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DUTCH LITERATURE IN YUGOSLAVIA

Translations via German

1. HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

In order to get an impression of the important cultural influences that have played a role in the translation of world literature in post-war Yugoslavia, one needs to be familiar with the language issues and the confessional and political history of the region. Between 1945 and 1990 three Slavic languages were spoken on the territory of Yugoslavia: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian. In this article, only translations into the largest of the three, Serbo-Croatian, will be discussed. From 1945 to 1990, Serbo-Croatian was considered to be one language with two varieties, the Western and the Eastern, and with two writing systems, the Latin and the Cyrillic one. Nowadays, we do no longer consider this to be one language, but four different languages: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin. This, among other things, led to a huge fragmentation of the book market.

Ever since the Middle Ages (particularly since the Grand Schism of 1054), South-Eastern Europe has been a borderland of conflicting political and economic interests. Up to this day, this is symbolised by the friction between the two main Christian traditions: the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox. From the fifteenth century onwards, the Ottoman expansion introduced a third religious factor to the political game: Islam. The influence of this factor will however be omitted from this overview.

Since the nineteenth century and the weakening of the Turkish domination in this part of Europe, this confrontation of conflicting interests has been given an official name: *The Eastern Issue* [Novaković-Lopušina, 1999, p. 122–123]. The Russian interests on the one side and Austrian/German and British interests on the other all saw an opportunity for expansion. The influence of these political and economic interests is not only noticeable in the political sphere, but also in terms of cultural influence, which in South-Eastern Europe differs from region to region.

The predominantly Catholic West of Yugoslavia, particularly Slovenia and Croatia, but also the northern part of Serbia, was subject to influences from the German culture. The orthodox South-East, especially Serbia and Montenegro, were influenced by Byzantine and Russian culture.

For centuries, these predominantly Slavic peoples have been striving for independence and for liberation from various foreign rulers. This was only realised after the First World War, thanks to the victory of the Serbian army and the support of its allies of that time, mainly France. This resulted in a much larger role being played by French culture after the First World War.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was founded with enthusiasm in 1918. However, soon this conglomerate of different cultures and traditions proved difficult to maintain [Novaković-Lopušina, 2013, p. 365–374]. The problem of this multi-ethnic state culminated in the outbreak of the Second World War. On the territory of Yugoslavia, this would become a civil war on a national and ideological basis. A compromise between Stalin on the one hand and Churchill on the other allowed a second Yugoslavia to emerge on the ruins of the first: Tito's Yugoslavia. From 1943 to 1948, Yugoslavia was on a fixed pro-Soviet track. In 1947, the first meeting of the newly established Inform bureau (successor of the Comintern) was even held in Belgrade. However, 1948 was the year of the Tito-Stalin split. Since then, Tito has opted for the strategy of non-commitment and for the glorification of his own person. This resulted in the opening up of the country to Western influences, although connections to the Soviet Union were again somewhat improved when Khrushchev came to power.

The ideological influences on the reception of literature in Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1990 can only to a limited extent be compared to other communist countries in Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe. Censorship also existed in Yugoslavia and the League of Communists – renamed 'Socialist Party' after Tito's death – had a great influence on the ideological developments. However, the number of published works and their accompanying paratexts show that it was more about personal or occasional choices that followed works published before or after the Second World War. Ideologically, they turned out to be acceptable for both the political left and right. Although the presidium continued to follow the socialist track after the death of Tito in 1980, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 had already announced the end of an era and the rise of a painful transition to neoliberalism, with a growing influence of the United States in the region.

This brief overview of political and ideological factors demonstrates that culturally speaking, three cultures and their respective languages played an important role in Yugoslavia of the interwar period: the German, the French, and the Russian one. After the Second World War, the German language was abruptly pushed back by the English one, but also

French lost its importance. From the sixties also Russian lost its influence. Taken together, the aforementioned factors can explain why the influence of German as a transfer culture in the 1945–1990 period turns out to play a significantly smaller role in Yugoslavia, when compared to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

2. THE ROLE OF GERMAN AS A TRANSFER CULTURE

Regarding the role of German as a transfer culture in South-Eastern Europe, we can distinguish the following stages:¹

- German influence during the Austrian and Austro-Hungarian occupation of the South Slavic areas (until 1918 and to a lesser extent also during the interwar period).
- German influence during the occupation in the Second World War.
- Ideological influence from the GDR as a Comintern country until 1948 and to a much lesser extent after 1948.
- Opening to the West and frequent foreign influences, among others from West Germany (through economic contacts and economic migration).

