



Arminius – Barbarossa – Hitler? Images of Germany in texts by Harry Mulisch and Cees Nootboom

Arminius – Barbarossa – Hitler? Duitslandbeelden in teksten van Harry Mulisch en Cees Nootboom

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Abstract: The changeful history of Dutch-German neighbourship has brought forth numerous clichés and stereotypical notions that have served to conceptualise the respective neighbours' supposedly typical attributes and distinguish their own traits from those of the other. In more recent history, the Dutch image of Germany and the Germans was greatly influenced by the experiences from the era of National Socialism and the German occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War. Literature played a significant role in forming a German hetero-image. With this in mind, I shall examine Dutch images of Germany as they can be seen in two books which process impressions made while travelling in Germany: Harry Mulisch's *De toekomst van gisteren* (1972) [The Future of Yesterday] and Cees Nootboom's *Berlijnse notities* (1990)/*Roads to Berlin* (2012). Both books attempt to understand the foreign by seeking it out in culturally familiar forms. Among other things, the travelling protagonists visit two German *lieux de mémoire*: the monument for Arminius, who unified the German tribes in the fight against the Romans at the beginning of the Common Era, and the monument for the medieval emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who became a symbolic figure of the German pursuit of unity as a national state in the nineteenth century. In Mulisch's conceptualisation of German history, Arminius and Barbarossa are interpreted as the predecessors of Hitler and his Thousand-Year Reich, whereas Nootboom's *Berlijnse notities* approaches them from the perspective of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990. In comparative analyses, I shall attempt to clarify whether – and if so, to what extent – Mulisch's and Nootboom's books critically question German self-images and whether the authors take a distanced stance on their own Dutch identity.

Keywords: Harry Mulisch, Cees Nootboom, the foreign / het vreemde, national image / nationale beeldvorming, hetero-stereotype, self-stereotype, Germany / Duitsland

The novel *De toekomst van gisteren* [The Future of Yesterday] by Harry Mulisch, first published in 1972, was, as the author writes in the foreword to the German translation published in 1995, ‘das Protokoll eines doppelten Fiaskos: das eine ist ein gescheiterter Roman über das Tausendjährige Reich, das andere ist das Tausendjährige Reich selbst – zwei Fiaskos, die zwei Seiten einer Medaille sind’ [the protocol of a double fiasco: one being a failed novel about the Thousand-Year Reich, the other being the Thousand-Year Reich itself – two fiascos which are two sides of a coin].¹ In this book, Mulisch tells of the plan he had pursued for over a decade to write a novel with the title *De toekomst van gisteren* ‘waarin Duitsland de oorlog had gewonnen, en waarin iemand eveneens een verhaal *De toekomst van gisteren* zou schrijven, waarin Duitsland de oorlog had verloren’ [in which Germany had won the war and in which someone would also write a story called *De toekomst van gisteren* in which Germany had lost the war].² It was to be Mulisch’s third book that dealt with the Second World War and the Holocaust, following *Het stenen bruidsbed* (1959)/*The Stone Bridal Bed* (1962), which plays in a war-ravaged Dresden, and *De zaak 40/61* (1962)/*Criminal Case 40/61* (2005), Mulisch’s report about the trial against SS officer Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961.³ The protocol of the failure of Mulisch’s aforementioned project *De toekomst van gisteren* assumed the place of the novel that he originally had planned as the third part of the trilogy, though the title remained.

Experiences of Foreignness

In the third chapter, Mulisch gives an account of a trip he made to Germany in order to free himself from writer’s block. The first sentence of his travelogue reads: ‘Bij Oberhausen begon de nevel’ [Around Oberhausen, the fog began].⁴ What evidently sets in within the traveller upon passing the border between the Netherlands and Germany is a typical experience of foreignness. If one takes into account Ortrud Gutjahr’s definition of ‘das Fremde als das unbekante Draußen’ [the foreign as the unknown outside], where ‘vertraute Orientierungen und Deutungsmuster ihre Gültigkeit verlieren’ [familiar orientations and interpretive patterns lose their validity], the fog that suddenly surrounds the perceiving individual is a striking metaphor for this phenomenon. Examining the foreign is a means to self-discovery on this journey and, according to Ortrud Gutjahr, ein ‘wirkungsmächtiges [...] Muster’ [an influential pattern] in western literature can be seen within this nexus in particular.⁵ This becomes apparent as Mulisch continues:

¹ Harry Mulisch, *Die Zukunft von gestern: Betrachtungen über einen ungeschriebenen Roman*, trans. by Marlene Müller-Haas (Berlin: Edition TIAMAT, 1995), p. 10. The article was translated by Zachary Jacoba. Translations of quotes in this article are his, unless indicated otherwise.

² Harry Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren: Protokoll van een schrijverij* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1972), p. 73.

³ Harry Mulisch, *The Stone Bridal Bed*, trans. by Adrienne Dixon (London/New York/Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1962); idem, *Criminal Case 40/61, the Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account*, trans. by Robert Naborn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁴ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 75.

⁵ Ortrud Gutjahr, ‘Wie fremd ist eigentlich das Fremde?’, *KulturPoetik* 3 (2003), p. 115.

