huygens Prize 2000 as well as the prestigious P.C. Hooft Prize 2010 for her entire work. She may not yet have been much translated internationally,<sup>4</sup> in Dutch-speaking cultural circles Mutsaers is well-known for her eclectic, colourful, political and controversial oeuvre. In her various paintings and drawings, as well as in her essays, stories and novels, Mutsaers does not shrink away from voicing critical opinions about any form of injustice done to animals.<sup>5</sup> For example, the narrator of her latest novel *Koetsier Herfst* (2008, *Coachman Autumn*) alludes to animal dignity by challenging the common idea that we are different from the animal by conspicuously stating: '*Humaniteit, uw naam is dier*' [*Humanity, your name is animal*].<sup>6</sup> Humans should not forget their animal condition. Humans and animals should be put on an equal footing and be treated similarly. A similar statement on human-animal egalitarianism is uttered by the protagonist Rachel in Mutsaers' novel *Rachels rokje*: 'Als dier ben je de pineut. Heeft u ooit tribunalen voor misdrijven voor dieren gezien?' [*Being an animal, you are the dupe. Have you ever seen a tribunal for crimes against animals?*]<sup>8</sup> The seriousness of these critical and political statements is counterbalanced by the playfulness and the *bevlogen lichtheid* [*enthusiastic lightness*]<sup>9</sup> so characteristic of Mutsaers' writing. Her books also abound with allusions and references to famous painters, songwriters, storytellers and philosophers within the Dutch-speaking and international contexts, as well as to her own work.

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<sup>4</sup> Only a few of Mutsaers' books have been translated so far, more specifically into German by Marlene Müller-Haas, e.g. the novels *Rachel's Röckchen* (translated in 1997) and *Kutscher Herbst* (in 2011), as well as some of her essays in the collection *Kirschenblut* (in 2001). Could this be related to the particular attention she pays to German-speaking authors, such as Franz Kafka?

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. D. Rovers, "Laat dat maar aan de stomerij over": Over ethiek in Charlotte Mutsaers' *Rachels rokje*, in *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 8.4 (2003), p. 326; S. Sereni, "Doelgerichte grilligheid": Een discours-theoretische lectuur van het werk van Charlotte Mutsaers', unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Liège (2006); N. Cornelissen, *Armando, Brakman, Mutsaers: Over filosofie en literatuur* (Zoetermeer: Klement, 2012), p. 225; For a provisional and critical state of art of the existing research on the animal in Mutsaers' work with regard to *Animal Studies*, see B. Fraipont, "[H]et dier in al zijn toonaarden": Over zoöpoëtische configuraties in Charlotte Mutsaers' beeldend en literair werk', in *Nederlandse letterkunde* 1 (2014), pp. 67-87, in particular note 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Koetsier Herfst* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2008), p. 32; Italics in the original text.

<sup>7</sup> In this article, I use the second edition of the novel published in 1996.

<sup>8</sup> C. Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1996), p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> A quotation borrowed from Hugo Bousset's essay about Mutsaers' writing ('Bevlogen lichtheid', in *De Gids* 161.3 (1988), pp. 224-39) and based on Italo Calvino's essay *Six Memos for the Next Millennium: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1985-86* (1988) (*Zes memo's voor het volgende millennium. De Charles Eliot Norton lezingen 1985-1986*, trans. by L. Pennings (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1991), pp. 3-31).

The animal motif in Mutsaers' work is influential in her transition from painting to writing. In 'Als het woord vlees wordt, hinnikt het paard' [When the word becomes flesh, the horse neighs],<sup>10</sup> a poetical essay about the relation between image and text, the author explains how she simply could not depict and draw the special experience she had with 'her beloved physical horse named Petit' – which she met in a riding school:

We waren nog maar halverwege of Petit hield met een ruk halt, aarzelde even en begon te bokken. [...] Terwijl ik verbouwereerd op het mos zat, zag ik dat Petit zelf ook door de knieën ging en langzaam op me af kwam gekropen. De manoeuvres die hij maakte waren zo eigenaardig en de manier waarop hij me aankeek was zo speciaal dat ik maar één conclusie kon trekken: hij wil op schoot. Hoe dit afliep staat, uiteraard mutatis mutandis, te lezen in *Rachels rokje*.<sup>11</sup>

[We were only halfway when Petit suddenly halted, hesitated and started to buck. [...] While I sat dumbfounded on the moss, I saw that Petit himself also dropped to his knees and slowly crawled towards me. His manoeuvring was so peculiar and the way he looked at me felt so special that only one conclusion could be drawn from it: he wanted to sit on my lap. How this story ended can be read, mutatis mutandis, in *Rachel's skirt*.]