2.1. Stijn Streuvels

A striking example of a twofold ideological interpretation is the work of Stijn Streuvels. Ideological considerations have played a role from the very beginning, but the fascinating thing is that they came from both the extreme political left and the extreme political right.

2.1.1. *Langs de wegen*, 1902

The German translation of *Langs de wegen* was published in 1928 under the title *Der Knecht Jan. Roman aus dem Landleben*. The translation was made by Nico Rost and published by the Berlin-based publishers Univer-sum. When it comes to the ideological context, the afterword written by Augustin Habaru (1898–1944) is important. Habaru was a French-speaking Belgian writer and journalist, first chief editor of *Le Monde* and ardent communist. He also translated *De werkman* – another internationally well-known work by Streuvels – into French. The Serbian translation was published by the publishers Nolit in 1930 under the title *Sluga Jan* in Belgrade. It was an indirect translation, via German, partly done by Desanka Anđelković and from page 142 onward by D. Marković. The afterword is, as in the German edition, written by Augustin Habaru.

The afterword to the translation of the *De werkman*, written many years later by Ivo Hergešić, demonstrates that also in this case the ide-

¹ More about the first two stages can be found in Novaković-Lopušina (2010).

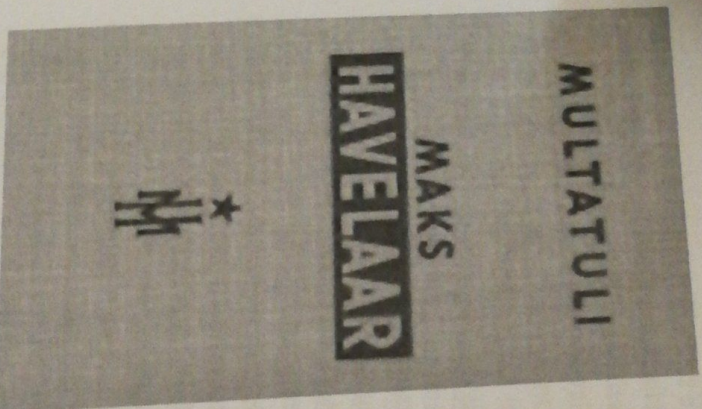


Fig. 1. *Multaatuli*. Maks Havelaar ili nizozemska trgovačka kompanija prodaje na dražbu kavu. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1946

ological influence came from the left side of the political spectrum. In this afterword he writes that *Sluga Jan* had been enthusiastically received in progressive circles and that a positive review had been published in the magazine *Književnik* (vol. III, no. 2, 1930, p. 77–78). This review was a product of Luka Perković, a left-oriented Croatian writer and poet

2.1.2. *De werkmán*, 1913

The First German translation of *Der Arbeiter* was published in 1911 in Leipzig by Insel-Verlag, translated by Anton Kippenberg. Three editions followed (1920, 1933, 1938). The First GDR-edition from 1949 was titled *Der Arbeiter Erzählung*, also was published in Leipzig by Insel-Verlag and in the same translation by Anton Kippenberg.

In Yugoslavia the Croatian translation of the title *Nadničar* (Zagreb: Zora, 1951). It was an indirect translation of German by Pavao M. Košćević and with an afterword from the aforementioned Ivo Hergešić about Flemish literature and Streuvels. Additionally it is important to note the following about Ivo Hergešić (1904–1971). This Croatian translator and professor of comparative literature in Zagreb did not only translate *Max Havelaar* (via the German translation by Wilhelm Spohn), but also wrote the first important essay about Multaatuli. His afterword for the Croatian translation of *De werkmán* has a slight ideological tone since he emphasizes the popular folk character of the work. He mentions *Langs de wegen* as being Streuvels' first work, but translates this title as *Na cesti* (literally: on the road) as if he did not know about the Serbian or German translation. Later he does mention the title *Sluga Jan*, but does not connect this to *Langs de wegen*. Apparently he was not completely informed.