De nevel is, in de ruimte, het meteorologische pendant van de legende, het onhistorische verleden. Daarom is nevel Duits, en daarom is de Rijn – althans tot 30 april 1945 – voor Duitsers niet eenvoudig een rivier in zijn natuurlijke bedding, zoals voor Zwitsers, maar een legende. In Nederland met zijn heldere, merkantiele weer, onder een onafgebroken grauwe lucht, die niet verblindt maar waar het licht nergens vandaan komt, zoals in een schildersatelier, – in Nederland is de zelfgemaakte aarde onwonderlijk zichtbaar, en daar is de Rijn een stuk *waterhuishouding*, een gebruiksvoorwerp, een weg, waarover vrachtgoed verscheept kan worden, met het oogmerk dit duurder te verkopen dan men het zelf gekocht [h]eeft; daartoe dijkt men hem in en bouwt aan zijn monding de grootste haven van de wereld.⁶

[Fog is, in regard to space, the meteorological equivalent of the legend, the unhistorical past. That is why fog is German and why the Rhine – at least until 30 April 1945 – was not only a river in its natural bed for Germans as it is for the Swiss, but rather a legend. In the Netherlands, with its clear, mercantile weather under a steadily grey sky that is not blinding, but where the light, such as in the studio of a painter, has no point of origin – in the Netherlands, the man-made earth is readily visible and there, the Rhine is part of the water economy, a utensil, a route on which cargo can be shipped with the aim to sell it elsewhere at a profit; in order to do so, the Dutch have dyked it in and erected the world's largest harbour at its mouth.]

With the image of the river, which factually connects the Netherlands and Germany, and its ever so contrary connotations in these differing cultural contexts, Mulisch briefly summarises and highlights prevalent imagological topoi: German Rhine romanticism shrouded in legends and myths as opposed to the Dutch spirit of enterprise with its pragmatic grasp of water and land.

As Ortrud Gutjahr points out, the foreign is not perceived as such without any further ado; differences are also put into scene:

Das Fremde ist demnach durch eine spezifische Doppelbindung gekennzeichnet, insofern es einerseits dem Eigenen als unbedingt Nicht-Eigenes entgegengesetzt wird, andererseits aber als solches nur verständlich werden kann, wenn es auf ein Archiv von Fremdheitsvorstellungen rekurrieren und somit in einer kulturell vertrauten Form Gestalt gewinnen kann.⁷

[Accordingly, the foreign is characterised by a specific double bond insofar as that it is contrasted with that which is one's own as something that is categorically not one's own, yet which can only be intelligible as such if it can have recourse to an archive of notions of foreignness and hence take shape in a culturally familiar form.]

Mulisch identifies the averting response (in the double sense of the word) to revolutionary changes as a motive for why the Germans sought refuge in myth. He indicates the years 1789,

⁶ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 75.

⁷ Gutjahr, 'Wie fremd ist eigentlich das Fremde?', p. 114.

1830, 1848, 1871 and 1917 as ‘vijf rampzalige stadia, die onafwendbaar naar vernietiging en zelfvernietiging leidden, moord op de tijd zelf: het Duizendjarige Rijk’ [five catastrophic stages that unavoidably led to destruction and self-destruction, to the murder of time itself: the Thousand-Year Reich].⁸ As a result this becomes the telos of German history, and at the same time its end. For his teleological outline of German history, Mulisch constructs a ‘stamboom van Nacht und Nebel’ [genealogy of *Nacht und Nebel*],⁹ which stretches from Hermann the Cheruscan to the medieval emperor Frederick Barbarossa to Bismarck and finally to Hitler. Both Arminius, as the legendary commander Hermann was called in Latin sources, and Barbarossa also appear as imagological hetero-stereotypes and typical German memory spaces in a travelogue written by another Dutch author, Cees Nooteboom’s *Berlijnse notities/Roads to Berlin*,¹⁰ which was published in Dutch in 1990 and in English in 2012. For him, as for many foreign observers and also for the Germans themselves, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the German reunification in 1990 made the question arise once again and in a new light as to who the Germans actually are and how one can describe the relationship with these neighbours whom one has known for so long but who yet are still foreign.¹¹

Images of the Foreign – Images of the Self

In the scientific reflection on the foreign, the foreigner and foreign spaces, there is a consensus regarding at least two points: on the one hand, foreignness is not synonymous with alterity. While alterity refers to the difference between two related identities, which enables the self to form its identity through distinction from the other, the foreign is the result of an interpretive act – the construction of the other as the foreign. Norbert Mecklenburg rightly points out that the opposition own vs. foreign is not suitable as a scientific conceptual pair, but is rather to be understood at the level of object language as a form of attribution and as a cultural interpretive pattern.¹² A second definition is closely linked to the one just mentioned: the foreign is to be understood as a relational item, for it can only be given meaning in relation to and differentiation from that which is one’s own. By pointing out the interdependence of the own and the foreign, one simultaneously emphasises the importance of examining the foreign

⁸ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 77.

⁹ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 86.

¹⁰ Cees Nooteboom, *Berlijnse notities* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1990); idem, *Roads to Berlin. Detours and Riddles in the Lands and History of Germany*, trans. by Laura Watkinson (New York/London: MacLehose Press, 2012).

¹¹ ‘The reunification of 1989 accordingly reactivated the traditional question “How are the Germans?” [...], also in neighbouring countries.’ Manfred Beller, ‘Germans’, in *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 163.

¹² Norbert Mecklenburg, ‘Literatur als Brücke zwischen Menschen und Kulturen. Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft im Rahmen der philologischen Methodenentwicklung’, in *Interkulturalität und (literarisches) Übersetzen*, ed. by Silke Pasewalck, Dieter Neidlinger and Terje Loogus (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2014), p. 60.

for the formation of one's own identity.¹³ In light of this thought, Jan and Aleida Assmann postulate self-enlightenment and self-distancing as tasks of xenology as a field of cultural studies.¹⁴ This postulation can, on the one hand, be fulfilled from the perspective of the self encountering the foreign; on the other hand, the view of one's own culture can be sharpened by confronting it with the perspective that foreigners have of it, for '[...] the stranger [...] becomes essentially the man who has to question everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group.'¹⁵ It must be clarified as to whether or not Mulisch's and Nootboom's books play a part in deautomatising the Germans' view of their own culture. Likewise, the question must be asked as to whether or not *De toekomst van gisteren* and *Berlijnse notities* take a critical and distanced stance on Dutch identity – and if so, to what extent.