To draw or paint this experience of 'het paard dat op schoot wou' [the horse that wanted to sit on her lap] would merely amount for her to describe it and, as Mutsaers asserts, '*Beschreven paarden waren er genoeg*' [[t]here were enough *described* horses].<sup>12</sup> Instead, she has chosen to write this experience, to write it in the sense of acting and engaging with it so as to perform it in her writing. It is worth noting that horse representations and in particular the rider/horse dynamic are also often identified in Kafka's work as motifs for the writing practice.<sup>13</sup> For Mutsaers, Gilles Deleuze and his thought about the becoming-animal marks a turning point in her decision to write. As she further explains in her essay through the schematic statement 'EEN PAARD SCHRIJVEN = EEN PAARD WORDEN': 'Volgens Deleuze kun je onmogelijk in iets veranderen zonder dat datgene tegelijkertijd in jou verandert' [WRITING A HORSE = BECOMING A HORSE: [a]ccording to Deleuze, you cannot turn into something else without this other thing turning into you].<sup>14</sup> In short, according to Mutsaers, the writing of the horse inevitably goes hand in hand with the becoming-horse of the writer. This is the smith's secret, says Mutsaers, a secret similar to a magic spell that ought to be achieved through the medium of writing. The question remains, however, of how this magic spell should concretely be performed:

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<sup>10</sup> *Paardejam* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2010 (1996)), p. 193. Here I use the eighth edition of Mutsaers' essay collection, published in 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> For instance in Kafka's novel *Amerika* (1935), we find literary indications for 'die kentaaurische Verschmelzung von Mann und Pferd als Emblem des literarischen Schreibens' [the centauric fusing of man and horse as emblem of literary writing], in D. Kremer, 'Verschollen. Gegenwärtig: Franz Kafkas Roman "Der Verschollene"', in *Text+Kritik*, 7 (1994), p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 210.

Omdat de dierwording zich op het niveau van de stijl voltrekt, kom je er met het schuiven van woordjes niet. Hoe kom je er dan wél, zal men zich afvragen. Maar gelukkig geeft Deleuze geen schrijfcursussen. In feite zegt hij niet veel meer dan dat de schrijver zijn territorium moet overschrijden, moet trachten te schrijven 'zoals een rat een lijn trekt, of zoals hij zijn staart kromt, zoals een vogel een klank uitstoot, zoals een roofdier beweegt of zwaar slaapt.'<sup>15</sup>

[Because the becoming-animal fulfils itself on a stylistic level, you will not get there by putting words next to each other. Nevertheless, one may wonder how to get there. Luckily Deleuze does not teach writing courses. In fact, the only thing Deleuze says is that the writer should step out of his territory, and should write 'the way a rat traces a line, or the way it twists its tail, the way a bird sends out a sound, the way a predator moves or sleeps heavily.']

Mutsaers states further that it is through language, 'het meest ondierlijke medium' [the most non-animal medium]<sup>16</sup> that she managed to achieve what she failed to do with her visual art. This is the looking glass through which we can read her experience of 'the horse that wanted to sit on her lap' in chapter 10 of *Rachels rokje*. This alleged becoming-horse only represents one of the multiple becomings-animal with which the novel is imbued. In order to analyse the becomings-animal in Mutsaers' *Rachels rokje* and to understand her complex relation to Kafka's animals, I will now use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophical conceptualisation of becomings-animal in art.

