This novel also attests to Mulisch's own assertion that the war was *the* event which shaped him and his work. His conviction that the tragic results of catastrophic events affect people and their countries for years to come, is echoed in the final line of the novel. Anton, now possessing the answer to the riddle of his life, shuffles his shoes as he walks across the cobblestones and it is

> as if each step raised clouds of ashes, although there are no ashes in sight.

Rutger Kopland: *The Prospect and the River*. Translated by James Brockway. Hull, England: Jackson's Arm Press, 1987.

Hendrika Ruger
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Rutger Kopland was born in Door, the Netherlands in 1934. The name is a pseudonym for Rutger H. van den Hoofdakker, one of the most popular writers of the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium. He is a psychiatrist affiliated with the psychiatric clinic of the University of Groningen as a scientific researcher.

In 1986 he received the Paul Snoek Prize, a Belgian literary prize issued for the first time that year. Last year Kopland was honoured in the Netherlands for his literary work by receiving the P. C Hooft Prize.

There is no doubt about the popularity of the poet, which is evident in the number of times his poetry collections have been reprinted. His first collection, *Onder het vee* (1966), is now in its seventh edition; *Het orgeltje van Yesterday* (1968) followed and is now in its 13th edition; *Alles op de fiets* (1969) was reprinted 11 times; *Wie wat vindt heeft slecht gezocht* (1973) is now in its seventh edition; *Een lege plek om te blijven* (1975) is in its sixth edition; *Al die mooie beloften* (1978) was reprinted five times; *Dit uitzicht* (1982) and *Voor het verdwijnt en daarna* (1985) are now both in third editions.[1] From this record it is clear that Kopland is indeed a very popular and much-read poet.

Kopland's books have been reviewed in many newspapers and literary journals both in the Netherlands and abroad. In general, the critics have received his work with praise. However, some reviewers have been puzzled by his books' tremendous popularity. These critics suspect that the poet's success is a result of the misunderstanding of his work by the greatest part of his readership. They think that the majority of these readers are not aware of the real meaning of these poems, that they miss the complexity and the "double bottom" of his work. They argue that the average reader is misled by the use of a simple choice of words and colloquial language, and that the average reader takes his poems at face value only. Other critics, for instance Hugo Brems, think that the popularity of the poet lies not only in his simple language but also in the fact that the reader can recognize his or her own feelings in the emotions described by Kopland, and that his popularity may therefore be ascribed to the reader's self-recognition. As good poetry is usually thought to be good because the reader can identify with the situations and emotions described by the poet, it is likely that critics such as Hugo Brems have identified the real reason for Kopland's success: he is so popular because he writes so well.

Kopland made his debut as a writer in 1964, in the literary journal *Tirade*. Later, from 1969 to 1971, his work was published in *Hollands Maandblad*. In 1974 he contributed to the then newly-founded literary journal *De Revisor*. Since 1980 his work has been appearing in *Raster*.

In the Netherlands literary journals represent certain tendencies and characteristics. Each journal represents a certain "stream", a style in writing. For this reason the critic immediately associates a work which appears in a literary journal with a certain group of writers. While work published in *Tirade* is considered to be "anecdotal", *Raster* would tend to represent an abstract style. It has been noted that Kopland's work has gone through an evolution from his early anecdotal publications in *Tirade* towards his latest work, associated with the "Raster-style".

As has been mentioned, Kopland expresses himself in simple colloquial language. His style is that of ironic understatement, and his subjects are romantic themes such as death and decay. He shows emotion In his work, perhaps exclaiming at the sight of something beautiful, or describing the memory of something that has made an indelible impression. This can best be illustrated by considering his well-known poem "Young Lettuce":

> I can bear it all,
> the withering of beans,
> flowers dying, I can watch
> the small patch of potatoes being dug up
> without shedding a tear, I'm really hard
> when it comes to that.
> But young lettuce in September,
> just planted, still limp,
> in little moist beds, no.[2]

We may consider the first poem of his first book, *Onder het vee* (1966), as a further example. "A Psalm" begins as follows:

The green pastures the quiet water
on the wallpaper of my room
as a frightened child
I believed in wallpaper.

The beginning of the poem refers to Psalm 23 in the Bible: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want,/He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters/He restoreth my soul." Kopland here refers to his childhood. He goes back to the memory of the safe haven of home, the assurance of the safety of his room, the familiarity of its wallpaper with the well-known pattern, the wallpaper "in which he believed".