When putting the foreign into scene, one must make use of familiar patterns so that the foreign can be portrayed intelligibly.¹⁶ Throughout the course of history, an arsenal of images has developed in the mutual perception of peoples and nations, 'mental silhouette[s] of the other who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race. Such an *image* rules our opinion of others and controls our behaviour towards them.'¹⁷ The origin and function of national stereotypes is the research object of imagology. Bearing in mind that national identities are constructs, current imagology, informed by the cultural turn, examines the topicality and rhetoric of national stereotypes as 'objects discursifs'.¹⁸ It does so in the belief 'that it is in the field of imaginary and poetical literature that national stereotypes are first and most effectively formulated, perpetuated and disseminated'.¹⁹ National images are understood as commonplaces that 'refer primarily not to the nation in question but to the currency of other, previous images about that nation'.²⁰ The following analyses aim to illustrate just that. Furthermore, they aim to show that the continuation of stereotypes is not to be understood as a mere act of repetition. Instead, the actualization that occurs when referring to

¹³ Alois Wierlacher and Corinna Albrecht, 'Kulturwissenschaftliche Xenologie', in *Konzepte der Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2003), pp. 280-285; Ortrud Gutjahr, 'Fremde als literarische Inszenierung', in *Fremde: Jahrbuch für Literatur und Psychoanalyse* 21 (2002), ed. by Ortrud Gutjahr, p. 47; Peter J. Brenner, 'Die Erfahrung der Fremde: Zur Entwicklung einer Wahrnehmungsform in der Geschichte des Reiseberichts', in *Der Reisebericht: Die Entwicklung einer Gattung in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. by Peter J. Brenner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), p. 16.

¹⁴ Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, 'Kultur und Konflikt: Aspekte einer Theorie des unkommunikativen Handelns', in *Kultur und Konflikt*, ed. by Jan Assmann and Dietrich Harth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 39.

¹⁵ Alfred Schütz, 'The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology', in *American Journal of Sociology* 49:6 (1944), 502.

¹⁶ Gutjahr, 'Fremde als literarische Inszenierung', p. 61.

¹⁷ Manfred Beller, 'Perception, Image, Imagology', in *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 4. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Joep Leerssen, 'The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey', *Poetics Today* 21:2 (2000), p. 270.

¹⁹ Joep Leerssen, 'Imagology: History and method', in *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 26.

²⁰ Leerssen, 'The Rhetoric of National Character', p. 280.

antiquated national images is to be comprehended as part of a process in which self-ascriptions and other-ascriptions are generated anew time and time again.²¹

Like recent approaches in intercultural literary scholarship, imagology deals with the hermeneutics of the foreign by analysing the devices that depict foreignness in literary texts.²² With this in mind, I want to address the question as to which images of the foreign regarding the Germans and the German are created using the examples of Arminius and Barbarossa in *De toekomst van gisteren* and *Berlijnse notities*. Moreover, I will also address the question as to which images of the self can be seen behind these images in relation to Dutch identity.

Images of the Foreign in *De toekomst van gisteren*

Berlin, the focal point of the events in Nootboom's *Berlijnse notities*, acts as a special *lieu de mémoire* in Mulisch's failed project of writing a novel about an anti-utopia of the Thousand-Year Reich: 'Duitsland heeft de oorlog verloren; boven Hitlers graf in Berlijn staat nu De Muur: zijn monument' [Germany has lost the war; above Hitler's grave in Berlin, there now stands the Wall: his monument].²³ Upon reaching the border during his first trip to East Germany, 'de aanblik van al dat beton en prikkeldraad' [the sight of all that concrete and barbed wire] fills him 'met vreugde en opluchting' [with joy and relief].²⁴ German unity only caused havoc, the justified punishment of which is German division.

Mulisch dates the German pursuit of unity back to A.D. 9, the year in which Arminius and his army defeated the Roman legions led by Varus. He cites, among other sources, Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht* [The Battle of Hermann] (1808, published 1821) as evidence that 'in de negentiende eeuw de legendarische barbarenvorst aan het begin van het a-historische duitse verleden werd geplaatst' [the legendary barbarian chieftain was placed at the beginning of the ahistorical German past in the nineteenth century].²⁵ Mulisch draws a line that leads from the post-Napoleonic restoration to the repression following the revolts in 1830, followed by the response to the revolution of 1848, out of which Bismarck supposedly emerged stronger than before and began contemplating his goal of a Germany unified under Prussian hegemony. 'Methode-Arminius – maar met dit verschil, dat deze zich altijd nog tegen vreemde overheersing verzette, terwijl Bismarck agressie-oorlogen moest forceren' [The Arminius Method – except with the difference that Arminius always defended himself against foreign rule while Bismarck had to force wars of aggression].²⁶

²¹ Birgit Neumann, 'Grundzüge einer kulturhistorischen Imagologie: nationale Selbst- und Fremdbilder in britischer Literatur und anderen Medien des 18. Jahrhunderts', *KulturPoetik* 10 (2010), p. 5.

²² Mecklenburg, 'Literatur als Brücke zwischen Menschen und Kulturen', pp. 60-64. See also Norbert Mecklenburg, *Das Mädchen aus der Fremde. Germanistik als interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft* (München: Iudicium, 2008) and Michaela Holdenried, *Künstliche Horizonte. Alterität in literarischen Repräsentationen Südamerikas* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt 2004).

²³ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, pp. 83-84.

²⁴ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 83.

²⁵ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 79.

²⁶ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 80.

