



## **Signs of Life. Vitalising Literary Studies**

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**Abstract:** This article proposes a new way of approaching literature through nomadic philosophy. It considers the importance of bodily engagement with texts as well as affective and intellectual involvement, and commends translation as an intensive form of reading. This vitalistic approach is illustrated with examples from classroom and translation practice.

**Keywords:** literature / literatuur , vitalism / vitalisme, nomadism / nomadisme, translation / vertaling, reading / lezen

Vitality and vitalism are the starting-points for and focus of this article. They are fundamental elements of nomadic theory as expressed by Rosi Braidotti in her 2012 book *Nomadic Theory*, where she acknowledges Gilles Deleuze and Spinoza as her antecedents. For a number of years I have been experimenting with a nomadic approach to the study of language and literature, partly as a way of moving beyond methodological nationalism<sup>1</sup> in these fields of study and research, and partly to pioneer new ways of reading and writing. This informal project is no doubt connected with the fact that I teach Dutch literature outside the Dutch language area to students for whom mobility is a mode of existence and for whom Dutch is frequently a second or third new language. In a multilingual environment such as London, translation and translating have an important role to play in life as well as in linguistic and literary studies with the result that I have found it increasingly difficult to operate a simple model of translation in which a text in one clearly bounded language is transferred to another equally contained language. This sense of translation as a mode of textuality can change our view of literature as Rebecca L. Walkowitz discusses in her book *Born Translated*, which considers the many ways in which translation is pre-empted in literature. To give just one example – my personal favourite – the Van der Valk detective novels by Nicolas Freeling are written in English with a variable Dutch inflection so that they sometimes read like a foreignising English translation of a Dutch text.

The ways in which readers actively engage with literature are the central focus of this article. These are the vital signs, the signs of life which concern me here. I begin with two brief examples from my personal collection of observed informal interactions between literature and life which demonstrate modes of intensive perception of the language of a literary text. They will be followed by two more substantial examples from my own classroom and translation practice. The discussion will be based both on contemporary philosophy, on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Rosi Braidotti, and on translation theory, especially that of Michael Cronin and Clive Scott.

## Signs of Life: Two Introductory Examples of Intensive Reading

The translation of literary texts is pleasurable, even for students with moderate linguistic competence and a lack of experience, as long as they regard the translation task as a process and not as an imperative to produce a perfect translation which will always fall short. The first example concerns poetry translation workshops which take place outside the curriculum, i.e. they do not form part of the programmed hours for a particular course, nor are they assessed. In 2016, students, most of whom were following the course ‘Advanced Translation from Dutch into English’<sup>2</sup> spent an afternoon discussing their translations of poems by Benno Barnard, together with the poet. Rather than analysing the poems for translation, the workshop began with an exchange of reading experiences, which elicited a wide range of observations which paid more attention to rhythm and sound than to discussion of word meaning. In an

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this pedagogical approach and its relationship to nomadic theory, see Rosi Braidotti, ‘Nomadism: Against Methodological Nationalism’ in *Policy Futures in Education* (2010, vol. 8, pp. 408-18).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/selcs/study/undergraduate/modules/year4-2017-18/4th-year-modules-17-18/dutc4502-advanced-translation-from-dutch-into-english> for a description of the course.

atmosphere of freedom, a much richer discussion ensued than in the 'normal' classes. Clive Scott says 'that, in relation to translation, metre is an unproductive distraction; rhythm is fruitful and conciliatory for the translator [...]'<sup>3</sup> Not that Barnard uses strict metre in these poems, but the point here is that students dared to trust their own experience of and response to the poem which was felt physically as well as intellectually. The role of the body was made clear by physical gestures such as head movements and tapping. When lexis was eventually discussed the process was reciprocal in that the poet was just as interested in the words the students chose for their versions as they were in what he had to say. This example illustrates two aspects: the importance of freedom and the role of the body in intensive reading.

My second vital sign is a personal and private bilingual reading project of a good friend. In fact, I discovered this project by accident while on a train journey, and the private nature underlines my sense that where education perhaps fails, individuals invent their own ways of reading with intensity. The project was a double simultaneous reading of *Austerlitz* by W.G. Sebald in both German and English. This reader became fascinated by Sebald's language in the English translation and wanted to read the German text for himself even though his German proficiency is only moderately good. It is a slow process with the aim not of finishing the book(s) but of dwelling in language. The process might even be described as tasting the languages, since it includes mumblings and reading aloud. Intense concentration and physical engagement are the hallmarks of this project.

