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Black Elk Faces East: Beb Vuyk, Cultural Translation, and John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*

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When in 1931 the Oglala Lakota holy man Nicholas Black Elk (1863–1950) told the story of his life and his religious vision to the Nebraska poet John G. Neihardt (1881–1973), he laid the basis for one of the most widely known works of Native American life writing and religious thought. *Black Elk Speaks* did not find a wide audience when it was first published in 1932, but in the 1960s and 1970s it became a pivotal text in Native American literature, presented as Black Elk's words "as told through" the white poet Neihardt. Much critical commentary has explored how *Black Elk Speaks* is crafted from multiple layers of collaboration and translation: interviews with Black Elk and other Lakota interlocutors, Neihardt's poetic invention, and drawings by the Lakota artist Standing Bear.[1] As Neihardt explained the process, Black Elk's son Ben translated his father's words from Lakota into English, Neihardt repeated the translation in his words, and Neihardt's daughter Enid took notes in stenographic shorthand.[2] Shaped by Neihardt's omissions as much as his additions, *Black Elk Speaks* was already a work in translation before it ever appeared in an international translated edition.

Outside the United States, *Black Elk Speaks* brought Lakota history and culture into conversation with world literature and European intellectual traditions. In Zurich, the psychologist Carl Jung drew on the work for his study of myths and the unconscious and called for its translation into German.[3] The first foreign-language edition of *Black Elk Speaks* was Siegfried Lang's German translation, published in Switzerland in 1955. After the University of Nebraska issued a successful paperback reprint in 1961, new translations appeared in Germany (1962), the Netherlands (1964), Belgium (1967), Italy (1968), Denmark (1969), France (1969 and 1976), Spain (1971), Japan (1973), and South Korea (1981). Before the frequent appearance of translated works by a new generation of Native American writers in the 1970s and 1980s—such as N. Scott

Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Craig Strete, and Louise Erdrich—*Black Elk Speaks* helped to secure a place for Indigenous life writing within world literature.

Studies of *Black Elk Speaks* mention these translations only in passing, but a recent turn to transnational studies of Indigenous literature suggests new ways of exploring the boundary-crossing nature of Neihardt and Black Elk's book.[4] Scott Richard Lyons considers the book as one that is simultaneously rooted in Oglala Lakota religion and culture, American literary and religious contexts, and the "worldwide resilience and revitalization of traditional religion and culture"; that it mediates between these different contexts is a marker of the work's "hybridity."[5] Such commentary recognizes that *Black Elk Speaks* was already transnational before the first international translation appeared, raising questions about Lakota-to-English (mis)translation, the interactions between multiple Indian nations on the Great Plains, and Black Elk's transatlantic travels as a performer in Wild West shows. Christopher Pexa suggests that it expresses a notion of Lakota territoriality as "mobile relationality," not only because of Black Elk's international travels, but also because his narrative underscores Lakota concepts of land and belonging that "survived the state's assault on communally held homelands."[6] Yet Pexa also notes that the book's global popularity made Black Elk a "highly mobile signifier," disassociated from the struggle for Lakota land and nationhood and serving a range of political projects instead.[7] In this respect, the international translations of *Black Elk Speaks* also reflect a further decentering of Indigenous self-representation.

In the publication history of *Black Elk Speaks,* the Dutch translation by Beb Vuyk (1905–1991) offers a telling example of what happened to Neihardt's book when it reached European markets in the 1960s. *Zwarte Eland spreekt: een Sioux-medicijnman vertelt zijn leven* was first published in the Netherlands in 1964 and republished in Belgium three years later.[8] Vuyk's translation links *Black Elk Speaks* to the career of one of the most important postwar Dutch-Indonesian authors, who had a prominent voice in debates on Indonesian nationalism, decolonization, and world literatures in the period following World War II. The Dutch-language edition thereby lends Black Elk's narrative a previously unremarked place within transnational networks of anticolonial writers and intellectuals, during a period when the project of global decolonizing intersected with Cold War cultural politics.

Following on the call of translation scholars to attend to the cultural dimensions of literary translation, this essay explores a work of US-Lakota literature in foreign-language translation, which is, to borrow Susan Bassnett's words, "one of the many forms in which works of literature are 'rewritten.'"[9] If translation is often regarded as a "minor" literary act—concerning only the linguistic transfer from the source language to the target language—a cultural approach to translation considers literary texts as what Salah Selim calls a "moveable event" that "constantly mutates" as it goes through many "contingent rewritings and rereadings."[10] In the case of *Black Elk Speaks*, this rewriting involves a complex negotiation between different discourses of Indigeneity and colonialism. Whereas *Black Elk Speaks* connects Neihardt's craft as an

epic poet to Lakota vision telling, the 1964 Dutch edition overwrites the visual logics of Black Elk's narrative and vision, thereby decentering the source text's representation of Lakota culture and American settler colonialism. Beb Vuyk's linguistic and organizational choices demonstrate how literary (mis)translation effects what Lawrence Venuti calls the figural "replacement" of Indigenous writing, in a global literary field marked by linguistic, cultural, and colonial hierarchies.[11] As it mediates between Lakota, English, and Dutch, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* reveals an interplay between linguistic and cultural translation that shifts the representation of Lakota writing within transnational literary exchange.