In the second part of the poem the feeling of safety disappears:

when my mother prayed for me
and I had been forgiven for yet
another day I stayed behind
between motionless horses and cows
laid down like a foundling in a world
of grass.

Here we definitely detect a feeling of being isolated, homeless, away from the protection of home. He finishes the poem with a final stanza:

now I have to go again through God's meadows
I don't find a step
that I can retrace, only
a small hand in mine
that stiffens in cramp as the mighty bodies
of the cattle groan and breathe
of peace.[3]

There is no possibility of returning to the feelings of safety of his youth. He must again travel through God's pastures, but now he, in turn, has to lead a child ("a small hand in mine") through the landscape. They have to pass the cattle. Grass and cattle remain a memory, a symbol of the state of innocence, of peace.

In his later work, grass and cattle remain symbols of youth and childhood, memories of a carefree state of happiness.

In *Al die mooie beloften (All those fine promises)* (1978) we see Kopland's yearning for the past supplanted by a pronouncement of disillusion, a resignation to the inevitability of unsolved problems. The title poem is included in a collection of translations by James Brockway:

The green pastures, the still waters,
I have visited them and indeed
have found them, they were even lovelier
than I had been promised,
magnificent.

And in this endearing landscape the son
of the maker, nailed to a tree,
but no trace of violence, just
peace, quiet.

His vacant eyes stare into the scene,
eternal questions play around his mouth,
why then, who are you,
where were you, and the like.

Without reproach, he must have known
what was about to happen.
I have no reply.[4]

Here we find, then, that the poet has "seen it all", and there is no place to be left safely "between motionless horses and cows/laid down like a foundling in a world/ of grass", as in his earlier poem "A Psalm." In the "endearing landscape" stands the cross. Only the questions remain now. The poet has no solution: "I have no reply".

In order to follow the evolution of Kopland's style and his philosophical progress, ideally one would read all of his poetic work, and most certainly the rest of the poems included n *Al die mooie beloften (All those fine promises)* (1978), *Voor het verdwijnt en daarna* (1985) and *Het Uitzicht* (1982). For English speaking readers, dependent on translations, this is still not possible, although some early work is available in English. In 1977 Ria LeighLoohuizen translated the poems from *Een lege plek om te blijven* in *An Empty Place to Stay and Other Poems* (San Francisco: Twin Peak Press, 1977). Some of her translations had appeared earlier in *Delta* (volume l4, no. 4). Translations of Kopland's work by James S. Holmes were included in various issues of this journal as well. While occasionally English translations of Kopland's poems had appeared in various anthologies, it was a pleasant surprise when a complete volume of translations of the latest poems of Kopland became available in the collection entitled *The Prospect and the River* (1987), the work of the well-known translator and scholar James Brockway.

While it is not possible to follow the evolution of Kopland's poetic output by reading this collection, it is a privilege to have his recent work available in English. Among the poems included is "Father I see your Face" from *Al die mooie beloften* (1978). "Beekdal the Valley" is a translation of the poem "Beekdal", from *Voor het verdwijnt en daarna* (1985). The other poems are from *Dit uitzicht (This view)* (1982). James Brockway gave his work the title *The Prospect and the River*, echoing in it the idea of a view or prospect in the original title.

The first poem of *The Prospect and the River* concerns the father of the poet: "Father I see your face again, years/ after your death..." The poet turns to the past and lingers on his feelings, evoked both by memory and by the impressions that are left after the passing of the years. It is the poet's habit to do this, first to evoke the past, then to play with feelings aroused by an interpretation of this past in the present. He will even alter the past: "Almost a scream still at/this death". Then he ends the poem with:

> Father your face there, a sort of
> island where no-one
> has ever lived, where
> no-one ever arrives.

These last lines are typical of Kopland. He describes a fleeting moment of remembering his father, without any indication of why this memory has entered his mind, then the memory flashes by. In the original Dutch the poet's last lines are:

> /-zo'n
> eiland waar nooit iemand
> heeft gewoond, waar
> nooit iemand komt.