The two examples, described here only briefly, are characterised by the fact that the reading and translating subjects have opted for an intense and personal engagement with literary language. Because these readers can always carry their linguistic dwelling-place around with them, I view their projects as a nomadic activity and the sensibility with which they approach them as nomadic in the sense of having an impact on them personally. In both cases the activity in question is reading, or rather the experiencing of the dynamics of literature, whether this takes place through their own realisation of a poem in a new language or through moving back and forth between two versions of a text, each in a different language. As Scott says:

When we read, we enter the world of language which engages us bodily, which busies our psycho-physiological faculties, which works on and with our metabolism. The life of language is interwoven with the life of the reader of that language.<sup>4</sup>

The signs of life related here give an idea of the key elements of a nomadic engagement with literature. Before discussing the second pair of examples, an explanation of the nomadic concepts on which they depend provides the theoretical foundation both of the taught course which forms the first example and of the translation project which forms the second.

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<sup>3</sup> Clive Scott, *Literary Translation and Rediscovery of Reading* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Clive Scott, *Translating the Perception of Text: Literary Translation and Phenomenology* (Oxford: Legenda, 2012) p. 54.

## Nomadism and Literature

A nomadic approach to literature is not new in Dutch Studies. Yra van Dijk chose it as the theme of her keynote lecture at the 2015 IVN Colloquium in Leiden, while at the same conference I participated in a panel on nomadism and Dutch Studies, together with Jaap Grave and Gerdi Quist. In addition the monograph *Nomadic Literature* approaches the work of Cees Nooteboom in English translation as an alternative to reading it as part of the canon of Dutch literature.<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, the philosopher who first put nomadic concepts into words, was also the first to bring together nomadic philosophy and literature in his 1975 book *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*, written together with Félix Guattari.<sup>6</sup> At this point, my choice of the English translations of Deleuze and Guattari's writings rather than their French original is worth a comment: nomadic philosophy became known internationally primarily through the English translations, and there are many scholars such as Claire Colebrook and Rosi Braidotti who work on nomadic philosophy and theory through the medium of English. Given that I teach in English, these English versions are my primary texts. At the same time, I enjoy reading the French texts, and find writing about nomadism in Dutch an interesting challenge. This multilingualism is part of the effort to work among languages rather than keep them entirely separate from one another, and is thus connected to the nomadic approach to literature I am proposing.

Nomadic philosophy is a materialist philosophy in which bodily life is as important as intellectual life. Its aim is to engender transformations or becomings in the individual subject. In this sense, it is not possible or desirable to keep the academic and the personal separate from one another. To begin the conceptual explanation and demonstrate one of the working methods of nomadism, I will sketch a figuration of a nomad, bearing in mind that in a nomadic mode of thought, a figure is not a representation or a metaphor, but rather a thinking practice. The nomad is the central figure which can be elaborated in order to think about:

- life as a process of which change and mobility are fundamentals
- a movement away from stable identities
- 'becoming' as the fundamental mode of being of a subject who is therefore multiple
- language as deterritorialised so that it becomes possible for a subject to carry a linguistic dwelling-place with them.

To give a more specific example, the nomad is also the perfect figure with which to think through the role and person of the translator, since translators must open themselves to more than one language, and come to know literatures from the inside. As a result, translators can be seen as no longer having a monolithic, clearly defined identity, but as subjects who embrace mutability and multiplicity. As my first two vital signs – the poetry workshop and bilingual reading – suggest, it is difficult to separate translation from reading. In any case, translation gives an insight into a vital and transformational mode of reading. Clive Scott describes it as follows: 'the autobiographical input of reading' [which] is unstable, shifting, varied,

<sup>5</sup> Jane Fenoulhet, *Nomadic Literature: Cees Nooteboom and his Writing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> 1975 was when the first French edition was published under the title *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. The English translation by Dana Polan first appeared in 1986.