Beb Vuyk, Decolonization, and Transnational Modernism

If Beb Vuyk is mostly known today as the author of *Groot Indonesisch Kookboek* (1973)—a classic guide to Indonesian cuisine in the Netherlands—her novels, short stories, autobiographical writings, and essays also take a central place in Dutch-Indonesian modernist literature. Of Dutch-Indonesian descent, Elisabeth "Beb" Vuyk was born in 1905 into the family of a shipbuilder who had moved from the Dutch East Indies to the Netherlands. Vuyk grew up and attended school in Rotterdam, but in 1929, after facing much of the racism leveled against Indonesian people in the Netherlands, she moved to the city of Sukabumi (West Java) in what was then the Dutch East Indies, where she met her future husband, an employee of an Ambonese tea plantation.[12] As Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher write, over the next two decades Vuyk became "a significant figure among Indonesian cultural and literary modernists."[13] She entered the literary circle of the Dutch-Indonesian poet and novelist E. du Perron (1899–1940), whose critical stance on Dutch colonialism helped her recognize what she described as the "sharp dividing lines in colonial society."[14] Joining a network of progressive intellectuals committed to Indonesian culture, Vuyk contributed many magazine columns on Indonesian literature and politics and published three heavily autobiographical novels that dissect colonialist psychology and critique colonial administrators in the Dutch East Indies.

At the end of World War II, when the Japanese occupation ended and Sukarno declared Indonesia's independence, Vuyk was one of relatively few Dutch-born intellectuals who supported decolonization, even though she promoted the more moderate course of Sutan Sjahrir's Socialist Party of Indonesia (PSI).[15] She coauthored a manifesto on Indonesian political and cultural independence, joined a study group of intellectuals around *Konfrontasi*—a journal of Indonesian literature and politics—and attended the 1955 Bandung Conference, the first major meeting of newly independent Asian and African states.[16] Vuyk was part of a generation of Asian and Pacific intellectuals who, in Gary Y. Okihiro's words, "challenged white supremacy and colonialism" and fought for self-determination along two axes: "anticolonialism or liberation from the material conditions that oppressed and exploited them, and antiracism or

freedom from the discourses that justified and maintained colonialism."[17] Vuyk moved back to the Netherlands in 1958, after Sukarno began to marginalize PSI members and Western-educated intellectuals and moved to take away the passports of Dutch-born Indonesians.[18]

Because of these developments, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* appeared at the height of a wider Indonesian diaspora, which was shaped in part by Dutch-American transatlantic relations. Because of close diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the United States, some twenty- to thirty-thousand Dutch Indonesians made their way through the Netherlands to settle in the United States between 1958 and 1965.[19] At this moment of decolonization, diaspora, and transatlantic exchange, Vuyk became an established public voice on Indonesian culture and politics in the Netherlands.[20] She also championed the translation of Asian and African literatures, reviewing and introducing short story and poetry collections by many non-Western authors.[21] In other words, her work on *Zwarte Eland spreekt* fits the profile of a diasporic writer in exile who promoted what she described as "constant exchange and mutual influence across national borders in the field of art and literature."[22] In Roberts and Foulcher's words, her work represents "transnational modernism's cross-pollinating literary and expressive cultures," a global intellectual and literary movement that was increasingly shaped by decolonial and Indigenous traditions.[23]

Because Vuyk was a writer of Indonesian heritage who wrote critically about Dutch colonialism, it is tempting to see *Zwarte Eland spreekt* as a figuration of what Chadwick Allen calls "trans-Indigenous connections and collaborations," the dialogues between Indigenous literatures, aesthetics, media, and art from different parts of the world.[24] Indeed, with Indonesia having been under various forms of Dutch colonial rule from the early seventeenth century to World War II, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* connects the literary history of two different Indigenous contexts.[25] But if Vuyk was critical of Dutch colonialism in the East Indies, her historical relation to colonial culture was also more complex. In the 1930s she worked in a system of Protestant boarding schools for Indonesian youth, playing a role in the influence of Dutch colonial institutions on Indonesian society and culture.[26] Moreover, as the longtime owners of a cajeput plantation on the island of Buru, Vuyk and her husband also belonged to the planter class that she criticized in her work. Although critical of colonial rule, her autobiographical novels also promote the importance of property ownership and invest in such aspects of running a plantation as farming techniques, trade strategies, economic cycles, and the management of labor. Her novels, then, are a reminder that anticolonial literature was often produced and championed by cultural and economic elites.