It is an isolated island, without connections, without ties, just there by itself. Yet the poet has imagined "Almost a scream still at/this death". This leaves the reader with the question: Was there a scream, or did he go silently, without a sound? It is this ability to leave the reader with many unanswered questions that makes Kopland's poetry so intriguing and so true to real life. When describing an incident that happened in the past he also offers to the reader the change of reactions to this incident after a certain time. His observations are not objective, and in his description he provides an ever-changing kaleidoscopic range of possible reactions to the incident.

In the poem "The Surveyor" Kopland describes the surveyor and the territory he maps:

> with the boundaries that he
> draws,
> sharper, more distinct, the grass and the trees
> grow vaguer and everything that lives there declines
> and dies.
> The world around him is perfectly clear, everything
> has been observed.

While the first poem, "Father I see Your Face", had as subject what the poet actually saw, here he describes an observer, the surveyor, who seeks, but does not find the world. "Just lines on a map", Kopland reports concerning these observations. The poet describes the consequences of this way of seeing: the grass, the trees, and everything that lives there "lijdt en sterft." While "suffers and dies" is the literal meaning of this phrase, the translator says "declines and dies", demonstrating a beautiful use of alliteration and musical sound.

The next two poems of the collection, "All those fine promises" and "Conversation", are beautiful examples of Kopland's ability to convey a mood, recalling the terror of the past and, at the same time, conveying the knowledge that there is no longer anything to fear:

> there was one
> a time, and now it's past, there's a place
> and this too has been deserted,
> these are comfort, but why
>
> Not because of what has been, but because of
> afterwards:

And the poet offers consolation in the lines:

> I hear, but the silence afterwards,
> I see, but what is no more,
> I think, but of what?

Here the poet seems to imply that time has passed and events which have occurred during that period of time have altered the past, as well.

To allow English language readers to appreciate fully Kopland's method of writing, it would be useful to have his essay "Over het maken van een gedicht" translated into English and available to a wider public. In this essay he describes step by step the thoughts, efforts, and energy needed to create a poem.

> In order to write poems one has to find words, words
> that will express what was not there before; perhaps

writing poetry is to find words for what was not there before those words were there.[5]

This theory can be compared to the way inventors and scientific researchers work, creating something completely new, taking a scientific step forward, making an improvement, or at least a change, in their perception of the world. It can be considered a certain form of progress. In his turn, Kopland describes the entire creative process of writing a poem. He tells the reader the reason for his choice of words, and why he wants to describe something. He associates feelings with events in his life, and he makes use of his observations through use of all his senses.

In particular, he uses memory, his sense of smell, and the association of certain smells with certain situations in his past. In short, he describes the process of creating a poem using all his personal feelings connected with all his life-experiences. And although his circumstances are unique and personal they are, after all, human and shared with others. As a result the reader can indeed identify with everything he writes. This identification is also accomplished by the use of simple colloquial language, as pointed out by literary critics. The final result is that his poems do appear simple, yet are rich in emotional nuances and offer all the varieties of colouring available to describe the human condition.

It seems an easy task to translate ideas that have been expressed in simple Dutch into equally simple English. But translating poetry is never simple. Words have a different "weight" and subtle shades of meaning, which may or may not be available in the second language. Or there may be associations of a different nature arising from ordinary words translated into the second language.

In some instances, James Brockway's choice of words reflects the fact that he is writing on the other side of the Atlantic. A Canadian or American translator would be unlikely to choose "prospect" in favour of "view" or "steward" rather than "agent" or "bailiff", for the Canadian reader would likely associate other meanings with these words. In spite of all difficulties, this translator has given his English-speaking readers an admirable collection of poems which do not appear on the surface to be translations but rather poems in their own right. By means of *The Prospect and the River* James Brockway, a translator of Dutch literature since 1947, has once again further enlarged his remarkable contribution to the knowledge of Dutch literature abroad. His earlier service to Dutch literature was recognized in 1966 when he received the Martinus Nijhoff Prize. Readers will be grateful for this most recent contribution through the translation of Rutger Kopland's work. It may be hoped that one day he will make this poet's entire *oeuvre* available in English.

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For the information about Kopland, I am especially indebted to Stefaan Evenepoel's article on Kopland. Evenepoel is preparing a thesis about Kopland. He lives in Leuven: Hoegaardenstraat 122, Leuven, B 3000, Belgium.

Notes

[1]Stefaan Evenepoel: "Twintig jaar Kopland in Vlaanderen (1965-1985)" in *Ons Erfdeel* v.31 no.5 november-december 1988, p. 722.