metamorphic, multi-lingual and multi-sensory'.<sup>7</sup> The translator-nomad has a kind of power which has traditionally been disregarded as a result of his or her invisibility. In an article on the Mozambican writer Mia Couto, Stefan Helgesson sees the translator as a powerful transformer, a co-creator of a literary text, while Michael Cronin describes him or her as an 'agent of metamorphosis'<sup>8</sup>

[...] who derives his or her transformative power from the view of language in which words no longer simply refer to objects in the real world but construct or generate reality. In this way a translator can carry new meanings from one language into another, subtly altering the target language and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Such figurations are ways of mapping multiplicities, and because they are figures of thought, they need not be complete or definitive. I have also noted that 'The figuration of translators as transformers is itself multiple: it encompasses translation of texts from one language to another, transformation of the translator's subjectivity, and perhaps also of the readers of those translated texts.'<sup>10</sup>

The figure of the nomad is thus not necessarily someone who travels, but rather someone who is open to 'becomings'. The concept of 'becoming' is quite specific in Deleuze's thought. It means that the subject is in the process of leaving behind 'molar' or 'majoritarian' society and moving towards the margins – what Deleuze and Guattari call 'a becoming-minor'. They describe Kafka's use of the major language of German as minor because he writes from his position as a Czech Jew. 'How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have only one single dream, to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language [...]. Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor.'<sup>11</sup>

Such a radically different philosophy entails a new mode of thought which is not linear, but what Deleuze and Guattari term 'rhizomatic'.<sup>12</sup> Rhizomatic thought is branching with 'lines of flight' which move away from the rhizome and loops which return to it. This article is structured rhizomatically rather than what majoritarian society would call 'logically'.

The feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti has built on Deleuze's work to expand nomadic philosophy. Following Braidotti in her book *Nomadic Theory* (2012), which can be seen as a restatement of the nomadic ideas spread across her work from *Nomadic Subjects* (1994) onwards, I consider other crucial elements of nomadism to be that

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<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Literary Translation*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> My paraphrase in Jane Fenoulhet, *Nomadic Literature*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Fenoulhet, *Nomadic Literature*, p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Dana Polan, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp.1-27.

- nomadic theory replaces majoritarian thought with ‘an ethics of qualitative transformation’;
- the universal subject of Enlightenment thought – man – under which all individuals are subsumed is a damaging construct;
- it is the role of minoritarian, multiple subjects to bring about change since majoritarian man seeks to maintain his dominant position.

What I want to argue now is that distancing ourselves from the traditions and fixed practices of our academic discipline, i.e. Dutch Studies or *neerlandistiek* can have a stimulating effect for teachers, researchers and students. Put in Braidotti’s words: ‘We need to rethink continuities and totalities, but without reference to a humanistic or holistic world-view.’<sup>13</sup> Braidotti has consistently discussed the future of the humanities in her work. For example, in *The Posthuman* she states that

We need an active effort to reinvent the academic field of the Humanities in a new global context and to develop an ethical framework worthy of our posthuman times. Affirmation, not nostalgia, is the road to pursue: not the idealization of philosophical meta-discourse, but the more pragmatic task of self-transformation through humble experimentation.<sup>14</sup>

And although she does not specifically address the question of the study of languages and literatures, she does say that ‘The issue of methodological nationalism is crucial in that it is in-built into the European Humanities self-representation.’<sup>15</sup>

It will be clear by now that I am in agreement with her. In the case of the students I teach, I have observed that a significant change in their attitudes has taken place in the last ten years or so, which is that they no longer see literature primarily as an expression of a nation, or its culture and society. This may be connected with the fact that they have chosen to study in a cosmopolitan city like London and come from a range of countries. They are interested in cultural diversity and exchange – something which is in evidence in the topics chosen for independent essay projects. Which brings me to the heart of the matter. Their interest in literature is alive and well, but more and more, they are choosing to study literature via comparison and translation. At UCL there is a new BA programme in Comparative Literature, and the well-established MA programmes in Comparative Literature and in Translation Studies attract large numbers. The lack of enthusiasm for traditional approaches such as literary history and criticism is more than compensated for by a willingness to engage in more experimental practices. Clive Scott goes beyond negative criticism of traditional methods and proposes:

[...] a new kind of literary-critical practice. It is not a practice which can in any way do without the knowledge that literary studies has so painstakingly accumulated over the years. Without such knowledge, there is no constructivist reading, no radial reading. But