Following the founding of the German Empire in 1871, another project could also be completed: the erection of the memorial Hermann Monument on Grotenburg mountain near Detmold. The project had been initiated by the architect Ernst von Bandel in 1838 as a reminder of the liberation from Napoleonic occupation. After the Reichstag had allocated the necessary resources, the monument was unveiled in 1875 in the presence of the Emperor and the crown prince. An icy easterly wind is blowing as Mulisch's travelling alter ego visits the Hermann Monument. For him it is:

het angstaanjagende symbool van de reactie, de kristallisatie van het kontrarevolutionaire denken, het conservatieve geweld van bovenaf, de abjecte uitspeling van een nationale 'vrijheid' om de sociale onrechtvaardigheid in stand te kunnen houden. Het hoort al bij het Duizendjarige Rijk. Onder deze reusachtige stenen konden de pissebedden en kakkerlakken zich nestelen, wier kinderen in 1933 aan de macht kwamen.²⁷

[the frightening symbol of reactionism, the crystallisation of counter-revolutionary thinking, the conservative domination from above, the abject misuse of a national 'freedom' in order to maintain social injustice. All of this is part of the Thousand-Year Reich. It was under these gigantic stones that the woodlice and cockroaches whose children came to power in 1933 were able to nest.]

This is how Mulisch classifies the memory space Arminius in his teleological conception of history. From atop the monument hill, he hears the noise of cannonry and starfighters. This offers him the opportunity to add further links to his chain of associations and, in the process, skilfully press more buttons on the panel of German hetero-stereotypes: 'Dat is de Bundeswehr, die straks Eisbein zal eten in de 'Rommel Kaserne' bij Detmold. Rommel was de generaal die door Noord-Afrika de weg naar Palestina vrij moest maken voor Eichmann' [That is the Bundeswehr, which will soon be eating pickled ham hock in the Rommel Barracks near Detmold. Rommel was the general who was supposed to clear the way for Eichmann through North Africa to Palestine].²⁸ Thus, from the point of view of the traveller, the anti-history proves to have continued on into the present.

Mulisch moves on to the memory space of the next figure in his 'stamboom van Nacht und Nebel' [genealogy of *Nacht und Nebel*], the mountain named Kyffhäuser. According to legend, Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa has been waiting for German unity inside of the mountain since the twelfth century. This memory found its space when, as Mulisch writes, a giant cave was discovered in the Kyffhäuser in 1865, when German nationalism 'zijn triomf naderde' [was nearing its triumph].²⁹ Instead of indulging in the historical sensation of this place of anti-history during his visit to the cave, Mulisch reinterprets it as a place of his own mythology when he believes, on entering into the earth, that he can remember the act of his own conception and is now located in his mother's womb.³⁰ By quoting Heinrich Heine's famous line, in which

²⁷ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 82.

²⁸ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 83.

²⁹ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 86.

³⁰ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 87.

Barbarossa is prompted to stay inside the Kyffhäuser because the Germans have no need for an Emperor,³¹ Mulisch distances himself from the ‘Barbarossa gimmick’.³²

Yet he also visits the part of the *lieu de mémoire* that is located above ground: the ruins of the Hohenstaufen castle – ‘door de SS volledig uitgegraven’ [fully excavated by the SS]³³ – and the Kyffhäuser Monument. ‘Maar daar – nee, het is *zum Kotzen*, het begint mij werkelijk verschrikkelijk de keel uit te hangen, – op het gebied van de oude burcht staat het *Denkmal* voor Bismarcks keizer Wilhelm I in de snijdende sneeuwstorm, die over de Harz aanjaagt.’ [But – no, it is *zum Kotzen*, I am slowly but surely beginning to get horribly fed up with this, – at the site of the old castle, there is the *Denkmal* for Bismarck’s Emperor Wilhelm I, standing there in the biting snowstorm that is sweeping across the Harz mountains].³⁴ Mulisch’s genealogy of German anti-history stretches from Arminius to Barbarossa to Bismarck and finally to Hitler. Here, a segment of his genealogy begins to take form, for beneath the pedestal on which Emperor Wilhelm I’s equestrian statue stands, Barbarossa sits chiselled in stone. As further stations of the German history of doom, Mulisch travels to Bayreuth and attends the Richard Wagner Festival. He then visits the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, where he ultimately has a conversation with their architect, Albert Speer.

The conception of German history, which is drafted in *De toekomst van gisteren* is entirely focused on Hitler, National Socialism and the Second World War. Not only does the past find its ultimate culmination in the legend of the Thousand-Year Reich, the legend of German anti-history, but the future and the travelling author’s post-war present do so as well. The prospect of a future no longer seems to exist for Germany, merely the reality of division as a time of punishment for its past crimes. Behind the history of the perpetrators, which Mulisch (re)constructs as an image of the foreign, a history of victims as a collective Dutch image of the self becomes apparent. One chapter of *De toekomst van gisteren* recalls the Dutch famine of 1944/45 and is thus reminiscent of the Dutch as victims of the German occupation. In the fictitious storyline of the unwritten novel, which is sketchily rendered in the book, the Dutch are also portrayed in the role of the victim, subjugated by the Germans and deported to a cold, dark, demolished city. The novel’s main character, Otto Textor, fails to keep his manuscript about Germany as the country that lost the Second World War hidden from the Gestapo and ends in a gas chamber.

With his ‘genealogy of *Nacht und Nebel*’, Mulisch not only references his perception of German history as a legend and an unhistorical past, he also alludes once more to the era of National Socialism and the Second World War. In September 1941 Hitler issued a decree on

³¹ ‘Herr Rotbart – rief ich laut – du bist/ Ein altes Fabelwesen,/ Geh, leg dich schlafen, wir werden uns/ Auch ohne dich erlösen. [...] Das beste wäre, du bliebest zu Haus/ Hier in dem alten Kyffhäuser –/ Bedenk ich die Sache ganz genau,/ So brauchen wir gar keinen Kaiser.’ Heinrich Heine, ‘Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen: Geschrieben im Januar 1844’, in idem, *Werke, vol. 1: Gedichte*, ed. by Christoph Siegrist (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1968), p. 461. [‘Barbarossa’ – I cried in return –/ ‘You’re only some old fable,/ go back to bed, we’ll free ourselves/ without you, we’re quite able. [...] Perhaps on reflection you’d better stay/ in your cave, a historical oddity;/ for our present purposes, Emperors aren’t/ a necessary commodity.’] Heinrich Heine, *Deutschland: A Winter’s Tale*, translated with an introduction and notes by T.J. Reed (London: Angel Books, 1986), pp. 67–68. See also Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 88.

³² Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 87.

³³ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 88.

³⁴ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 88. Emphasis in original.

how members of the resistance in territories occupied by Germany were to be dealt with. This went down in history as the *Nacht- und Nebel-Erlass*, or Night and Fog Decree. Those who could not immediately be sentenced to death were to be taken across the German border under ‘the cloak of darkness and fog’ and held captive there.³⁵ This metaphor therefore not only suggests the hetero-stereotype of the German as the fascist usurper, but also two Dutch self-images: that of the victim of German tyranny and that of the resistance fighter against the Germans.

The figure of the author and narrator, which presents itself as a mirror image of the empirical author Harry Mulisch, does not primarily appear as a victim, but rather as an advocate of the victims who condemns (Nazi-)Germany. Mulisch breaks with the binary opposition between the Germans and the Dutch by using a series of intertextual references to install the German poet Heinrich Heine as a figure with whom he identifies. By calling Heine by his forename ‘Harry’, which Heine bore up until his conversion from the Jewish to the Christian faith, Mulisch makes Heine his namesake and thus shows his affinity for the anti-nationalist and German patriot who was sorely aggrieved by Germany. Mulisch himself was the son of a German-born Jewish mother.

The impression that Mulisch is moving along the footsteps of Heine and his poem ‘Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen’ [Germany, a Winter's Tale] is not only attested by the quotation of Heine’s stanza concerning Barbarossa in *De toekomst van gisteren*. In 1844 Heine also visited the site of the Hermann Monument, which at that time, however, was nothing more than a construction site. Mulisch’s description of entering the GDR is to be read as an echo of Heine’s account in the second chapter of ‘Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen’, in which Prussian customs officials rummage through his luggage looking for forbidden books.³⁶ With a precision reminiscent of that of a German civil servant, Mulisch meticulously lists which magazines, pamphlets and prospects the customs officials fished out of his car and subsequently confiscated.³⁷

‘Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen’ is also actualised as an intertext by the way in which Mulisch stages himself and the processing of his experiences while travelling around Germany. In Heine’s poem, the lyrical subject repeatedly mentions the bodily reactions that the memory of and encounter with Germany produced in him. Symptoms such as heart palpitations, tears, pain and bleeding of the heart indicate that the visitor, travelling to Germany from his exile in Paris, is deeply distressed by the fate of his homeland in his head and in his heart. Mulisch’s traveller does not in any way behave as a passive observer either. He also repeatedly brings himself into play by means of his corporeality. In the Barbarossa cave, as described above, he relives his own conception and growth in his mother’s womb. He experiences leaving the cave as his birth into a snowstorm. Upon seeing the Kyffhäuser Monument, which represents Barbarossa and Emperor Wilhelm I, he is overcome by nausea. Moreover, he feels that he is getting sick and catching a fever from the death that surrounds him again so quickly after his

³⁵ Lothar Gruchmann, ‘“Nacht- und Nebel”-Justiz: Die Mitwirkung deutscher Strafgerichte an der Bekämpfung des Widerstandes in den besetzten westeuropäischen Ländern 1942-1944’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29:3 (1981), 342-396. http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/1981_3.pdf.

³⁶ Heine, ‘Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen’, pp. 426-427; Heine, *Germany: A Winter's Tale*, pp. 31-32.

³⁷ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 84.

birth experience.³⁸ For one thing, the *mise-en-scène* of the protagonist's moral outrage is heightened by the description of his somatic reaction. For another, his emphasised corporal presence indicates an involvement, which rather points towards subjective concernment and thus to the examination of an image of the self than to that of an image of the foreign. Margarete van Ackeren has also already noted Mulisch's 'Sonderstellung zwischen niederländischer und deutscher Mentalität' [exceptional position between Dutch and German mentality] and pointed out his affinity for German romanticism, which he himself ascribes to his German soul.³⁹ It is within this context that the positioning of Mulisch's alter ego in *De toekomst van gisteren* can be classified. Here, a liminal space is opened where it is possible to perceive the foreign as part of the self.⁴⁰

Images of the Foreign in *Berlijnse notities*

Cees Nootboom's alter ego in *Berlijnse notities*, who is also travelling around Germany, takes a different stance from Mulisch. While the latter creates intercultural liminality as a strategy of reflecting upon a hybrid Dutch-German identity, Saskia Pieterse and Jan Konst situate Nootboom's perspective of perception in a distancing liminal space which can neither be assigned to the Dutch culture nor to the German.⁴¹ It is from this perspective that the events in Berlin in 1989 and 1990 are described. Pieterse and Konst illustrate this position by referring to the numerous strategies used by Nootboom to distance himself from the objects of his perception while attempting to understand Germany. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Nootboom feels carried along by the stream of historic events. He embarks on several trips to German national memory spaces in order to place topicality in proportion to history. The events that he personally witnesses supply him with the leitmotif: the German pursuit of national unity.

When describing his visit to the Hermann Monument, Nootboom's tone is at first distanced, satirical. His first impression is that the monument showed him 'een vuurtoren van een mens op een al even torenhoog voetstuk, met zijn zwaard in het noodweer snijdend, heersend over de wereld. Zijn maat benam mij de adem' [a towering beacon of a man on an

³⁸ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, pp. 87, 89.

³⁹ Margarete van Ackeren, 'Deutsches und Deutsche bei Mulisch: oder der Dichter als Eroberer', in *Annäherungen: Wahrnehmung der Nachbarschaft in der deutsch-niederländischen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Wilhelm Amann, Gunter E. Grimm and Uwe Werlein (Münster: Waxmann, 2004), p. 218.