Concerning the distribution of translated Dutch literature he writes the following:

"We just fall behind because in the past translations used to be made without any system. Far too often, publishers allowed themselves to be guided by a commercial-sensationalistic criterion, rather than an ideological



Fig. 2. *Streuvels S. Žetva*. Beograd: Jugostok, 1942



Fig. 3. *Streuvels S. Nadničar*. Zagreb: Zora, 1951

logical-pedagogical or simply artistic criterion?² It is quite possible that personally, Hergešić was guided only by this last, artistic criterion, but justified himself in a slightly ideological way just to be sure.

2.1.3. *De oogst*, 1901

The First German translation of *De oogst* was published in 1916 under the title *Die Ernte* by Insel-Verlag in Leipzig. The translation was made by Rudolf Alexander Schröder. It was followed by three editions, out of which two appeared during the Second World War [*Die Ernte*. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1921, 1925, 1940, 1941]. The First GDR edition appeared in 1950 by the same publishers, translated by Peter Mertens.

The Serbian translation under the title *Žetva* had three editions: two under German occupation (1942, 1943), and one in 1952. However, they all used the same translation by M. Mladenović. This example clearly illustrates the fact that Streuvels enjoyed sympathy from both the left and right side of the political spectrum. Together with a number of other writers, he belonged to those Flemish people whom the Germans were eager

² This quotation, as well as all other quotations from Serbian/Croatian, were translated by the author of the article.

to incorporate into their *Flamenpolitik*. Otherwise, the fact that the translation of his work could appear in occupied Belgrade would have been unthinkable.

The republication from 1952, however, points out that Streuvel's thanks to the GDR edition and the recently published translation of *Der werkmán* could again be read through socialist spectacles.

In both the pre-war and post-war editions, a short biography of Streuvel is included, written by the translator M. Mladenović: "Streuvel represents the pure, healthy Flemish person, the true, epic folk poet who with the unquestioning power of his sincere and natural use of language reveals the soul of his people and of his birthplace to us [Mladenović 1952, p. 75–76]." This piece is teeming with keywords for which apparently both the political left and right were susceptible: *healthy, strength, people, folk poet, birthplace, pure*.

2.2. Multatuli

Max Havelaar of de koffveelingen der Nederlandsche Handelsmaatschappij

1860

Fifteen years after the original, *Max Havelaar* was published in Berlin by G.M.F. Müller (1875) in the translation of Theodor Stromer. Another 25 years later, in 1900, a translation by Karl Mischke appeared in Halle at the Saale. In 1900 a translation by Wilhelm Spohr followed, published by J.C.C. Bruns' Verlag in Minden. This last translation formed the source text for the Croatian translation by Ivo Hergešić that was published in Matice hrvatska in 1945 in Zagreb, under the title *Maks Havelar ili njegova trgovačka kompanija prodaje na dražbu kavu*.

The GDR publications can hardly have given an impulse since the appeared later, first in 1948, in Erich Stück's translation, and then in 1952 in Wilhelm Spohr's translation. However, the fact that socialist ideas did play a role in the choice (or perhaps in the justification of the choice) is expressed by the essay about Multatuli by the Croatian translator Hergešić: "The man who had appropriated the name Multatuli was despite all his shortcomings, a social and literary revolutionary who was far ahead of his time in many ways. As a result, his works – to speak of Stendhals words – seemed to be letters addressed to future generations [Hergešić, 1967, p. 348]."

More about the curious reception of Multatuli in Yugoslavia can be read in the article by Srdan Nikolić from 2008. His research has shown that an anonymous translator with right-wing political views from the interwar period was also interested in the work of Multatuli. He too fo

ferred to his shortcomings, but from a completely different perspective: he thought Multatuli was not racist enough [Nikolić, 2008, p. 48–61].³

2.3. Hendrik Conscience

De Leeuw van Vlaanderen, 1838

Conscience's epic about the Golden Sporenslag had numerous translations and editions in Germany. The first German edition of *Der Löwe von Flandern* appeared in Münster as early as 1846, in a translation by Melchior Diepenbrock. The first GDR edition was published in 1971 in Berlin by Verlag Neues Leben. However, the GDR editions did not influence the translations in Yugoslavia. More important is the romanticization of the national past, which served as an ideological guideline for the two translations published in Croatia.