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<sup>13</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 152.

that knowledge has a rather different role to play: it is no longer that by which we explain or interpret text, but rather that by which, through translation, we release text into its other lives, and into the lives of other readers.<sup>16</sup>

In order to address the needs of students as I saw them, I created a new course entitled Nomadic Literature, which students can take as an option alongside their national literary studies. The following quotation from Braidotti expresses the philosophy underlying the course:

[...] the important aspect of nomadic vitalism is that it is neither organicist nor essentialist but rather pragmatic and immanent. There is no overarching concept of life, just practices and flows of becoming, complex assemblages and heterogeneous relations – no idealised transcendental, but virtual multiplicities.<sup>17</sup>

Life is seen as ‘vitalist, self-organizing matter’ as Braidotti puts it. In other words, it does not have a pre-given coherent meaning or shape, and in the course, we read Carry van Bruggen’s *Eva* as a powerful illustration of this approach.

Philosophical vitalism can be described as an attitude to life in which desire has an important role to play and is not associated with a lack or absence. Desire is not a personal, individual emotion or impulse, but rather it belongs with the concept of *zoë* (life as immanence) as opposed to *bios* (or the duration of an individual body or life). The concept of *zoë* emphasises that ‘the life I inhabit is not mine, it does not bear my name – it is a generative force of becoming, of individuation and differentiation [...]’.<sup>18</sup> Desire can be seen as a life force, an energy which provides the impetus for action and positive passions. According to Deleuze, ideas are intensities and affect underlies the activity of thinking. In this connection, both Deleuze and Braidotti refer to Spinoza to underline the fact that vitalism is an ethical position.

What are the consequences of an ethical stance and philosophy for the study of literature? Although I have experimented with this over three academic years, it is still not possible to give a full answer. What I can do here is to sum up the main impacts before I round off this article with the two practical examples, one from my teaching and one from my research:

- Methodological nationalism no longer functions as a structuring principle.
- Without the logic of the national canon, a positive choice must be made in favour of studying a particular writer.
- A literary historical or critical approach is no longer suitable, so a vitalist nomadic approach is called for.
- In the classroom, this means a new mode of thinking and writing for students
- Nomadic concepts can be used as instruments for opening up texts to bring new aspects to light.

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<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Literary Translation*, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, p. 288.

- As an intensive form of engagement with literature, translation can play a vital role in reading literature.

## Signs of Life: two examples from academic practice

In what follows, I present two concrete but very different, examples of the nomadic study of Dutch literature in practice, i.e. literary pedagogy and research into the translation of experimental Dutch literary texts. The first example is the course ‘Nomadic Literature’ for fourth-year undergraduate and Masters students. The second is a project looking into the translatability of modernist language, specifically in the novel *Eva* by Carry van Bruggen.

### First Example

The seminar course consists of ten classes, each lasting two hours. Students are expected to spend six to eight hours a week in private study (reading and writing). Figure 1 gives the published course description, according to which students make their choice of courses.

#### Figure 1: Course outline

DUTCG206 Nomadic Literature

Assessment: one essay of 6,000 words

**Course Description:** The course takes a philosophical approach to literature: it provides an introduction to the nomadic philosophy of Rosi Braidotti and Gilles Deleuze and shows how such concepts as deterritorialization, becomings and multiple subjectivity can illuminate works of literature. We first look at the ways in which Franz Kafka and Virginia Woolf destabilize language by bringing to bear a minor sensibility on a major language such as German or English. We also investigate the way these and other writers give expression to ‘becomings’ in their work. The course focuses on becoming-animal/woman/imperceptible, exploring how these concepts are realized in the work of selected Dutch writers, including Carry van Bruggen and Cees Nooteboom.

The course includes two writing workshops in which students practice the new modes of writing that are part of a nomadic approach.

In the first two classes, students are introduced to the main concepts of nomadic philosophy so that they can begin to see the implications of these new concepts for reading literature and start to put them into practice in their thinking, reading and writing. The philosophical content continues throughout the course but the emphasis, and with it classroom time, shifts in favour of the literary texts. There is a new text each week, starting with short stories and moving on to novels. For example, one week we study Cees Nooteboom’s *The Following Story/Het volgende verhaal* through the concept of becoming imperceptible and compare it with Samuel Beckett’s short film entitled *Film*. New modes of thought require new writing modes which range from the formulation of philosophical concepts to a cartographic account of a text, to the use of



figurations to track and think through an issue, to rhizomatic structuring and formulation of longer pieces of writing.