⁴⁰ For the foreign within the self, see Georg Mein, 'Die Figur des Parasiten und das Theorem der Interkulturalität', in *Zwischen Provokation und Usurpation. Interkulturalität als (un-)vollendetes Projekt der Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften*, ed. by Dieter Heimböckel, Irmgard Honnef-Becker, Georg Mein and Heinz Sieburg (Paderborn: Fink, 2010), pp. 64-65.

⁴¹ Jan Konst and Saskia Pieterse, 'Hoe ziet een vis de rivier waarin hij zwemt? Waarnemen vanuit een liminaal perspectief in de 'Berlijnse notities' van Cees Nootboom', *Internationale neerlandistiek* 50:3 (2012), 235-250. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5117/IVN2012.3.KONS>. See also Christof Hamann, 'Die Grenze als interkulturelle Kategorie: *Robinson Crusoe*, mit Jurij M. Lotman gelesen', in *Zwischen Provokation und Usurpation. Interkulturalität als (un-)vollendetes Projekt der Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften*, ed. by Dieter Heimböckel, Irmgard Honnef-Becker, Georg Mein and Heinz Sieburg (Paderborn: Fink, 2010), pp. 223-238.

equally towering pedestal, slicing his sword into the storm, ruling over the world. His scale took my breath away].⁴² ‘Hermann hield zich goed’ [Hermann stood firm] – as opposed to his observer, who feels defencelessly exposed to the abominable December rain and gale-force winds – ‘hij weegt dan ook ruim tweeënveertig ton, met zijn sokkel erbij komt hij een stuk boven de vijftig meter en hij hoeft ook niet bang te zijn dat zijn helm af- of zijn rokje opwaait: hij zit aan zichzelf vast met 30 924 koperschroeven’ [but then he weighs more than forty-two tons. Including his pedestal, he stands over fifty metres tall and he does not need to worry about his helmet flying off or his skirt blowing up: he is fastened together with 30,924 copper rivets]. This is not the visitation of a historical figure, but rather the deconstruction of a myth that has lost its former function just as its monumental representation form has. Nootboom mentions the monument’s unveiling by the future German emperor in 1875, as well as the inscription on Hermann’s sword: ‘Deutsche Einigkeit meine Stärke, meine Stärke Deutschlands Macht’ [German unity my strength, my strength Germany’s might].⁴³ According to Nootboom, the two of them draw a line of continuity from Hermann to Wilhelm as if the centuries of German fragmentation lying between them had never existed. Nootboom sees the Hermann Monument as the expression of a national pathos that those who do not need to live together in a single state can allow themselves, a pathos ‘dat zo te zien zijn arm tot ver in het volgende millennium gestrekt zal houden’ [which showed every sign of holding its arm aloft well into the next millennium]. That was Nootboom’s prognosis in December 1989.

By adding the words ‘ik vind het goed’ [that was fine by me], the observer then retreats, though this time not to his liminal observer zone. During the Christmas holidays, he flees ‘naar de kalme tuinen van mijn vaderland, waar de beelden kleiner zijn, maar de problemen ook’ [to the peaceful gardens of my homeland, where the statues may be smaller, but so are the problems],⁴⁴ ‘waar nooit iets lijkt te gebeuren omdat wij het allemaal een paar honderd jaar geleden al hebben gedaan’ [where nothing ever seems to happen, because we did it all a few hundred years ago]. The neutral pondering about Germany’s difficult path to unity hereby receives a partisan base coating – by referring to the Netherlands as a contrasting foil: it may be small, but it is dignified, for ‘mijn rustige vaderland’ [my peaceful homeland]⁴⁵ managed to merge and form a republic centuries before Germany did. The established binary opposition of ‘weak versus strong’ for the national images of the Netherlands and Germany is contrasted by another characteristic pair: ‘progressive versus backward’. Unlike the prevalent first opposition, the Netherlands comes out ahead in the latter.⁴⁶ Nootboom’s wording does not conceal his satisfaction at this.

This is not the only occasion on which Nootboom reveals his cultural position as well as his personal involvement and openly confesses that the liminality of the neutral observer is never the full truth. The encounter with the *Volkspolizei* officers at the East German border on

⁴² Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 88; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 111.

⁴³ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 90; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 111.

⁴⁴ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 91; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 87; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Joep Leerssen refers to ‘weak versus strong’ as a structural pattern and one of the main invariant oppositions in the context of the attribution of characteristics to national or ethnic groups. See Leerssen, ‘The Rhetoric of National Character’, pp. 275-277.

his way to Berlin in March 1989 already made him conscious of his place within the tense relationship between the self-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes of the Dutch and the Germans: ‘het geschreeuw, het Duits, het uniform, van die oorlog kom ik nooit af.’ [the shouting, the German, the uniform. I am never going to escape that war.]⁴⁷ In *De toekomst van gisteren*, Mulisch does not abstain from using this cliché of Germany either when describing his crossing the border into East Germany.⁴⁸ The fact that neither takes a critical and distanced stance on the traditional Dutch self-images may be due to both of them experiencing the era of German occupation in the Second World War. Nootboom’s traumatic childhood memories of the German invasion of the Netherlands, which he describes in three passages in his volume of essays *De ontvoering van Europa*,⁴⁹ are also present in *Berlijnse notities*: ‘Deze verzamelde streken die samen Duitsland heten en dat straks weer zullen doen, zij het met een kleine correctie, hebben zich tenslotte vijftig jaar geleden ook in mijn leven gemengd’ [After all, this collection of regions, which together were once called Germany and soon will be called Germany again, after a little adjustment, also intervened in my life fifty years ago].⁵⁰ When, on another occasion, the train in which he is travelling to Düsseldorf stops on an open stretch of tracks during the night following a bomb threat, this evokes the same association: ‘ik moet aan de oorlog denken, aan de zuigkracht van dit vreemde land dat altijd, of het wil of niet, andere landen meetrekt in zijn lot’ [I cannot help thinking about the war, about the power of attraction exerted by this strange country, which always drags other countries into its destiny, whether it means to or not].⁵¹ At one point he refers to Germany as a ‘moeilijk vaderland, moeilijk buurland’ [troublesome fatherland, troublesome neighbour].⁵²