2.3.1. *Flandrijski law*

Zagreb: Antun Scholz, 1906. Translated by August Harambašić

August Harambašić (1861–1911) was a Croatian writer, poet, politician and translator. He translated from Bulgarian, Russian, Czech, Polish, English, French, Italian and German. It is not known on which of the German translations or editions this Croatian translation is based. We do, however, get some information concerning the quality of his translation in the afterword of the later translation by Josip Tabak, especially in the most recent edition of his translation of *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* from 1990. This text has been signed with the abbreviation Ur., which presumably stands for the editor-in-chief (*urednik*) of the edition:

He [Tabak] of course read its [*De Leeuw van Vlaanderen*] Croatian translation⁴, and yet reading did not go smoothly. At the time, he still did not know anything about translating, about translations and edits, or about publishers. He was not only surprised by the use of language and all kinds of ambiguities, but also about the absurdities and nonsense in that book. It seemed to him as if he had to eat not only the juicy kebab meat, but also parts of the skewers, that is to say of the wood on which the meat was threaded [...]. To him, everything seemed to be a giant, unbelievable jumble, but he could decipher that riddle later, when he got hold of a German translation of the book. He then realized what kind of challenge the lousy Croatian translator had faced and how much freedom he had allowed himself by distorting everything in such a way, and by perverting it with contradictions. And then to also halve the text's length.

³ This concerns the preface of the anonymous Croatian translator of Multatuli's *Ideën*, published in Zagreb in 1920.

⁴ The translation by August Harambašić.

[...] Tabak did not yet master Flemish at this point, and had not yet come across the original text (he only became acquainted with that language much later). But even with the help of the German translator he could see that the Flemish author told one thing, while the Croatian translator translated something else, often the complete opposite, in spite of the writer.

[...] When Tabak came in contact with the Flemish language at a older age, and after having read many Flemish classical books and works by Flemish romantics, he reached for the original text of *De Leeuw*. He read it two or three times and realized that Harambašić had never had access to the original, and that he betrayed the German translator. We know that Harambašić knew German, he had to know it, so what was the reason for this? That is a complete story in itself [Matan, 1990, p. 359–360].⁵

In the sequel, the editor of the 1990 edition writes that although Harambašić was a great Croatian writer, he had to take up too much work due to financial reasons. Sometimes he had three or even four occupations: he worked as a lawyer, a writer, a translator and as a politician. Due to a conviction for a 'verbal offence' in one of his poems, he even spent some time in prison. Moreover, he wrote the translation of *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* shortly before his death. At that time, he was already seriously ill and had a 'blurred mind' [Matan, 1990, p. 360].

Besides this financial motivation, nothing is written about the motivations of Harambašić. However, we know that his translation appeared in a time when Croatia was part of Austria-Hungary and that a strong desire for national liberation and a distinct identity was present among the people.

2.3.2. *Law od Flandrije*

Riječka: Otokar Keršovani, 1957 (1975; 1990). Translated by Josip Tabak *Law od Flandrije*. Zagreb: GZH, 1990. Translated by Josip Tabak

Josip Tabak (1912–2007) was a Croatian translator, essayist and literary critic. It is said that he knew about twenty languages and translated from a dozen of those languages (French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Flemish, German, Danish). His political past was rather turbulent. During the Second World War he worked as a translator for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the fascist Ustaša state. However, he refused to take an oath of allegiance to Pavelić and was subsequently banished. By the end of the war he was accused of being a British spy. After the war he was imprisoned for his free speech and for alleged collaboration.

⁵ This quotation and all other quotations from Serbian/Croatian have been translated by the author of this article.

The editor's text of the 1990 edition shows us that the motivation to make a new translation of *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* had an ideological and political basis. Josip Tabak had visited Flanders and had become acquainted with its past and present:

"The distant past that he imagined was very heavy for Flanders, it was a time of greyness, mud, doom and gloom, but especially a time of humiliation. It all lasted far too long, even from a historical perspective. When he would suddenly wake up from this Flemish dream, according to the translator, he far too often compared Flanders with Croatia in his mind (perhaps this comparison made him so devoted to this book)."

Conscience was the Flemish Senoa⁶ (1938–1881), both in terms of his productive authorship and his civilizing function for the people. Both worked towards the same goal: to make a peasant community familiar with its own history, to highlight the national identity, to boost morale and to give hope [Matan, 1990, p. 361].