## Kafka's 'Magnificent Metamorphosis'

In their seminal work *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux* (1980) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari compare the writer with a wizard: 'Si l'écrivain est un sorcier, c'est parce qu'écrire est un devenir, écrire est traversé d'étranges devenirs qui ne sont pas des devenirs-écrivain, mais des devenirs-rat, des devenirs-insecte, des devenirs-loup, etc.' ['If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc.']<sup>17</sup> Both philosophers associate the very idea of becoming-animal with what they call the *anomal* [anomalous]. They define *an-omalie* as 'l'inégal, le rugueux, l'aspérité, la pointe de déterritorialisation' ['the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization.']<sup>18</sup> For them, '[L]'anomal n'est ni individu ni espèce [...]. C'est un phénomène, mais un phénomène de bordure' ['the anomalous is neither an individual nor a

<sup>15</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>16</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 293-94; G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by B. Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 265.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*, p. 298; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 269.

species [...]. It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering.’<sup>19</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, a model wizard who has accomplished becomings-animal through his writing style is Kafka. They consider him no less than ‘un grand auteur des devenirs-animaux réels, [qui] chante le peuple des souris’ [‘a great author of real becomings-animal [who] sings of mouse society’].<sup>20</sup> To them Josephine in Kafka’s animal parable ‘Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse’ (1924) represents the anomalous among the mouse people: ‘[T]out Animal a son Anomal. [...] tout animal pris dans sa meute ou sa multiplicité a son anomal’ [‘Every Animal has its Anomalous. [...] every Animal swept up in its pack or its multiplicity has its Anomalous.’]<sup>21</sup> The anomalous, in this case, Josephine, can sing in Kafka’s story – in contrast to the other mice – and thus disrupts species-specific characteristics. As bordering phenomenon, she enables a becoming-animal to take place because we find her on the edge of animal and human forces. In the Deleuzian sense, a becoming-animal is a phenomenon ‘de double capture, d’évolution non parallèle, de nocés entre deux règnes. [...] Il n’y a plus de machines binaires: [...], homme-animal, etc.’ [‘of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns. [...] There are no longer binary machines: [...], masculine-feminine, man-animal, etc.’]<sup>22</sup> A simultaneous deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of fixed or established spheres occurs.<sup>23</sup> Thus a zone of proximity and indetermination between animal and human unfolds from which features of both the animal and the human can be brought back to either the one or the other.

Not only Deleuze and Guattari have associated Kafka’s writing with the becoming-animal motif, Kafka’s stories are in fact considered exemplary for the relation between writing and the animal in many ways.<sup>24</sup> In her leading book *Animal Stories. Narrating across Species Lines* (2011), Susan McHugh mentions Kafka and refers to Margot Norris’ analysis of ‘the exceptional case of Franz Kafka’s animal narratives’, which, according to Norris, casts the dynamic of ‘the

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<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*, p. 299; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*, p. 298; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*, p. 298; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 269.

<sup>22</sup> G. Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996 (1977)), p. 8; G. Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2007, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux*.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. K.-H. Fingerhut, *Die Funktion der Tierfiguren im Werke Franz Kafkas; offene Erzählgerüste und Figurenspele* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1969); M. Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); J. Zhou, *Tiere in der Literatur: Eine komparatistische Untersuchung der Funktion von Tierfiguren bei Franz Kafka und Pu Songling* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996); I. Schiffermüller, ‘Kleine Zoopoetik der Moderne: Robert Musils Tierbilder im Vergleich mit Franz Kafka’, in Locher, E., *Die kleinen Formen in der Moderne* (Essay & Poesie; 13) (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2001); J. Thermann, *Kafkas Tiere: Fahrten, Bahnen und Wege der Sprache* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2010); For recent readings and interpretations of ‘the roles played by nonhuman animals and other creatures in Kafka’s writing’ from the perspective of Animal Studies, see in particular the essay collection *Kafka’s creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. by Lucht and Yarri (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 4 and Roland Borgards’ chapter ‘Literatur’ in *Lexikon der Mensch-Tier-Beziehungen*, ed. by A. Ferrari and K. Petrus (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015).

modernist “biocentric” tradition of representing human animality’.<sup>25</sup> Mutsaers’ above-mentioned statement on Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* can be analysed alongside interpretations that, such as that of McHugh, show how animality illustrates in Kafka’s work a ‘narrative logic’ for deconstructing the humanist subject.<sup>26</sup> Especially in Kafka’s famous short story, the figure of the animal mainly functions as a disruptive means to distort, as Kári Driscoll puts it:

established discourses and power structures by transgressing or eradicating seemingly strictly defined boundaries and opening up new possibilities for de-hierarchised sets of dynamic relations constantly interacting through contagions, allegiances, and becomings. [...] ‘Animality’ and ‘animal’ here name the very process of deterritorialisation itself, where the figure of the animal poses a threat to established orders and boundaries precisely because those orders and boundaries are conceived as anthropo- and logocentric.<sup>27</sup>