He visits these German memory spaces as ‘de versteende illustraties bij het verhaal dat ik aan het lezen ben’ [the [petrified, M.-Th. L.] illustrations for the story I am reading].⁵³ In this way, he points out that he uses an archive of notions of foreignness when perceiving the foreign, and that history can only be received as a construct, a representation. When his car is suddenly enveloped by fog in the Harz Mountains near the Hexentanzplatz [the site where witches meet to dance], he interprets this as a reference to Walpurgis Eve in Goethe’s *Faust* – ‘de decorontwerper is mij gunstig gezind’ [the set designer is looking kindly upon me].⁵⁴ For him, fog functions as a theatrical tool in the context of a *mise-en-scène* of the ‘Duitsland van de eenzame Graalreizen, het drakebloed, het heksengekrijs, de sage, de nostalgische herinnering’ [Germany of those lonely pilgrimages in search of the Holy Grail, the dragon’s blood, the

⁴⁷ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, pp. 7-8; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Mulisch, *De toekomst van gisteren*, p. 85. A uniformed representative of the German occupation forces also appears in Mulisch’s novel *De aanslag*. Shouting profusely, he orders about intimidated civilians. Harry Mulisch, *De aanslag* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1982), pp. 36-37.

⁴⁹ As a child, he had been deeply disturbed by an explosion linked to the invasion of the Netherlands by German troops. Cees Nootboom, *De ontvoering van Europa* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Atlas, 1993), pp. 9-10, 51, 78-79.

⁵⁰ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 101; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, pp. 162-163.

⁵¹ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 64; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 84.

⁵² Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 42; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 57.

⁵³ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 101; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 163.

⁵⁴ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 147; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 211.

witches' screeches, the legends, the nostalgic memory]⁵⁵ and not, as in Mulisch's case, as a symbol for the German national character. In *Berlijnse notities*, the myth is always seen from the outside, from a meta-level that makes it possible to see through its constructedness. When Nootboom gives introductory historical background information in the description of his visit to the Kyffhäuser and the Barbarossa Monument, he alludes to Mulisch, for whom the Hohenstaufen emperor is 'een schakel in de ketting Hermann – Barbarossa – Bismarck – Hitler' [a link in the chain Hermann – Barbarossa – Bismarck – Hitler]. Nootboom remarks critically: 'maar dan injecteer je de negentiende in de twaalfde eeuw' [but that is projecting the nineteenth century onto the twelfth].⁵⁶

Here, it becomes clear again that Mulisch's *De toekomst van gisteren* and Nootboom's *Berlijnse notities* approach the German's historical myths from different perspectives. Mulisch considers them first and foremost from an internal perspective; he takes up their subject matters in order to weave them further and ultimately interlace their strands into his mythical construct of the Thousand-Year Reich. That is why his Hermann is a figure from the first century A.D. and why his Barbarossa belongs in the twelfth century. Nootboom, on the other hand, primarily views these myths from an external perspective by enquiring about the circumstances of their creation, the interests that are voiced in them, and their cultural and political functions.

It is also with a certain distance that Nootboom visits the memory space Kyffhäuser. He presents the different variants of the Barbarossa legend with an almost philological meticulousness; right down to the version from the flyer he is handed at the entrance to the Barbarossa Cave, which is interspersed with socialist vocabulary. His mocking remark 'een sage met een loket, daar heb je het al' [a legend with a ticket desk – it is only to be expected] completes the anti-illusionism.⁵⁷ In the cave, Mulisch further intensifies its mythical atmosphere by re-stylising it into the place of his own personal birthing myth. Nootboom, on the other hand, keeps his distance by emphasising and ironising the banality of the situation. While walking around the cave looking to join the day's last group of visitors, Nootboom is struck by the thought

[...] dat dit de momenten zijn waarop je gefilmd zou moeten worden, diep onder de grond achter een onbekende vrouw aanhollend op zoek naar haar collega en de schim van een duizendjarige keizer. [...] "Blijft u hier maar staan," zegt mijn vrouwelijke Virgilius raadselachtig, "dan ga ik even bellen."

[[...] that this is the kind of moment when someone should be filming you, as you run along deep beneath the ground, following a woman you do not know, in search of her colleague and the ghost of a thousand-year-old emperor. [...] "You just wait here," my female Virgil says, rather mysteriously. "I'll go back and phone her."]⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 147; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 210.

⁵⁶ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 156; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 158; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 221.

⁵⁸ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, pp. 158-159; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 222.

As a result, he does not regard the Barbarossa Monument and the equestrian statue of Emperor Wilhelm I that is erected above it with repulsion or outrage, but rather as a reserved deconstructor: ‘eigenlijk zou je willen dat die hele troep opgeborgen kon worden bij het volk van omvergehaalde standbeelden dat droevig door Oost-Europa trekt op zoek naar een laatste rustplaats’ [I actually wish they would consign the whole pile of nonsense to the legions of toppled statues who are morosely making their way through Eastern Europe in search of a final resting place]. The gloomy Barbarossa, however, would be allowed to stay put, albeit ‘zonder zijn wilhelminische über-ich’ [without his Wilhelmine *Über-Ich*].⁵⁹

Conclusion

In *De toekomst van gisteren*, Mulisch identifies the Germans with and through their memory spaces. For Nootboom though, these memory spaces rather provoke the question as to what these archival documents of cultural memory say about present-day Germany and how the Germans handle them. In doing so, he unfolds the ideological contents of the stereotypes, topoi, and clichés, ever aware of their inescapability: ‘Clichés, datgene wat iedereen opmerkt en wat je toch moet zeggen’ [Clichés involve things that everyone notices, but which still need to be said].⁶⁰ Nootboom is not the only author who makes use of irony as a stylistic device when dealing with national images. ‘In the field of the arts, the use of “national” characterizations has undergone an “ironic turn”. [...] [S]tereotypes and clichés of national characters are often invoked ironically as, precisely, clichés, with a knowing wink from author to reader’, says the comparatist Joep Leerssen. As a stylistic device, irony establishes a distance to the cliché, but it does not deconstruct it.