Vuyk's positionality as translator is further complicated by her place within intellectual networks that were influenced by Cold War–era US cultural politics. Her writing career was buoyed by organizations and magazines sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an organization funded by the US State Department, to promote its anticommunist agenda in decolonizing countries. For instance, the magazines she published in, including *Konfrontasi*, regularly included CCF-endorsed articles.[27] In

1964, Vuyk translated *Under the Mountain Wall* (1962) by Peter Matthiessen, whose editorship of *The Paris Review* was in part a cover for his activities as a CIA agent.[28] And in 1968, she translated the published journals of Yozar Anwar, a member of the anti-communist student group KAMI, which contributed to Sukarno's ouster as president of Indonesia in 1967.[29] While such connections do not directly determine the cultural and political valence of Vuyk's work, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* nevertheless registers a certain tension. Even as the book made Black Elk's anticolonial critique available to new publics, it was part of a global exchange in which the instrumentalization of literature and intellectual work served US projects of cultural and political influence.

Retranslating *Black Elk Speaks*

Vuyk's *Zwarte Eland spreekt* was published in 1964 by De Tijdstroom, a publisher specializing in philosophical and educational textbooks. It is unclear precisely how Beb Vuyk ended up as its translator, especially since she had no background in Indigenous cultures of North America, nor advanced training in English besides the evening school classes she took as a teenager.[30] Her biographer Bert Scova Rhigini writes that she may have well taken on the work for purely financial reasons.[31] She was likely tapped by the Dutch literary agent Peter van Lindonk, who first asked Neihardt for the Dutch translation rights to his book. Van Lindonk also requested a copy of the 1955 German-language edition "just for compairing" [sic], possibly to help solve certain problems of translation.[32] Many of Vuyk's choices suggest that her main objective as a translator was readability in Dutch. Vuyk translates the names of Indigenous people literally into Dutch (*Zwarte Eland* for Black Elk, *Gek Paard* for Crazy Horse, and *IJzeren Havik* for Iron Hawk), as well as the Lakota names of months (*Maan van de Sneeuwblinden* for Moon of the Snowblind). Vuyk also translates the names of rivers into Dutch, such as *Kleibeek* (Clay Creek), *Malse Gra*s (Little Big Horn/Greasy Grass), *Rozenknop* (Rosebud), and *Poeder* (Powder), even though she retains English placenames such as Wounded Knee, the Badlands, and Harney Peak. In one instance, Vuyk consistently translates the word "tepee" as "wigwam," a mistake that is likely attributable to a lack of expertise in Indigenous histories and cultures of North America.

Such acts of literary translation are not a "marginal" activity, Susan Bassnett argues, since translation is a "primary instrument" by which one culture learns about another and simultaneously "constructs its image of that other culture."[33] In analyzing the cultural and linguistic implications of literary translation, scholars of translation studies typically distinguish between "foreignizing" and "domesticating" approaches to translation. As Bassnett summarizes, a "foreignizing" translation makes visible the translator's choices through editorial apparatuses and notes, to emphasize the fact of the text's translation from a different language. On the other hand, a domesticating approach—such as Vuyk's in *Zwarte Eland spreekt*—seeks to produce a text that "reads as fluently as if it had been written originally in the target language."[34] Yet

creating a fluent translation in the target language can also engender a false transparency that covers over ethnocentrism.[35] In Lawrence Venuti's words, a foreign text that is translated in such a way as to erase the signs of its foreignness, in an attempt to "bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar," can result in the "wholesale domestication of the foreign text" and thereby serve as "an imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas."[36] In other words, the translation of a foreign text according to the "values, beliefs and representations that preexist in the target language" can lead to the "forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text."[37]

In the case of *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, this replacement of linguistic and cultural difference happened twice over: with the translation of Black Elk's words from Lakota into English and again with Vuyk's translation of the English text into a different colonial language, decades later. In this process of replacement, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* not only constructs an image of the culture that produced the original work, but also of the crosscultural collaboration that produced it. Investing in the concept of "Indian speech" as a distinct literary commodity, the dust jacket proclaims that Black Elk's "language is extremely simplistic" even as it is "vivid and image-laden despite the few means of language and the limited vocabulary. The translator has tried as much as possible to render in the Dutch language the deviancies in usage in the original."[38] This wording presents the book as an expression of the natural imagery and vivacity of Native speech acts, implying that Indigenous writing represents those inherent qualities, which are then characterized as "deviancies in usage." The Dutch edition expresses what Venuti calls the preexisting "values, beliefs, and representations" in the target culture, which in this case reveal colonialist assumptions about Indigenous language and expression.[39]

The promotional copy obscures the fact that *Black Elk Speaks* is not a precise record of Black Elk's oral text in Lakota, but is shaped by Neihardt's edits and inventions—and Vuyk's translation adds another editorial layer to the text. For instance, Raymond J. DeMallie points out that the first six paragraphs of *Black Elk Speaks* are all Neihardt's invention, even though the poet claimed to capture Black Elk's tone and suggested meaning.[40] However, Neihardt opens with the italicized phrase "Black Elk Speaks" to suggest the beginning of Black Elk's narration:

> *Black Elk Speaks:*
>
> My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like a heavy snow?[41]

Vuyk's translation of these opening passages subtly alters the book's first impressions of Black Elk's attributed speech: she leaves out the heading "Black Elk Speaks" and

replaces the question mark at the end of the sentence with a period, thereby signaling even more clearly that this is a rhetorical question.[42] More significantly, Vuyk gives a different first impression of Black Elk's syntax by breaking up the opening sentence into two separate sentences. Neihardt's version suggests an immediate complexity by using semicolons to coordinate several syntactic units: Black Elk's addressing his friend Neihardt; his announcement that the text is more than the story of just one person; and a metaphorical reasoning for why this is so. Vuyk's translation opens with the more straightforward statement "My friend, I am going to tell the story of my life, which you ask me for."[43] While this change manages the issue of the text gaining length in translation, due to the relative length of Dutch words, Vuyk nevertheless produces a syntactic simplicity that Neihardt does not.