There are some indicators of how the course has been received. All students must complete a feedback form at the end of the course. I can summarise these by saying that I have never before had such positive evaluations. Furthermore, students gained noticeably high marks. All assessments are second-marked by a colleague and moderated by an external examiner. To give one example: all the fourth-year BA students take an exam. In the first year of the course the second-marker proposed raising all marks to give an unprecedentedly high set of marks. And one last indicator of the course's positive reception is the fact that a number of Masters students opted to write their final dissertation in nomadic mode.

### Second example

*Eva* by Carry van Bruggen is generally considered a modernist novel. In their short description of *Eva*, Erica van Boven and Mary Kemperink come closest to the view of the novel I present here: that is, as a 'zogeheten bewustzijnsroman' (so-called novel of consciousness) which constructs a stream of consciousness to register the subjective experience of the main character, Eva.<sup>19</sup> This experiment with the Dutch language relays moments of epiphany, and the strength of Eva's perceptions of her surroundings and her interactions with others. In this respect, there are parallels with the writing of Virginia Woolf in, for example, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) which uses 'the language of what life *feels* like', according to Carol Ann Duffy.<sup>20</sup> Jeanette Winterson describes Woolf as 'an experimenter who managed to combine the pleasure of narrative with those forceful interruptions that the mind needs to wake itself.'<sup>21</sup> Both of these descriptions of Woolf's writing might have been said of Carry van Bruggen's writing in *Eva*.

In this second example in which I discuss a nomadic approach in the context of research into the translation of experimental writing, I want to focus on the style of writing and the novel's distinctive punctuation together with the multiple, shifting narrator. Van Bruggen's fictional world in *Eva* is characterized by its intensity – the main character's manner of thinking and feeling, as well as the intensity of her perception of colour, music, landscapes, family life and sex which the reader also experiences in some degree. Rather than faithfulness to the source text, my aim when translating the novel into English was to capture these intensities. However, the greatest challenges when taking my English readers into consideration were i) the use of multiple pronouns – *zij*/she, *ik*/I and *jij*/you – as narrating instance and ii) the idiosyncratic use of punctuation.

*Eva* is a novel about female sexuality and the overcoming of feelings of shame, the mechanism used to socialise women into reserving their sexual availability for marriage. In parallel with Eva's sexual awakening is the gradual opening out of Eva's subjectivity. The following passage which narrates the intimacy of breastfeeding illustrates this with the emphatic repetition of the first-person pronoun and resonant phrases such as 'You may take me':

<sup>19</sup> Erica van Boven and Mary Kemperink, *Literatuur van de moderne tijd: Nederlandse en Vlaamse letterkunde in de 19<sup>e</sup> en 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Bussum: Coutinho, 2006) p. 210.

<sup>20</sup> 'Carol Ann Duffy on *Mrs Dalloway*' in Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. xii.

<sup>21</sup> Jeanette Winterson, 'Foreword', *Mrs Dalloway*, p. vii.

The doors are rattling, a deep, dull sound, the wind moves round like a weary sigh... shh... shh... he is stirring in his little white crib. Here I am... I'm here... but I've never seen your eyes like *that* before. How quietly you lie there waiting... stay like that a moment... I'm coming... I fetch the candle and the low chair and I'm back... did I talk too much, wasn't I quick as a flash? And now I lift you up and cradle you in my arm... you weigh seven pounds and you can't talk... and you rule my life and all my happiness rests with you. My lap is your home, the crook of my arm is for your little head... never before have I been in so confined a shaft, alone with you. You have learnt since this morning, you didn't cry, you know me already, you trust me, you know I'm always here, and that I will always be here from now on. And now I put down the candle, there! So that that I can see you, but so that it doesn't bother you, and we are together in one chair... oh, you are forcing me into a corner and I like it there... and now I give myself to you, you may take me... with your round little head and your fine hair like the March grass...<sup>22</sup>

A few lines further on the narrator gives expression to physical sensations which sometimes accompany the experience of breastfeeding which are very seldom described or evoked in literature:

