

‘Voices in my head’. Plurivocality in the autobiographical novel by Alfred Birney, *De tolk van Java* (2016)

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Abstract: Every autobiography is to a more or lesser degree a ‘relational autobiography’. In the social environment described by an autobiographer, relationships with family members often play a major part, be it as ancestors or progeny, as role models or counterexamples, or as mourned deceased or the never known. The representation of these relatives can articulate itself in many different ways and evokes questions like: How are the voices of family members rendered and mediated by the subjective conscience of the autobiographer? What does a specific way of representing a family member tell us about the autobiographical “I” himself? This article takes the Bakhtinian notion of ‘heteroglossia’ as ‘plurivocality’ as a starting point for finding answers to these questions. Taking the novel *De tolk van Java* [The Interpreter from Java] by the Dutch author Alfred Birney as a concrete case, I focus on three aspects of life narratives: rhetorical and stylistic aspects of voice, structural devices, and the use of fictional elements and strategies.

Introduction

In his autobiography *My ear at his heart: Reading my father* Hanif Kureishi (2004) writes: ‘I feel inhabited by others, composed of them. Writers, parents, older men, friends, girlfriends speak inside of me. If I took them away, what would be left?’ (p. 255) Every autobiography is to a more or lesser degree a ‘relational autobiography’, as Anne Rügemeier (2014) stated in her study on what she called a new genre in English literature. No life can be lived in splendid isolation, be it for the one reason that even the most hardened recluse once had a parent. The interconnection of the autobiographical ‘I’ with her/his family and the social, historical, or cultural context articulates itself in many different ways. To start with, there is the relational constitution of human identity that is being constructed in constant interaction with the others (Shapiro, 2010), a mechanism that allows the individual to negotiate relationships

and conflicts and to constitute a ‘self’. Furthermore, the act of remembering is relational in itself: ‘Memory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past by a subject, but of recollection for another subject.’ (W.J.T. Mitchell quoted in Smith/Watson, 2010, p. 26) Moreover, self-narratives frequently establish intertextual relations to narratives of others, not seldom ‘related writers’, turning the autobiography into a ‘hypertext’ (Rüggemeier, 2014, p. 75). The focus on these interrelations of the autobiographer changes her/his status because she/he then no longer is just a writer, but also a recipient, a listener and a reader of texts and stories written and told by others.

It is because of this dialogicity, intrinsic to autobiographical writing, that Paul Eakin (1999) spoke about ‘the myth of autonomy of the autobiography’ and pleaded for stretching the definition of the genre to ‘reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed’ (p. 43). Bakhtin’s notion of dialogicity or plurivocality has already attracted attention of life writing scholars. The volume ‘*Broken Dialogues*,’ or *Finding Bakhtin in Auto/Biography Studies* illustrates how Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism inspire further reconceptualizations of life writing: ‘As he ruptures the illusion of autonomy and the single voice, Bakhtin’s understanding that one is a self only vis-à-vis another epitomizes both the constitution of the autobiographical subject and the social life of autobiography’ (Karpinski 2015, p. 203). If we take it seriously that ‘the most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship towards another consciousness...’ as Michael Bakhtin (1984, p. 287) has formulated, then this relational identity must have consequences both for the content and the form of the narrative. We can indeed expect that such stories and histories will be represented differently from the ‘self-narrative’. While family stories may contain (mystified) family sagas, distorted or deficient life accounts, or remain completely unsaid and persist as family secrets with family members serving as a sounding board for the narrating ‘I’, they also are the inevitable other, with whom the autobiographer is bound up in a lifelong relationship. Apart from such specifics in content and functioning, I am particularly interested in highlighting the features in the communicative and rhetorical mode of relational autobiographies, on the level of discourse, style and structure.