In the final part of his argument, the editor alludes to the political situation in Yugoslavia on the eve of the civil war that would erupt a year later:

"Where to go from here? Nobody is allowed to underestimate, despise or reject another person. We are all workers and our country needs our labour – a pathetic and empty country since so many workers had to leave, and more than fifty thousand top craftsmen left with them! We need a community spirit, because everything else is neither civilized nor democratic, neither European nor Christian. Besides, we must be together, together we must push the chariot of history in order to prevent the chariot from pushing us back, backwards, into ruin. The socialist idea, however, cannot perish. That eternal human longing since the times of the old Chinese socialists, the Persian, Babylonian and Christian, to those of today. We do have to make sure that the old story does not repeat itself: for we have fought a bloody struggle to destroy the classes, while castes have emerged. Socialism must be of the people, not private, not of a clan or of the mafia. Finally, let us pray to God for the health of Mikhail Gorbachev and for his success. For if he – God forbid – were to be overthrown, we would again witness the return of everything like vampires! We might not see the Middle Ages but the Apocalypse!" [Matan, 1990, p. 364].

This dramatic warning, full of political contradictions but meant as a sincere cry for help, was written on January 16, 1990, a few months before the first shots were fired.

⁶ A well-known Croatian writer who is also called 'the father of the Croatian novel'. Representative of a small middle class and mouthpiece of the Croatian self-consciousness.

2.4. Gerard Walschap

Hautekiet, 1939

Walschap's vitalistic novel has been translated into German by Martin Hechtle. In 1941 it was published in Jena by Verlag Eugen Diederichs. Two more publications followed, one in 1943 and one in 1951.

The Serbian translation with the title *Hautekiri* was published in 1956 by Novi Sad by Bratstvo-Jedinstvo. It had been translated by the translators Simonid Kocić and Aleksandar Mišić. Although the impression of the Serbian translation from 1956 does not state from which source language the novel has been translated, it could only have been done via the German translation since the French translation (Brussels, 1966) is of a later date. No information can be found about Simonid Kocić. All found about Aleksandar Mišić is the fact that he himself published and that he translated the novel *Koenigsmark* by Pierre Benoit. However, this French novel also existed in a German translation [Königsmark. Berlin: Ehrlich-Verlag, 1924, translated by Victor Aubertin], so presumably this one was also translated via German.

In the preface of the Serbian edition, an overview of the history of Dutch literature in Flanders is given, written by the Flemish writer-poet and translator Bert Decorie (1915–2009). In a footnote, the translators thank two secretaries from the Belgian embassy in Belgrade for their mediation and for the correspondence with Decorie. The correct spelling of their names is difficult to determine, since in Serbian names are phonetically transcribed. It also remains unclear in which language Decorie wrote his preface. On the basis of the transcriptions it could be a translation both from French and from German: Guido Gezelle

is written as Gvido Žezele (which suggests a French pronunciation), Lode Zielens as Lode Cijelens (read as Tsielens), which suggests a German pronunciation.

The emphasis on Walschap's solidarity with the Flemish countryside and the criticism of certain Catholic (read: reactionary) circles at work could be interpreted as a slight ideological motivation. He shares this popular, rural, vitalist sentiment with Streuvels. It is precisely these aspects that made them acceptable for both right-wing and left-wing political circles.



Fig. 4. Walschap G. Hautekiet. Novi Sad: Bratstvo-Jedinstvo, 1956

3. TRANSLATIONS VIA TRANSLATIONS FROM WEST GERMANY

The list of translations based on translations from West Germany, but without translations published before or during the Second World War, and also excluding publications in the GDR, is relatively short and includes the following titles:

SIMON VESTDIJK. *De dokter en het lichte meisje*, 1951.

German translations: *Der Arzt und das leichte Mädchen* – German translations by R. Italiaander, 1953.

Serbian translation: *Lekar i laka devojka* – Translated from German by Kaćuša Avakumović Maletin. Subotica, 1960

JAKOBA VAN VELDE. *De grote zaal*, 1953.

German translation: *Der große Saal* – German translation by Elmar Topfhoven, 1955.

Serbian translation: *Velika sala* – Translated from German by Bogomir Herman. Beograd, 1957.

HARRY MULLISCH. *De aanslag*, 1982.

German translation: *Das Attentat* – German translation by Annelen Habers, 1986.

Croatian translation: *Atentat* – Translated from German by Marija Katičić-Horvat and Dragutin Horvat. Zagreb, 1987.