Mutsaers distances her conception of the becoming-animal from Kafka’s writing. By stating that Kafka’s *Verwandlung* is ‘not a convincing becoming-animal’, Mutsaers is not suggesting that Kafka does not create becomings-animal as understood in Deleuzian terms, but that these becomings – especially the one in his *Verwandlung* – are not ‘convincing’ to her in the sense of having an authentic effect: ‘That’s how life slips away from it’.<sup>28</sup> The play of make-believe stops because the construction of the animal in Kafka’s story is too obvious and superficial. Mutsaers actually criticises the fantastic and allegorical features of animality and becomings-animal in Kafka’s texts. This means two things. Firstly, Mutsaers believes that animality in Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* is still too much marked by human’s subjectivity due to its metaphorical aspect, as Dutch philosophy scholar Niels Cornelissen also underlines.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the supposed becoming-animal suggested by the process of Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis into an indeterminate figure of *Ungeziefer* represents, ‘a monster, virtually nameless, existing as an opaque sign’,<sup>30</sup> as Stanley Corngold asserts in his essay ‘The Metamorphosis of Metaphor’. This monster is enclosed in itself and in the fictional world of a parable from the start: ‘When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.’<sup>31</sup> The metaphorical relation to the animal is too opaque, to follow Corngold, because the animal metaphor here denotes a becoming-animal that is not an effective one, in the sense that it remains too figurative and allegorical. With regard to Deleuze’s thought, the philosopher Alain Beaulieu describes this type of metaphorical becoming as follows: ‘a distinct state pretends to be able to replace another without considering the “fold” between things and without experiencing disjunctive synthesis, a machinic assemblage or a

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<sup>25</sup> S. McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> K. Driscoll, ‘Toward a Poetics of Animality: Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Pirandello, Kafka’, unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University (2014), pp. 179-80.

<sup>28</sup> Mutsaers, *Pedante pendules en andere wekkers*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Cornelissen, *Armando, Brakman, Mutsaers: Over filosofie en literatuur*, p. 258.

<sup>30</sup> S. Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> F. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. by S. Corngold (New York: Bantam Classics, 1972), p. 3.

process of differentiation.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the fictional representation fails to account for the significance of the animal when it is not determined by species-specific features in the text.

For Mutsaers, Deleuze's becoming-animal is a useful writing tool, which enables her to transcend the mere conceptual animal to get to the concrete animal, dealing with it as a central issue in her novel.<sup>33</sup> This is something she does not find in Kafka as his becomings-animal and literary animals function in another context and induce a different animal politics. Mutsaers nevertheless inscribes Kafka's animal texts in her own zoopoetics related to today's biopolitical context. *Zoopoetics* is concerned with poetical and creative (writing) processes in which another (animal) species is given attention and established ways of seeing the animal are questioned.<sup>34</sup> In Mutsaers' zoopoetics, Kafka's literary animals are, on the one hand, used as significant references to dismantle fixed or established conceptions about animals: in her texts, they suggest for instance a cross-species dynamic. On the other hand, Kafka's texts are simultaneously deterritorialized by Mutsaers and reterritorialized, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, that is reconfigured and -imagined in a performative manner. As a reader of Kafka, Mutsaers seems in this regard to follow Deleuze's belief that art should not imitate but rather steal and run away: 'The painter does not imitate the bird: it captures it as line, speed, and colour. This is a process of becoming that deterritorializes both the artist and his/her object.'<sup>35</sup> In other words, distancing herself from Kafka, Mutsaers uses language and the writing process itself to perform an in her eyes 'authentic' becoming-animal. This occurs in her writing alongside a discourse in which a form of egalitarianism between humans and animals is central. Philosopher Braidotti describes such a dynamic in terms of a biocentric affinity for *zoe*:

the affirmative power of Life, as a vector of transformation, a conveyor or carrier that enacts in-depth transformations. As such it actualizes a set of both social and symbolic interactions that inscribe the human-nonhuman bond, also known as biocentered egalitarianism, at the heart of our concerns.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A. Beaulieu, 'The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought', in *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 9.1-2 (2011), p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> In her study "Doelgerichte grilligheid". Een discours-theoretische lektuur van het werk van Charlotte Mutsaers', Sabrina Sereni briefly draws on the concept of becoming and becoming-animal. She refers to Mutsaers' reading of it to illustrate, from a discourse-theoretical perspective, how Mutsaers uses Deleuze's idea of becoming as yet another strategy to undermine established discourses in her writing, such as that of hierarchy between human and animal (pp. 403-26). I would like to further analyse the functions of that concept in Mutsaers' work and show how it testifies to a form of zoopoetical writing and thinking.

<sup>34</sup> With regard to Mutsaers' creative poetics, I derive this definition from the analogical relation to the term *ecopoetics* (see e.g. J. Skinner, 'Editor's statement' in *Journal Ecopoetics* 1 (2001), pp. 5-8 and P. Schoentjes, 'Texte de la nature et nature du texte: Jean-Loup Trassard et les enjeux de l'écopoétique en France', in *Poétique (Collection)* 164 (2010), pp. 477-494) and from different usages of the term in *Cultural and Literary Animal Studies* (see e.g. C. White, *Animals, Technology, and the Zoopoetics of American Modernism* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2008); M.A. Moe, *Zoopoetics. Animals and the Making of Poetry* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014); Driscoll, 'Toward a Poetics of Animality: Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Pirandello, Kafka').

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, cited from R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti*, p. 112.



Mutsaers brings a new animal dimension into play in her texts, which refers to the profound animal identity and affinity for zoe of the human. This animal ipseity and affinity for the animal is, for instance, strengthened in *Rachels rokje* through the intratextual relation to Mutsaers' essay about her horse experience in *Paardejam*. The significance of the animal in Mutsaers' novel is, besides the intertextual animal dimension through Kafka and the author's intratextual poetics, even more marked across her use of images and language. In her writing, Mutsaers conveys presence to the animal through zoe-affinities. In what follows, I will analyse three interfaces through which this occurs in *Rachels rokje*: body/agency (horse); voice/speaking (mouse); gaze/seeing (calf).

## 'Het paard dat op schoot wou'

Regarding Mutsaers' particular experience with a horse, how does this becoming-horse concretely take shape in the novel *Rachels rokje*? Different phases can be distinguished with respect to the horse's bodily agency in the text. On a figurative level, anthropomorphic aspects can be attributed to the animal figure of the horse. In Mutsaers' text, this is implied by the supposed humanised perspective of a horse that has longed to sit on his rider's lap for his whole life.<sup>37</sup> The horse's whole serious enterprise to get on the rider's lap reaches a critical point when the horse looks at his rider 'schuins in de ogen' [with a sidelong glance], thus attaining his sensitivity. The rider eventually 'sluit de benen, opent de armen en zegt: "Kom maar hier"' [closes his legs, opens his arms and says: 'come on here then.']<sup>38</sup> The close, almost symbiotic relationship of the horse and the rider brings about a form of therianthropism, which is, as Steve Baker explains, a visual construction combining the image of a beast with that of a man.<sup>39</sup> The anthropomorphisation of the horse, when paired with a theriomorphisation, leads to a form of animalisation of the rider in so far as he has changed after the intimate encounter with his horse: 'En de berijder? Is er beter aan toe dan ooit: niet meer voor rede vatbaar' [And, the rider? Never felt better: not open for reason anymore.]<sup>40</sup> In this double process of anthropomorphisation and theriomorphisation, a 'becoming' is performed, which is consistent with what Mutsaers identifies in Deleuze's light as a metamorphosis 'naar twee kanten' [in both directions.]<sup>41</sup>

The figurative meaning of this two-sided bodily metamorphosis is substituted by the literal and mental image of the imperceptible bodies of a human and an animal moving together and thinking together through the narrator's voice in *Rachels rokje*: 'Vort paard, hu!, zet de sokken erin. Dat doet het' [Giddy-up horse! Go! And so it does.]<sup>42</sup> As McHugh observes for other

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<sup>37</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> S. Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2001 (1993), p. 108; In an earlier publication, I looked at the relationship between therianthropism and theriomorphism in the interaction between Mutsaers' visual and literary work (Fraipont, "[H]et dier in al zijn toonaarden": Over zoöpoëtische configuraties in Charlotte Mutsaers' beeldend en literair werk', pp. 67-87).