In some instances, Vuyk's translation diminishes the cultural specificity of Neihardt's diction, for instance by changing the phrase "when the night was getting old" to "*later in de nacht*" ("later in the night").[44] Whereas Neihardt's wording is a literal translation of an uncommon phrase in English—perhaps used for poetic effect—Vuyk substitutes what is a common idiom in Dutch. In the third chapter, "The Great Vision," she uses an alternative pronoun to refer to the cloud that carries Black Elk: referred to as "it" in Neihardt's text, the cloud becomes a "he" (*hij*) in Vuyk's translation, seemingly personifying the cloud or amplifying its role as an agent in Black Elk's vision.[45] Other passages in *Zwarte Eland spreekt* are shaped by the omission of words. In "High Horse's Courting," a humorous chapter about a Lakota man's romantic adventures, Vuyk omits linguistic markers of the book's origins in oral performance.[46] In Neihardt's version, Black Elk repeatedly begins his sentences with the word "Well" to signal the beginning of an anecdote, but Vuyk leaves out these introductory phrases:

> NEIHARDT: Well, this young man I am telling about was called High Horse … [47]
> VUIJK: The young man about whom I tell was called High Horse … [48]
>
> NEIHARDT: Well, after High Horse had been sneaking around a good while … [49]
> VUYK: After High Horse had been sneaking around like that a good while … [50]

Neihardt's use of "well" has several effects: it signals the use of reported speech, a conversational tone, and perhaps a moment of Black Elk gathering his thoughts. Neihardt uses the words "now" and "so" to similar effect elsewhere, but Vuyk leaves out these metadiscursive markers, thereby deemphasizing the conversational tone of the narration.[51]

In a text that derives much of its power from its epigrammatic writing, even minor changes can achieve a significant shift in meaning. Some of these changes affect

the narrativizing of historical events. In "The End of the Dream," the last chapter before the postscript, Black Elk witnesses the massacre at Wounded Knee (1890), which he describes in harrowing detail, stating: "I did not know then how much was ended."[52] Despite the passive voice, the phrase "was ended" blames the American soldiers for ending the "people's dream" by killing women and children. Vuyk translates this sentence as "*Ik wist toen nog niet, hoeveel er voorbij was*" ("I did not yet know then, how much was past/over"). [53] This subtle change downplays the violence of this history and makes the sentence more of an elegiac reflection on the fate of the Lakota people. Other changes alter the book's representation of Lakota religious concepts. In the chapter "The Offering of the Pipe" Neihardt captures Black Elk's belief that "all life" is shared between "two-leggeds," "four-leggeds," and "all green things," who are "children of one mother and their father is one Spirit."[54] DeMallie notes that the capitalized word "Spirit" is one of the terms that Neihardt uses for *Wakhą́ thą́ka* (alternately translated in the book as "Great Spirit" or "Spirit of the World"), the "traditional Lakota conception of the totality of all that is sacred, powerful, and mysterious."[55] Vuyk's edition states that all these animate beings are "children of one mother and their father is a spirit" ("*kinderen van één moeder en hun vader is een geest*").[56] By using a lowercase letter and distinguishing between "one" (*één*) and "a" (*een*), Vuyk diminishes the emphasis on the understanding of *Wakhą́ thą́ka* as a totality.

As translation scholar Emily Apter argues, such acts of mistranslation are a constitutive feature of world forms of literature.[57] *Zwarte Eland spreekt* demonstrates how the use of figurative language, punctuation, modes of address, and even capitalization contribute to a new version of Black Elk's narrative in translation. In a text already shaped by its collaborative authorship, these seemingly minor changes underscore the inherent instability of the text, in which the narrative voice always depends on the interaction between Black Elk's oral performance and a complex layering of editorial interventions.

Rearranging the Vision

In *Zwarte Eland spreekt,* these editorial interventions encompass more than linguistic translation, as Vuyk also made organizational changes to Neihardt's and Black Elk's book. For one, the Dutch translation includes only a small selection of Neihardt's explanatory footnotes—mostly those that clarify chronology or place names—and prints them as parenthetical notes rather than as footnotes. By comparison, the Italian, German, Spanish, and French editions retain all of Neihardt's footnotes, and the Danish edition incorporates his explanations into the body text. The Dutch edition only retains one footnote as such: When Black Elk first uses the word *Wasichus*, Neihardt's note explains that this refers to "the white man, but having no reference to the color of his skin."[58] The omission of many footnotes means that readers of the Dutch translation miss several clues about cultural and geographical context. For instance, when Black

Elk narrates that "our friends, the Shyela and the Blue Clouds, had come to help us fight," there is no explanation that this refers to the Cheyenne and Arapaho.[59] Similarly, where Neihardt identifies the "iron road" as the Union Pacific Railway and the "source of mighty waters" as the Three Forks of the Missouri, the Dutch edition lacks this historical and geographical specificity, placing the narrative in a less specific cultural landscape.