And I've only got one hand for you, for I cover my eyes with the other, because of what I suddenly know: this must be it, to be taken while giving like this...my heart is beating like never ever before...and the fire spreads through me, so that my own hand can feel it and it is there...where the secret feelings live...there where I received you...and that is how I know for sure.<sup>23</sup>

When reflecting on my translation strategy, the overriding aim was to preserve the dynamic reading experience. For example, it is noticeable that the passages conveying sexual feelings here are narrated indirectly and that this has everything to do with the direct expression of

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<sup>22</sup> All translations from *Eva* are my own. The Dutch text is as follows: 'De deuren rukken in hun voegen, diep en dof, de wind gaat om als een matte zucht.... stil.... stil.... hij roert zich in zijn witte kooitje. Hier ben ik al.... ben ik al.... maar zó zag ik je ogen nog niet. Wat lig je daar stil te wachten.... blijf even nog zo.... want ik haast mij al.... ik haal de kaars en die lage stoel en ik ben al terug.... zei ik te veel, ging het niet vliegensvlug? En nu beur ik je op en je ligt op mijn arm.... je weegt zeven pond en je kunt niet praten.... en je heerscht over mijn leven en al mijn geluk berust in jou. Mijn schoot is je huis, de bocht van mijn arm is voor je hoofdje.... nooit ben ik in zó smal een schacht geweest, met jou alleen. Je bent wijzer dan van morgen, je schreide niet, je kent mij al, je vertrouwt mij wel, je weet dat ik er altijd ben, en dat ik er voortaan altijd zal zijn. En nu zet ik de kaars, zó, dat ik je zien kan, maar zonder dat hij je kwelt en we zijn samen in de ene stoel.... o, je drijft mij in de engte en het is er mij zo wel.... en nu geef ik mij aan jou, je moogt mij nemen.... met je bolronde kopje en je haartjes zo dun als het gras in maart....' Carry van Bruggen, *Eva* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1978), p. 120-121.

<sup>23</sup> 'En nu heb ik even maar één hand voor jou, want mijn andere moet ik over mijn ogen leggen, om wat ik plotseling weet: dit moet het zijn, zó, gevende genomen worden.... en zó sloeg nooit één seconde mijn hart.... en het door-gloeit mij, zodat mijn eigen hand het voelt en het is daar.... waar de heimelijke gevoelens wonen.... het is daar, waar ik je ontvangen heb.... en daarom is het, dat ik het zeker weet.' p. 121.

Eva's perceptions. In this daring passage, Van Bruggen brings her readers as close as possible to her main character's bodily experience and emotional reaction. One decision I took was to keep the breathlessness of the narrative as expressed in the short phrases separated by '...', whereas I had in other places reduced this somewhat where I felt it might strain the reader's patience.

Many translation theorists have discussed the ways in which translators adapt or shift their translations towards the norms of the receiving culture. David Bellos even speaks of a 'third code', a distinct 'dialect' created by translators: 'The "third code" effects that have been revealed in translations [...] are, even so, mere sidelights on the less easily pinpointed but far more general tendency of all translations to adhere more strongly than any original to a normalized idea of what the target language should be.'<sup>24</sup> When I set out to translate *Eva*, I felt a distinct pressure to tone down or normalize aspects of the text in my translation. Remaining with the examples given above, part of that pressure was to produce a more explicit text for two reasons – to make reading easier and to avoid an impression of prudishness. Or is prudishness perhaps something that appeals more to our students' generation? In a link to my first example, I have played with different versions in experiments with students to heighten their awareness of the textual multiplicities when rewriting an innovative, yet older, text into twenty-first century English. '[T]ranslation relocates a text from the there and then in the here and now', according to Scott in *The Rediscovery of Reading* (p. 12), and an important aspect of this 'is about registering the text in my body'. The importance of punctuation, certainly in relation to *Eva* is that it points to places in the text where readers are invited to involve themselves bodily in the reading process. This becomes immediately clear when reading it aloud: the punctuation indicates where to pause, take a breath, speak louder or more emphatically, whisper, speak fast as in an aside, or use a questioning intonation, for instance.