<sup>40</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 58.

narratives of cross-species intimacies,<sup>43</sup> this specific intercorporeal text – in which a mutual agency between horse and rider is expressed – is based on an aesthetical and performative experience of multiplicity – as a multiple synthesis of animal and human features. Through the entanglement and affinity of both species here portrayed and performed (which actually melt together in a way that challenges every anthropocentric boundary), this passage exemplifies a becoming approach across lines of species and social life.

## Rachel Stotter-maus

Besides the bodily presence of the animal through the horse figure, I will now discuss the animal vocal affinity in *Rachels rokje* by analysing the eponymous protagonist's relation to the mouse Josephine, the bordering figure in Kafka's story. *Rachels rokje* is about Rachel's 'kalverliefde', her 'calf love' for her schoolteacher Douglas Distelvink.<sup>44</sup> The attraction between Rachel Stottermaus and Douglas Distelvink is already revealed in their surnames, referring to animal names. This also strikingly suggests the hybridity of both characters and refers to the human-animal reversals that are central to the novel. Like Kafka's Josephine, Rachel is, in many respects, what Deleuze and Guattari would call the anomalous – the bordering phenomenon – in Mutsaers' narrative. However, she is not the anomalous of the pack of her own apparent human species but rather of all animal species that inhabit the textual space of the novel, thus erasing all differences between humans and non-human animals, such as between the human rider and the horse in chapter 10. Unsurprisingly, in chapter 18 in the first part, Mutsaers alludes to Kafka's animal parable about Josephine and the mouse society. In that chapter, Rachel, the I-narrator, ironically says that mice are not musical at all – compared to the singing of a bird in a cage: 'Piepen kan tenslotte iedereen of je moet Josefine heten' [After all, anyone can squeak, or your name would have to be Josephine].<sup>45</sup> Through the reference to Josephine, the disruptive character in Kafka's story, Mutsaers suggests in this passage the idea of an indetermination between two animal species, in this case mice and birds. At first, this intertextual relation seems to play a marginal role in Mutsaers' text but, in fact, it reveals the novel's underlying politics, which tends to a form of egalitarianism between species. I will now discuss how the intertextuality affects in a similar vein features of the protagonist Rachel Stottermaus and provides yet another clue for reading the human/animal nature of the narrator in Mutsaers' text.

In Mutsaers' *Rachel's rokje*, the relation to Kafka's protagonist named Josephine and mouse people already appears in Rachel's family name: *Stotter-maus*, which can literally be translated as a 'mouse that stammers'.<sup>46</sup> Josephine, Kafka's mouse character, sings but also

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<sup>43</sup> McHugh, *Animal Stories. Narrating across Species Lines*, p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 73; Here I have opted for this non-standard and more literal translation of *kalverliefde* into English to render the layered meaning of the Dutch term in Mutsaers' novel. This translation will enable me to discuss the important intratextual connection to the calf the author is speaking about in her essay collection *Paardejam*.

<sup>45</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 96.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the name *Stottermaus* also emphasises the above-mentioned horse/writer connection to Kafka. In his novel *Amerika*, the link between the horse/rider and animal/writer dynamic is, as Kremer observes, exemplified

stammers like a child in order to be understood and acknowledged by the mouse society, both as an individual and as an artist. Just like Josephine and the mouse people in Kafka's narrative, who can no longer be distinguished from each other,<sup>47</sup> Rachel's oneness with a whole range of different animal figures, as already mentioned, is strongly inferred in the novel. Besides, the protagonist's name is an anagram of Charlotte Mutsaers' name. An effective poet/animal relationship is suggested through the autofictional bond between Rachel as hybrid phenomenon in the text and the writer herself. This relationship is central in the novel and, as I argue, in Mutsaers' whole artistic work.