The paragraph organization in *Zwarte Eland spreekt* also reshapes critical aspects of the text, such as its representation of the oral and ceremonial context of Black Elk's story. Vuyk's version rearranges the paragraph breaks in at least two hundred and two places, including several key moments in the narrative.[60] For instance, the first chapter, "The Offering of the Pipe," begins with Black Elk's explanation of his life story in relation to the great vision that was revealed to him in his youth. This explanation is arranged in the following sequence of paragraphs:

> Par. 1: (A) My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life … (B) So many other men have lived …
>
> Par. 2: (C) It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell…
>
> Par. 3: (D) This, then, is not the tale of a great hunter … (E) So also have many others done … [F] These things I shall remember by the way … (G) But now that I can see it all as from a lonely hilltop …
>
> Par. 4: (H) But if the vision was true and mighty …
>
> Par. 5: (I) So I know that it is a good thing that I am going to do… (J) See, I fill this sacred pipe with the bark of the red willow …[61]

Although Vuyk does not change the order of these sentences, she arranges them into different paragraphs:

> Par. 1 (A) Mijn vriend, ik ga het verhaal van mijn leven vertellen … (B) Zoveel andere mensen leefden … (C) Het is het verhaal van alle leven …
>
> Par. 2: (D) Dit dan, is niet het verhaal van een groot jager … (E) Dit hebben ook vele anderen gedaan … (F) Deze dingen zal ik terloops gedenken …
>
> Par. 3: (G) Maar nu ik het allemaal als van een eenzame heuveltop kan overzien …

> Par. 4: (H) Maar als het visioen waar en machtig was … (I) Daarom weet ik dat het goed is wat ik ga doen … (J) Kijk, ik vul deze heilige pijp … [62]

These changes reduce the effect of Neihardt's paragraph organization, which crystallizes the distinct ceremonial moments with which the chapter opens. For instance, his paragraph breaks distinguish Black Elk's explanation of the universality of his story ("It is the story of all life and is good to tell … for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit") from his statement of the continuity of his vision ("But if the vision was true and mighty, as I know, it is true and mighty yet … it is in the darkness of their eyes that men get lost").[63] Neihardt accentuates these ceremonial moments as distinct units on the page, inviting the reader to slow down and experience their full impact. By contrast, Vuyk's translation prioritizes a narrative logic over a ceremonial one: by setting apart only the sentence that begins, "But now that I can see it all as from a lonely hilltop," she draws attention mostly to the retrospective character of Black Elk's narration, not the ceremonial purpose of Black Elk's words.[64]

These changes are especially striking in "The Great Vision," where Vuyk alters the paragraph organization in no less than thirty places—the most of any of the chapters. In this pivotal chapter, Black Elk lays out the vision he had when he was nine years old, which throughout his life he was obligated to perform through ceremony, to make the vision manifest in the real world. Early in the chapter, Black Elk describes being part of a camp on the way to the Rocky Mountains. While Black Elk eats his food near a creek, a vision appears to him of two men coming from the clouds announcing that his Grandfathers are calling him. Neihardt's text slows down the more it becomes shaped by its visionary character, shortening the paragraphs to emphasize the discrete visuals that Black Elk conjures up:

> Par. 1: (A) When we had camped again, I was lying in our tepee … (B) I could see out through the opening … (C) Each now carried a long spear… (D) They came clear down to the ground this time …
>
> Par. 2: (E) Then they turned and left the ground … (F) When I got up to follow, my legs did not hurt … (G) I went outside the tepee, and yonder where the men with flaming spears were going, a little cloud was coming very fast. (H) It came and stooped and took me and turned back to where it came from, flying fast. (I) And when I looked down I could see my mother and my father …
>
> Par. 3: (J) Then there was nothing but the air and the swiftness of the little cloud …

> Par. 4: (K) Now suddenly there was nothing but a world of cloud…
>
> Par. 5: (L) Then the two men spoke together and they said: 'Behold him, the being with four legs.'[65]

By the time that Black Elk describes that "[t]hen there was nothing but the air" and his experience becomes disconnected from the world below, each individual paragraph corresponds to a single image or movement. Hereby Neihardt invites what R. Todd Wise calls a participatory reading, in which Black Elk's vision is not to be "passively" read in a linguistic sense but "to be grasped spontaneously by the viewer as his own breathing production."[66]

Vuyk rearranges this passage as a sequence of only two paragraphs instead of five, thereby altering the representation of Black Elk's vision:

> Par. 1: (A) Nadat we ons kamp hadden opgeslagen … (B) Ik kon door de opening naar buiten kijken … (C) Iedere man droeg nu een lange speer … (D) Ze kwamen deze keer helemaal op de grond … (E) Daarna draaiden ze zich om … (F) Toen ik op stond om ze te volgen … (G) Ik ging naar buiten en ginds … (H) Hij kwam en boog naar beneden … (I) En toen ik naar beneden keek … (J) Daarna was er niets meer dan lucht …
>
> Par. 2: (K) Nu was er plotseling niets meer dan een wolkenwereld… (L) Toen spraken de twee mannen met elkaar … [67]

Especially Vuyk's choice to incorporate sentences (J), (K), and (L) into longer paragraphs alters their visual and narrative effect. Whereas Neihardt urges readers to slow down as they take in these images—to understand these paragraphs as discrete units that work *as* images—Vuyk's arrangement of the text into longer paragraphs sorts an effect that is narrative rather than visual.

These changes subtly shift not only Black Elk's narrative voice, but also Neihardt's role as an editor who drew from a distinct poetic tradition. Before *Black Elk Speaks,* Neihardt had made a name with three epic poems about the American West, including *The Song of the Indian Wars* (1925).[68] Black Elk's vision is rooted in Lakota cosmology, but Neihardt's textualization of it also owes to an epic worldview in which the hero's journey is one with that of an entire community or nation. Identifying Black Elk's vision and life story with the national life of the Lakota people, *Black Elk Speaks* expresses a world in which, as Georg Lukács writes, the epic hero is "never an individual," since the theme of the epic "is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community."[69] As in epic poetry, Black Elk's "destiny connects him by indissoluble threads to the community whose fate is crystallized in his own."[70] Crucially, Raymond J. DeMallie suggests that Neihardt's craft as an epic poet dovetailed with Black Elk's

understanding of *hanbloglaka* (vision telling), "the traditional mystical speech of Lakota holy men when they told about their sacred vision experiences."[71] Neihardt's attention to the visual impact of Black Elk's vision therefore links traditional Lakota vision telling to the immanent expression of a totalizing worldview that is a hallmark of epic poetry.

In this respect, Vuyk's edition adds another layer of cultural translation to Black Elk's story as it downplays the book's epic elements and their relation to Lakota hanbloglaka. Whereas Neihardt's paragraphs are dictated by the images of Black Elk's vision, Vuyk organizes the text along a primarily narrative logic. Although it is difficult to determine the intent behind these changes, they perhaps reveal the choices of a translator who wrote mostly short stories, novels, and memoirs, and perhaps de-emphasized Neihardt's imagistic design in favor of the book's readability as a memoir. After all, when *Zwarte Eland Spreekt* appeared in 1964, most of Vuyk's output consisted of strongly autobiographical novels and short stories, as well as narrative nonfiction about the Bandung conference and her experiences in Japanese internment camps during World War II. More than an arbiter of linguistic decisions, Vuyk brought various layers of translation to Black Elk's narrative in adapting it for a new linguistic and cultural context.

Complicating a Transnational Legacy

As a work of translation, then, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* pulls in two directions: it is at once a variation on the original American edition and a separate cultural artifact unto itself. The book's reception in the Netherlands suggests that Native American writing held a marginal place in Dutch literary culture in 1964. Vuyk's edition received only little attention in the mainstream press, and one of the few newspaper reviews held that the book, although "written for adults," has "a somewhat boyish, a somewhat child-like premise."[72] It characterizes the book as a "fairytale-like yet sad Indian story," which is "not only the tragedy of this one man, but in the first place the tragedy of a whole people, a whole Indian tribe."[73] In relating the book to such disparate genres, the review marks an ambivalence about how to categorize a text like *Black Elk Speaks*, seeing it as the purview of deep tragedy as well as children's stories.

Although the Dutch edition was not reprinted, a Belgian edition of Vuyk's translation appeared in 1967 from a Brussels-based Christian publishing cooperative, which included it in a world literature series.[74] Yet it was not until the 1970s, after *Black Elk Speaks* was republished in Britain and appeared in several European editions, that Black Elk's life story found a new audience in the Netherlands. In 1975 the Dutch pop singer Peter Blanker composed and performed an ambitious "pop oratorio" based on Neihardt's book, and a year later the Dutch public broadcasting system aired John Neihardt's 1972 appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show*, which had introduced *Black Elk Speaks* to a mass audience in the United States.[75] The book's newfound popularity tracks a surge of interest in Indigenous cultures and religions following what Gÿorgy

Tóth calls the "Native American 1968," a moment of highly visible Indigenous activism that built on a longer period of advocacy and diplomacy.[76] European reporting on the Red Power Movement turned American Indian Movement (AIM) activists into a symbol of protest against US capitalism, and the figure of the American Indian became a potent trope in a discourse of cultural and political resistance.[77] *Black Elk Speaks* proved a convenient artifact to connect the history of anti-Indigenous violence to the contemporary politics of AIM. The Dutch newspaper columnist Jan Blokker linked the book to the 1973 protest of AIM activists on Pine Ridge Reservation, commenting on a newspaper photo of the activists at Wounded Knee: "By God I no longer know what this makes me think about first. About Black Elk's memoirs? About … the gradual elimination of the American Indians?"[78] Refracting white Europeans' ideas about Indigenous North American history, Black Elk's story resonated as an emblem of both Indigenous erasure and cultural resistance during the Red Power era.