By the same token, however, the old stereotypes are perpetuated and given a new lease of life, albeit under the ironic proviso: if they are used half-jokingly, they are also used half-seriously: meant to be recognised, albeit playfully, they nevertheless invoke and perpetuate the currency of the stereotype they avoid taking seriously.⁶¹

Nootboom’s *Berlijnse notities* is clearly influenced by well-trodden Dutch hetero-stereotypes,⁶² and yet they are more than mere repetitions and perpetuations of antiquated images of Germany. The well-known national images are placed in a new context, namely that of the German reunification. This contextualisation opens up new possibilities for interpreting the old stereotypes and thereby dynamises them.⁶³ Nootboom proves to be a foreigner who,

⁵⁹ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, pp. 159-160; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 223.

⁶⁰ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 122; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 184.

⁶¹ Joep Leerssen, ‘The Poetics and Anthropology of National Character (1500-2000)’, in *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 74-75.

⁶² Herbert van Uffelen drew the same conclusion, ‘Wo ist die Mauer? Berlin in der neueren niederländischsprachigen Literatur’, in *Annäherungen: Wahrnehmung der Nachbarschaft in der deutsch- niederländischen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Wilhelm Amann (Münster: Waxmann, 2004), p. 198.

⁶³ Birgit Neumann points out that the continuation of national stereotypes is never a mere repetition, but is rather to be understood as an on-going, processual generation of self-ascriptions and other-ascriptions. Neumann, ‘Grundzüge einer kulturhistorischen Imagologie’, p. 5.

with his book, offers the Germans a chance to subject their national culture to a critical revision and question their antiquated images of the self. The fact that *Berliner Notizen*, the German translation of *Berlijnse notities*, was awarded with the *Literaturpreis zum 3. Oktober*, a literary prize commemorating 3 October 1990, German Unity Day, as well as the fact that Cees Nootboom received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany,⁶⁴ allow one to conclude that many also understood the book as such. It problematizes allocations of meaning;⁶⁵ the observing foreigner tries to understand and to abstain from moral judgements while doing so.

While summarising his impressions in the last chapter of his notes, the author realises that he has not succeeded in maintaining his liminal positioning: ‘Ik ben partij geworden terwijl ik een buitenstaander was en ben, ik heb nooit kunnen vergeten dat dit mijn land niet is, en toch heb ik meegeleefd’ [I became part of it, even though I was, and still am, an outsider. I have never forgotten that this is not my country and yet I shared those events].⁶⁶ And it is no surprise that, in the end, he does not present a fixed image of Germany, but rather emphasises its performativity:

Duitsland is niet af, het is oeroud maar het wordt nog steeds gemaakt, dat dubbelzinnige maakt het fascinerend. Herder heeft het over naties “die de karakteristiek hebben van personen”, en als je daarin meegaat zou je kunnen zeggen dat de personen van Frankrijk en Engeland af zijn, volwassen, we kennen ze. Maar kennen we Duitsland? Kent het zichzelf? Weet het wat het wil worden als het groot is? [...] Er is, na al die eeuwen, nog steeds geen definitie van Duitsland, het blijft een enigma. In zijn laatste boek, *Die Schere*, geeft Ernst Jünger ook een bespiegeling over dat woord. Het is het gemeenschappelijke woord bij Grieken en Romeinen voor raadsel, geheim, het raadselachtige, het is Kants *an sich*, het wezen dat men niet kan kennen, het is in Luthers vertaling: *het duistere woord*. Duitsland als duister woord, als geestelijk raadsel achter een voorhang van macht en materieel succes, als land dat je probeert te lezen, oeroud, en van alle Europese staten het jongst.

[Germany is unfinished. It is ancient, but it is still being made, and that ambiguity makes it fascinating. Herder says that nations develop at different rates, like people. If you subscribe to that idea, you could say that France and England are fully formed, adult: we know them. But do we know Germany? Does Germany know itself? Does this country know what it wants to be when it is big? [...] Even after all these centuries, there is still no definition of Germany; it remains an enigma. In his latest book, *Die Schere*, Ernst Jünger reflects upon that word: “enigma” was a word shared by the Greeks and Romans for a puzzle, a secret, the unfathomable. It is Kant’s *An sich*, the essence that cannot be known; it is, in Luther’s translation, “*das dunkle Wort*”, the dark word. Germany as a dark word,

⁶⁴ Van Uffelen, ‘Wo ist die Mauer?’, p. 198. I do not share Van Uffelen’s opinion that these awards are primarily the result of unprocessed feelings of guilt on the part of the Germans.

⁶⁵ Konst/Pieterse, ‘Hoe ziet een vis de rivier waarin hij zwemt?’, p. 239.

⁶⁶ Nootboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 178; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, pp. 243-244.

as a spiritual mystery behind a veil of power and material success, as a country that you attempt to read, ancient, and yet the youngest of all European states.]⁶⁷

In contrast to Mulisch, Nooteboom does not establish a genealogy of men of belligerent action, but rather of men of thought, from Martin Luther to Immanuel Kant to Ernst Jünger. From their words he shapes a well-trodden cliché and an image of the foreign par excellence: Germany as a riddle. The image of the riddle does not, however, apodictically establish a definition in the way that Mulisch's concept of the ominous German anti-history does. Instead, the process of allocating meaning is relocated to the recipients, to those who are prompted to solve the riddle. The notion of Germany as an enigma thus opens up a new space of the undetermined and fluid, a liminal space beyond new or old hetero- and self-stereotypes.

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⁶⁷ Nooteboom, *Berlijnse notities*, p. 184; idem, *Roads to Berlin*, p. 249.

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