Further considering Kafka's intertext in Mutsaers' book enables to establish other connections, such as the importance of music. In Kafka's parable, Josephine's singing can be paralleled to the narrator's story about her.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the narrative structure of Mutsaers' text and its musical aspects display similarities. In *Rachels rokje*, the acceleration of the narrative rhythm regularly translates into musical elements, as Sabrina Sereni also noticed.<sup>49</sup> In chapter 26 for example, what the narrator says about the children's song 'Napoléon et Marie-Louise' illustrates an aspect of the structure and rhythm of the novel: 'In telkens sneller tempo. Wervelen, wervelen, wervelen. Net zolang tot ik duizelde en niet meer wist wie ik was: Marie-Louise of Napoléon, Napoléon of Marie-Louise. Door het liedje had ik me vereenzelvigd met allebei. Dat is nou rokjesmuziek in optima forma' [Faster and faster. Whirling around and around, over and over again. Until I became dizzy and did no longer know who I was anymore: Marie-Louise or Napoleon, Napoleon or Marie-Louise. Because of the song, I had identified with both of them. Well, that's what they call perfect 'skirt music'].<sup>50</sup> Music is often associated with metamorphosis and the becoming-motif, which refers to 'crossing as many thresholds of intensity as the subject can sustain'.<sup>51</sup> Strikingly, this passage further reveals the reversibility of perspective and dissolution of identity and boundaries, and thus highlights the becoming-animal motif in the novel.

This aspect of boundary crossing and multiplicity is not only found at a micro level, but also at a macro and formal level within the text. As suggested above, the musical elements and the animal motif are both disruptive phenomena. At a micro level, the text displays a large range of animals and lyrical fragments that are interrelated. In turn and through the acceleration of the narrative rhythm in a music-like fashion, the becomings-animal produced in each chapter are globally incorporated in a wider and complete becoming-animal at the level of the macrostructure. The chapters of the novel are, in fact, called 'plooiën' [folds] that literally refer to Rachel's skirt. Through the intrinsic affinity between Rachel and the animal which is actualised by the multiple becomings in each fold, we can better understand Mutsaers' idea in

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through the protagonist's name *Rofßman*, in Kremer, 'Verschollen. Gegenwärtig. Franz Kafkas Roman "Der Verschollene"', p. 247.

<sup>47</sup> M. Norris, *Beasts of the modern imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 125-29.

<sup>48</sup> Norris, *Beasts of the modern imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence*, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> S. Sereni, "'Begin in de geest. Dan zal voetje voor voetje de werkelijkheid volgen": Over Rachel Stottermaus en Emma Bovary – Twee zusjes van papier', in *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 8.2 (2003), p. 151.

<sup>50</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti*, p. 110.

*Paardejam* that Rachel's skirt, i.e. the book, encompasses the narrative 'als een vacht [er] omheen' [as a fur around it].<sup>52</sup> Hence, in making 'audible the irreducibility of in-between spaces, polyphonic hybridizations, and multiple sonic interferences',<sup>53</sup> the movement across species empowers the narrative and the writing process itself. The text becomes a *line of flight* (*ligne de fuite*), that is in Deleuze's view a deterritorialisation implying a movement from one perspective to the other.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, the text creates a new space through which the animal voice is echoed so as to let it speak.

## 'Dos Kelbl'

In her essay 'Dos Kelbl' in *Paardejam*, Mutsaers introduces a Yiddish song about a calf: 'Dos Kelbl'.<sup>55</sup> The same song, minus the title, appears at the very end of *Rachels rokje*, reminding the reader of Rachel's 'calf' love and the protagonist's multiple zoe-affinities. Mutsaers' essay about the song 'Dos Kelbl' revolves around the picture of a slaughtered calf against a war background. Together the song and the picture form an interface from which Mutsaers reflects on the animal's gaze in her essay. The face of the calf is displayed in such a way that it produces what we can identify as a form of *parallax*, i.e. in Žižek's words 'the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight'.<sup>56</sup> Through the calf's eye, an animal perspective becomes visible.