Just as the late 1960s brought increased visibility for Indigenous sovereignty movements, it also saw a renewed criticism of Dutch imperialism. Vincent Kuitenbrouwer explains that 1969 marked a shift in popular attitudes toward the history of Dutch colonial violence in the East Indies. The 1949 war of Indonesian independence reentered public discourse when military veterans broke their silence about war crimes committed by the Dutch army, which led to a parliamentary inquiry.[79] These events "signaled a shift in public opinion about the history of the Dutch Indies. Whereas before the war people talked of 'development' and 'harmony' between coloniser and colonised, terms such 'exploitation' and 'oppression' became the norm."[80] However, the Dutch edition of *Zwarte Eland spreekt* was no longer in print by that time, so commentators missed that the book already offered a tenuous link between Native American and Dutch-Indonesian literary critiques of colonialism. When in 1973 a Dutch newspaper reviewed a new British edition of *Black Elk Speaks*, it made no mention of Vuyk's translation ever having been published.[81] *Zwarte Eland spreekt* belonged to an earlier moment—before Red Power and before the public reckoning with Dutch colonialism—when it marked a rare, early instance of the cultural traffic between Native American and Dutch-Indonesian literature.

Charting the mobility of Native American writing, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* tells part of a wider story about the transformation of Indigenous cultures in an era of accelerated globalization. After all, Shari M. Huhndorf writes that the social and economic changes of the twentieth century profoundly transformed Indigenous politics, drawing new critical attention to "the crosscurrents and affiliations tying indigenous peoples to one another, and sometimes to other groups, across boundaries of language, culture, and nation."[82] The many layers of translation in *Zwarte Eland spreekt* reflect the type of crosscultural literary exchange that Beb Vuyk invested in throughout her career as a writer and public intellectual. Yet ultimately they also demonstrate that works of Indigenous literatures were equally prone to mistranslation within transnational networks of anticolonial writers as in any other context. If Vuyk's translation disseminated the book's critique of colonial violence to a new readership, it was also a

product of global US cultural and political influence—just as it simultaneously belonged to a literary history of decolonization and a longstanding project of overwriting Indigenous voices. In capturing these seemingly contradictory movements, *Zwarte Eland spreekt* demonstrates the complex mobilities that shape transnational Indigenous writing.

Notes

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[1] For instance, see Raymond J. DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), especially pp. 31–58 of the "Introduction"; DeMallie's footnotes in John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux: The Premier Edition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); DeMallie's endnotes in John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Hilda Neihardt and R. Todd Wise, "Black Elk and Neihardt," in *The Black Elk Reader,* ed. Clyde Holler (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 87–103; and Eric Cheyfitz, "The (Post)Colonial Construction of Indian Country," in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 79–88.

[2] DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather,* 32.

[3] George W. Linden, "John Neihardt and *Black Elk Speaks*: A Personal Reminiscence," in Holler, *Black Elk Reader*, 80.

[4] On the uptake in transnational Indigenous studies scholarship, see Robert Warrior, "Native American Scholarship and the Transnational Turn," *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2, Special Issue ed. John Frow and Katrina Schlunke: Critical Indigenous Theory (2009): 120–22. https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v15i2.2041

[5] Scott Richard Lyons, "Introduction: Globalizing the Word," in *The World, the Text, and the Indian: Global Dimensions of Native American Literature*, ed. Scott Richard Lyons (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 10, 11.

[6] Christopher Pexa, *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakhóta Oyáte* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 149.

[7] Pexa, *Translated*, 152.

[8] John G. Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt: een Sioux-medicijnman vertelt zijn leven*, transl. Beb Vuyk (Lochem, NL: De Tijdstroom, 1964). The title translates as "Black Elk speaks: a Sioux medicine man narrates his life." A new Dutch translation by Pieter Thomassen

was published in 1996 that remains in print and is much more attentive to the language, organization, and cultural context of the source text. Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt: verhalen en visioenen van de laatste ziener der Oglala-Sioux*, transl. Pieter Thomassen (Utrecht, NL: Bijleveld, 1996).

[9] Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2014), 28–9, 30.

[10] Samah Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge: Translation, Literary History and Colonial Ambivalence," in *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 2010), 324.

[11] Lawrence Venuti, "I.U. Trachetti's Politics of Translation; or, a Plagiarism of Mary Shelly," in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992), 209.

[12] Bert Scova Rhigini, *Een leven in twee vaderlanden: een biografie van Beb Vuyk* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2005), 5–7; 17; 24–25; 39–43.

[13] Brian Russell Roberts and Keitch Foulcher, eds., *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 59.

[14] Qtd. in Scova Rhigini, *Een leven*, 123.

[15] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven*, 252–52; 278.

[16] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven,* 247; 322–23; Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 59–61.

[17] Gary Y. Okihiro, *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 42.