For an English readership – and perhaps also for readers of the Dutch version – the punctuation in *Eva* would not be considered stylistically acceptable according to normative usage. In particular, the regular use of '...' is considered correct only in informal usage or in narrated speech.<sup>25</sup> The insistence with which it is used in *Eva* makes it perfectly clear that it is a deliberate literary device with the function of pulling the reader into the narrated present. A translator could normalise the punctuation fully, preserve it fully, or negotiate between those two positions. Compare the impact of the normalising translation (i) with the extreme punctuation of (ii):

- (i) The doors are rattling. They make a low, dull sound. The wind moves round like a weary sigh. Quiet! Quiet! He is stirring in his little white crib. Here I am. I'm here, but I've never seen your eyes like *that* before. How quietly you lie there waiting. Stay like that a moment. I'm coming. I fetch the candle and the low chair and I'm back. Did I talk too much? Wasn't I quick as a flash? And now I lift you up and cradle you in my arm. You weigh seven pounds and you can't talk. And you rule my life and all my happiness rests with you.

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<sup>24</sup> David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 201.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, a general style guide such as that found at <https://www.gsbe.co.uk/grammar-ellipsis.html>. Accessed 11.10.2017.

- (ii) The doors are rattling, a deep, dull sound, the wind moves round like a weary sigh... shh... shh... he is stirring in his little white crib. Here I am... I'm here... but I've never seen your eyes like *that* before. How quietly you lie there waiting... stay like that a moment... I'm coming... I fetch the candle and the low chair and I'm back... did I talk too much, wasn't I quick as a flash? And now I lift you up and cradle you in my arm... you weigh seven pounds and you can't talk... and you rule my life and all my happiness rests with you.

I am not interested in which of the two variants is the 'best' translation. This kind of play can teach both a translator and students reading literature to register the different impacts of choices, which ultimately serves as a reflection on Carry van Bruggen's style of writing. Reading (i) it is still clear that we are reading an internal monologue spoken by the main character: a first-person narrative in which Eva addresses her child as '*je/you*'. The disadvantage of such a clear approach is its fixity, because taking the novel as a whole, the narrator is more complex and multiple. For example, the opening chapter is narrated in the third person, but in the second chapter which is also predominantly told in the third person, moments of first-person narration creep in. At the same time, these narrators are displaced by a second-person narrator when Eva is addressing herself in her thoughts. In other words, the narrator and her narration are fluid, as in the following example which demonstrates the way the narrative moves easily from 'you' to 'she': 'Isn't it terrible that you are so vulnerable, so receptive to what is dirty? Without even the certainty that it will stay enclosed within you. This was only really brought home to her last year.'<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the fluidity is inherently bound in with the portrayal of the main character. As her self-awareness grows, so does the use of the I-narrator: Eva is given her own voice.

Such considerations led me to the decision to translate the novel in all its complexity and multiplicity, since in my view, this is what makes it an important addition to the European modernist canon. But this was not my main aim, important though it is. The significance of this text in the context of thinking nomadically about literature is that it demands of its readers that they feel, see and hear the fictional world along with Eva, even breathing along with her. This is the function of the use of ellipsis: to map the incompleteness of thought. This has the effect of creating the illusion of being in the midst of things and thus leads us to read performatively.

Version (i) creates the opposite of a fluid text and gives the narrative a certain banality. The following sentence adds the explicitness of conjunctions: 'You have learnt since this morning, for you didn't cry because you know me already. You trust me. You know I'm always here, and that I will always be here from now on.' Version (ii) – 'You have learnt since this morning, you didn't cry, you know me already, you trust me, you know I'm always here, and that I will always be here from now on.' - creates a string of phrases linked by commas which serves to evoke a feeling of breathlessness – 'I register the text in my body', to use Scott's phrase.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Is het niet gruwelijk, dat je zo weerloos voor het vuile open staat? Zonder zelfs de zekerheid, dat het in je besloten blijft. Dit laatste weet ze sinds verleden jaar pas goed.' *Eva*, p. 10

## Conclusion

Reading literature can be a vitalising experience: one that occupies a reader mentally, emotionally and physically. I argue that this can form a powerful part of literary study. By bringing vitalistic nomadic philosophy to bear on literature, it will be possible to take its study in new directions: experimenting in and with language as a response to a text; translating as a form of intensive reading; or translating in order to write along with an author. Or writing simply as a response to reading. As long as it brings enjoyment and positive engagement with literature.

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## About the Author

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