In her essay, Mutsaers focuses in particular on 'dat ene oog, dat zich precies in het centrum bevindt [...] Je kijkt ernaar en je schaamt je bijna' [that one eye, that finds itself precisely in the centre [of the picture]. You look at it and you almost feel ashamed].<sup>57</sup> The human readers seem to be prompted to feel ashamed under the gaze of this dead animal, which is still fixedly and unchangeably looking at us. The possible shame felt here in front of the slaughtered animal is like French philosopher Jacques Derrida's sense of shame when confronted to his cat's gaze whilst naked in his bathroom.<sup>58</sup> This reflective shame is about ourselves, our own humanity in front of our animality. The shame will remain under the animal's gaze, as long as humans do not recognise their own animality, as long as they do not allow themselves – as Derrida suggests – to be compassionate about animals and to include them in an eco-philosophical space in which an affinity between humans and (animal) others is thinkable.

In her essay, Mutsaers further suggests that her readers listen to the Yiddish song 'Dos Kelbl' [the calf] and look at the picture again. Through this new perspective provided by the song and in particular by its resonance with animal vocal aspects, Mutsaers urges the reader

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<sup>52</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 213.

<sup>53</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti*, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>55</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, pp. 62-5.

<sup>56</sup> S. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (London: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Mutsaers, *Paardejam*, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> See J. Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 18.

not to be one with the calf, but rather to become a calf: 'Vereenzelvig u niet, wórd kalf' (64). In this passage, Mutsaers incites the reader, through the use of the personal pronoun *you* (*u*), to experience what can be interpreted with Mutsaers as a performative becoming-animal. The portrayal of the slaughtered calf in 'Dos Kelbl' contrasts, however, with the theriomorphic embodiment of the calf, which in *Rachels rokje* led to Rachel's becoming-calf and is made impossible through the visual medium by the reality of death. By analysing Mutsaers' essay in relation with *Rachels rokje*, we could imagine the way the becoming-animal is or could be real in the fictional world. In this regard, the readers of Mutsaers' work are directly invited to reflect on zoe-affinities and becomings-animal, such as through the animalised perspective implied by the gaze of the slaughtered calf in 'Dos Kelbl' and that of the horse in *Rachels rokje*.

## The Horses that We Are After All

This article examined the relationship between Kafka's creative work and Mutsaers' essayistic and literary work regarding the issue of the animal. The Dutch artist and writer deterritorialises fantastic and allegorical forms of animal writing in Kafka's work, to reterritorialise them as *authentic* animals from within her zoopoetics. Through this dynamic, Kafka's animals become a constitutive part of the author's poetics and politics of animal-human affinity and egalitarianism.

The significance of animals in Mutsaers' work has here been underlined by analysing three zoe-affinities through three interfaces: body/agency (horse); voice/speaking (mouse); gaze/seeing (calf). This analysis of Mutsaers' writing shows that the many-sidedness of animals in her texts can only fully be grasped in relation to the visual medium and pictorial representation. The textual and intermedial way in which the animals function in Mutsaers' novel is part of an integrative zoopoetics of the Dutch author's artistic work. In the novel *Rachels rokje*, first, the figurativity of Mutsaers' writing makes theriomorphic images alongside anthropomorphic portraits apparent. The performativity of Mutsaers' language enables her to transcend these figurative metamorphoses producing a becoming-animal through the mutual bodily agency of a horse and a human rider. Secondly, the musical dynamics of the narrative relate to a vocal affinity for animals in the book. The figure of the mouse functions as a site of deterritorialisation through which the protagonist Rachel's becoming-animal can take place. Thirdly, by prompting her readership to reflect on the calf's gaze through the interface of text and image in her essay 'Dos Kelbl' [the calf], Mutsaers provides a new perspective for imagining the becoming-animal to be real in *Rachels rokje*. Mutsaers' imagined configurations at the human-animal threshold move from figurative to performative, from anthropomorphisation and theriomorphisation to becoming-animal, and relate to a poetics, which is aimed at mutual recognition as well as multiplicity across species and social models.

In Mutsaers' playful zoopoetics, a *real* or convincing space opens up in which multiple becomings and affinities between humans and animals can be negotiated and thought of. In this zoopoetical and biopolitical space, Kafka's animal writing is not only echoed but also brought to life through Mutsaers' creative writing, 'waarin het feit dat wij geen paarden zijn in twijfel wordt getrokken' [in which [...] doubt [is cast] on the fact that we aren't horses].<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Mutsaers, *Rachels rokje*, p. 56.

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