[18] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven,* 326–30.

[19] B. R. Rijkschroeff, *Een ervaring rijker: De Indische immigranten in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika* (Delft, NL: Eburon, 1989), 20–22.

[20] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven*, 249–59.

[21] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven*, 498–501; 509–10.

[22] Qtd. in Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 60.

[23] Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 186.

[24] Chadwick Allen, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xxiv.

[25] In 1602, the government of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1579–1795) granted the Dutch East India Company (VOC) a monopoly on the Asian trade. After the VOC's dissolution in 1799, the Batavian Republic (1795–1806) placed the Dutch Indies under direct government control, which continued after the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1816. The Japanese occupation (1941–1945) during World War II and the subsequent Indonesian War of Independence interrupted Dutch colonial rule well before the Netherlands recognized Indonesian sovereignty in 1949.

[26] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven*, 44–45.

[27] Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 18.

[28] Peter Matthiessen, *De zonen van Nopoe: een kroniek uit het steentijdperk,* transl. Beb Vuyk (Meppel: Boom, 1964); Michael Carlson, Peter Matthiessen obituary, *The Guardian*, April 6, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/06/peter-matthiessen.

[29] Yozar Anwar, *Dagboek van een kami-student*, 1967, transl. Beb Vuyk (Meppel: Boom, 1968).

[30] Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 60.

[31] Scova Rhigini, *Een Leven,* 373.

[32] Peter van Lindonk to John G. Neihardt, 18 June 1963, John G, Neihardt Papers, folder 142, State Historical Society of Missouri.

[33] Bassnett, *Translation*, 32.

[34] Bassnett, *Translation*, 48.

[35] Bassnett, *Translation*, 48.

[36] Lawrence Venuti, "Translation as Cultural Politics: Régimes of Domestication in English," in *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 2010), 68.

[37] Venuti, "I.U. Trachetti's Politics of Translation," 209.

[38] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt,* dust jacket.

[39] Venuti, "I.U. Trachetti's Politics of Translation," 209.

[40] See DeMallie's footnote in John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*: *The Complete Edition*, 301n4.

[41] John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, as Told through John G. Neihardt (Flaming Rainbow)*, illus. Standing Bear, 1932 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 1.

[42] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 13.

[43] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 13.

[44] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 72; Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland Spreekt*, 67.

[45] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 22; Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland Spreekt*, 29.

[46] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland* spreekt, 63-69. DeMallie demonstrates that High Horse's story is not in the transcripts of the 1931 conversation, nor recorded anywhere else besides in the published book. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 77.

[47] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 68.

[48] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland Spreekt*, 64.

[49] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 68.

[50] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland Spreekt*, 64.

[51] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 72, 73; Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland Spreekt*, 67.

[52] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 276.

[53] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 217.

[54] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 1.

[55] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition*, 300n1; DeMallie, "Appendix 6: John G. Neihardt and Nicholas Black Elk," in *Black Elks Speaks: The Complete Edition*, 258.

[56] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 13.

[57] Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 9, 16.

[58] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 8.

[59] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 10.

[60] Because Vuyk's translation does not indent the first line of a new paragraph, it is not always possible to determine where a new paragraph stars. As a result, there may be more than two hundred and two instances where Vuyk's paragraph organization differs.

[61] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 1–2.

[62] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 13–14.

[63] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 1, 2.

[64] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt,* 13.

[65] Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks,* 21–23.

[66] R. Todd Wise, "The Great Vision of Black Elk as Literary Ritual," in Holler, *Black Elk Reader*, 246.

[67] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt*, 29–30.

[68] John G. Neihardt, *The Song of the Indian Wars*, illus. Allen True (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

[69] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, transl. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1978), 66.

[70] Lukács, *Theory*, 67.

[71] DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather,* 37.

[72] "Sprookjesachtig maar triest Indianenverhaal," *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, November 17, 1964.

[73] "Sprookjesachtig."

[74] Neihardt, *Zwarte Eland spreekt: een Sioux-medicijnman vertelt zijn leven*, transl. Beb Vuyk, 1964 (Brussels: Reinaert, 1967).

[75] Piet Koster, "Het grote visioen van Zwarte Eland," *Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*, January 9, 1975; Niek Vechtmann, "Visioen van Zwarte Eland," *Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad,* January 13, 1975; "Dick Cavett praat met Indianenkenner," *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, July 17, 1976.

[76] Gÿorgy Tóth, "The Case for a Native American 1968 and Its Transnational Legacy," *Review of International American Studies* 12 (2019): 49. https://doi.org/ 10.31261/rias.7355

[77] Gÿorgy Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 66–7; 68–9.

[78] Jan Blokker, "Over Indianen," *De Volkskrant*, March 14, 1973, 7.

[79] Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, "Songs of an Imperial Underdog: Imperialism and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1870–1960," in *European Empires and the People*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2011), 116.

[80] Kuitenbrouwer, "Songs," 117.

[81] Vera Illés, "De verwoeste droom van Zwarte Eland," *NRC Handelsblad,* April 27, 1973.

[82] Shari M. Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 12.

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