It seems plausible that commercial considerations played a decisive role in the choice of these titles, but to date no research has been done on the history and reception of these translations.

4. ANNE FRANK, *HET ACHTERHUIS*, 1947

The case of the Diary of Anne Frank deserves more attention. Although the first German translation by Anneliese Schütz appeared in West Germany in 1950 (the GDR publication followed only in 1957), two years earlier than the English one, the Serbian translation of *Het Achterhuis* by Zagorka Lilić based on this English text was published in 1956 by the Belgrade-based publisher Nolit. For twenty years, this translation was the only one available in the entire Serbian/Croatian language area. Until 1990, it has had fourteen editions. The first Croatian translation from the English version by Giga Gračan and with an afterword by Eleonor Roos-evelt did not appear in Zagreb until 1977. The first translation from German by Ana Šegvić was published in Split in 2000.

If there can be an ideological motivation behind the translation of *Het Achterhuis* at all, then the impetus for this came from the English-speaking area, not from the German one. The fact that *Het Achterhuis* is part of the mandatory school curriculum could also explain the large number of pirate publications appeared over the past twenty years. Using the names of unknown translators, the translation of Zagorka Lilić has been plagiarized.

5. TRANSLATIONS DIRECTLY FROM DUTCH

Until the foundation of the Dutch professorship in Belgrade in 1987, the number of translations from Dutch in Yugoslavia was extremely limited. In fact, all Dutch translations before that year were published thanks to two translators alone: the Croatian translator Josip Tabak and the Slovenian translator Janko Moder. We know that Tabak, before he came to full master Dutch, used German translations. It is plausible that ideological considerations played a certain role in their choice or the choice of the publisher.

5.1. Theun de Vries

Thanks to his role in the Dutch resistance, as well as due to his persevering communist convictions, De Vries enjoyed widespread admiration in the Eastern Bloc. He was recognised as a respected Western author. Also in Yugoslavia this status definitely played a role.

5.1.1. Rembrandt, 1931

The First German translation of *Rembrandt* was published in 1934 in Berlin by Buchmeister Verlag, in the translation of Franz Dülberg. The first GDR edition was published in 1950 in Berlin, also by Buchmeister Verlag, but this edition was translated by Eva Schumann. This same translation was published in 4 more editions by this publishers (1951, 1954, 1957) and in 1958 another one followed at Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt.

The Croatian translation was published in 1956 in Zagreb by the Publishers Kultura. Zlatko Gorjan and Josip Tabak are mentioned as the translators. Zlatko Gorjan (1901–1976) was a Croatian writer, poet and translator. He mainly translated from German, but also from English and from French. He probably made the rough translation from German because at that time Tabak still did not sufficiently master Dutch. The back of the book contains notes about Theun de Vries, but the author of these notes is not mentioned. Whether those were taken from (one of) the translators of another source requires further investigation. Although the translation of the book is regarded as a contribution to the celebration of Rembrandt's 350th birthday, the emphasis in this paratext is on De Vries as a communist, progressive and anti-fascist convictions. It is obvious that the GDR publication has served as an incentive but probably also as a source of text.

5.1.2. Stiefmoeder aarde, 1936

In 1958, the Croatian translation of *Stiefmoeder aarde* (published and adapted from Zagreb) followed in the wake of *Rembrandt*. This time it was emphatically stated that it was a translation directly from Dutch.

made by Josip Tabak. At that time, only two editions of this work existed in West Germany, both translated by Anine Gerdeck-de Waal (Frankfurt a.M., 1949, Düsseldorf, 1958). If one can consider an ideological influence at all here, it was an indirect influence, related to the political translation of De Vries, as demonstrated by the paratext accompanying the translation of *Rembrandt* mentioned earlier. This translation has never had direct links to the GDR since *Stiefmoeder aarde* was never published in the GDR.

6. CONCLUSION

Due to the specific historical and political circumstances, in particular due to the non-commitment status, the ideological influence of the reception of Dutch-language literature in Yugoslavia after the Second World War took a different trajectory compared to the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

The German influence via the GDR was incidental rather than systematic and in most cases concerned authors who were already well-known due to their publications from before or during the Second World War. It is striking that the ideological label they had received through their previous publications could easily change colour without harming the appreciation of their oeuvre.

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