[2]Translation from 'Directions and Figures in the Poetry of Holland and Flanders' by R. L. Fokkema in *Writing in Holland and Flanders,* Summer 1973.

[3]Translation by H. Ruger and D. Howard in *Under Dutch Skies,* Windsor, Ontario: Netherlandic Press, 1981, p. 13.

[4]Translation of *Al die mooie beloften*, from *The Prospect and the River.*

[5]"Gedichten maken is woorden vinden, woorden die onder woorden brengen, misschien is dichten woorden vinden voor wat er niet was, voordat die woorden er waren." From: "Over het maken van een gedicht" in *Al die mooie beloften* by Rutger Kopland, Amsterdam: G. A. van Oorschot, 1978, p. 37.

Simon Vestdijk. *The garden where the brass band played.* (Originally published in Dutch as *De koperen tuin.)* Translated by A. Brotherton. Leyden: Sythoff/ London: Heinemann. 1965. 312 p.

William Rueter
University of Toronto Press

Simon Vestdijk occupies a unique place in twentieth-century Dutch literature as the prolific and versatile author of stories, essays, novels, and poems. Born in Harlingen in 1898, he began his career by studying medicine, but from 1932 he was seriously and deeply involved in all aspects of literature, including criticism, historical novels, an opera libretto, and reviews, with an acute interest in the widest variety of subjects. The essayist Menno ter Braak understandably described Vestdijk as "The Devil's magician", and A. Roland Holst referred to Vestdijk as the man "who writes faster than God can read."

Vestdijk is known for the objective, intellectual style he uses in his almost fifty novels — whether autobiographical, partially autobiographical, or historical — and for his search for the mystery within the most commonplace characters. *The garden where the brass band played* is a case in point. Published in 1950, it is a moving account of the emotional development of a lonely young man early in this century.

The younger son in a bourgeois household in a small provincial Dutch town, Nol sees life from a distance. He is always in conflict with his superficial older brother Chris and there is a long-term bond of hatred between them. But No knows his own character as well as that of his contemporaries:

> [Chris] was determined to be taken notice of, and in his constant fever of excitement it was difficult for him to distinguish between reality and fantasy. I was both more of a dreamer and more of a realist than he was. If I lied I knew I was lying, while Chris's whole existence was one big lie, a fiction of his own making, which the world around him gave a certain measure of approval to... He knew everything about everything. He told everyone what he heard or made up, he would forget it almost at once, and then avoid the boys who remembered what he had told them.

In Nol's eyes, poor Chris "reached his highest peak of intelligence" at age ten and then declined into predictable mediocrity.

Throughout the book Vestdijk captures superbly the mood and atmosphere of the period in a few brief, carefully chosen phrases. The key scene of the novel occurs after the family's return from their annual summer holiday, "after one of those weeks of imprisonment in the open air." Nol's mother takes him to a public garden where he is fascinated by Cuperus, the conductor of the park's brass band. In hearing Cuperus conduct a Sousa march he discovers the overwhelming power of music. Impulsively, he dances with a tall, pale, girl four years his senior — Trix, Cuperus's daughter — with whom he unwittingly falls in love.

Cuperus comes to Nol's house to give him piano lessons. His reputation as a drunkard has preceded him, and after a time he inadvertently disgraces himself with the family's maid and stops teaching Nol. Nol's hero-worship of the brilliant, erratic Cuperus continues despite Cuperus' loss of pupils and the town's growing disapproval of him. A chance meeting encourages Nol to collect money from his friends to help the grateful Cuperus. Lessons are resumed. Nol comes completely under the spell of his teacher.

Music plays a major role throughout the book. It becomes Nol's obsession, as well as the author's. In the main section of the book (almost an intermezzo) Vellinga, the editor of the local newspaper, founds an Opera Society and Cuperus is engaged to conduct a mostly amateur performance of *Carmen*. There are wonderful evocative descriptions of Cuperus' gradual discovery of the depth of Bizet's music as he tries out passages at the piano:

> ...here it is, from the ninth bar...just listen to this, it's pure Wagner... marvelous! But not at the end, still, that's damned good, too, that E flat-A flat-F chord That's *Tristan* , that's *Parsifal* or whatever you like, but Bizet never heard or read a note of either of them. He might have heard bits of *Lohengrin* and he would have heard *Tannhauser*, that's certain...clever, damned clever.