Structure, Voice, and Fictionality

(1) Structure

A possible figuration of relationality can be found in the structural design of an autobiographical narrative. Narrative structure tells us ‘[...] something fundamental about the relational structure of the autobiographer’s identity, about its roots and involvement in another’s life

and story' (Eakin, 1999, p. 60). Titles like *Autobiography of my father* or *Autobiography of my brother*¹ illustrate how a personal life story gets intermingled with that of a close family member, that can function as a complementary or contrastive portrait. This can go so far as a story told by an autodiegetical I-narrator being merely a frame for an inner biography/ies of his relative. In such cases the other(s) almost substitute the autobiographical I. The complex structure of a life representation can also express revisions and amendments by the narrator as the result of a confrontation of his own recollection with that of family members.

(2) *Voice*

'Voice' is a much commented on concept in narratology (from Gerard Genette, Michael Bakhtin to Susan Lanser, Monika Fludernik and James Phelan). Bakhtin referred to the novel as a text 'built on heteroglossia, the mixing of various sociolects and the ideological values associated with each' (Phelan, 2014, p. 50). As to autobiographical writing, it seems not so much this social dialogue surrounding every utterance that is of primordial importance, but a kind of 'multi-voiced discourse' that should not merely be seen as a social heteroglossia, but also a presence of different norms, feelings, worldviews, which are – as Bakhtin has demonstrated – not always explicitly expressed (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 278).

We could posit forms of plurivocality or dialogism on a scala from 'explicit or overt plurivocality' on the one side to 'implicit, suggestive' procedures to represent other voices on the other, thus ranging from voices rendered in dialogue or through indirect speech, over free indirect speech, to subtle modes of 'blending voices'. A character can f.i. recall what has been said to him and use an idiosyncratic expression in one of his recollections, that punctually evokes the speaker of that expression. Small lexical or stylistic singularities may in a quite specific narrative context be associated by the reader with a specific character in the story. What is important here is that – to paraphrase Bakhtin (1981) – thanks to the ability of language, the narrator can sound as if he is both inside and outside of the person, or how he is not only able to talk about someone, but at the same time is able to talk to someone and with someone else's voice. To explore these levels in voices it requires attention for subtle stylistic and lexical choices of verbal modality and temporality, for deictic adverbials, for formal details like italics, capitals or quotation marks, for discursive and syntactical particularities, and for small lexical shifts (e.g. dialectical expressions, the use of foreign language words, amplifying words, subjective or epistemic lexemes, etc. (see Fludernik 2003, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4).

A second important insight concerning voice is provided by James Phelan (2014, 2017) who in his search for a rhetorical narratology, pleads for complicating the usual communication scheme of 'author – narrator –

addressee – reader’ (S. Chatman) by introducing the characters themselves as ‘distinct agents of narration’ (Phelan 2017, p. 18). Phelan demands particular attention for what he calls the *multiple communication channels*, that pass off via paratexts, such as titles, blurbs, etc., but also for communication via structural devices (e.g. juxtaposition of scenes) and for interactions between characters, and unspoken communication not only between character and reader (or implied reader) but also between the characters themselves. Finally all these ways of communication converge into ‘a ‘synergy’ between these channels. (Phelan, 2017, pp. 19-21). Therefore, reading ability in the eyes of Phelan (the skill of a ‘rhetorical reader’) depends on ‘our attending to a combination of stylistic and contextual features of an utterance such as occasion, subject matter, character of the speaker, prior relationship of speaker, and audience.’ (Phelan, 2014, p. 50)

(3) Fictionality

Recent studies on autobiographical writing have paid a lot of attention to fictionality, mainly in research on autofiction or with regard to the ‘constructed’ nature of an autobiographical story. All the more this constructedness applies when an autobiographer speaks of the experiences and perceptions of others. Then the question becomes: how can an autobiographer convey a sense of authenticity to the reader when he is not speaking of himself? His rendering of family stories and voices is subjective, could be distorted, since he can merely inform the reader indirectly about the others. How can a relational autobiography deal with the possible unreliability of family members – or even of the I-narrator himself? (Rüggemeier, 2004, p. 16) We could assume that this reconstruction of an already ‘communicated’ reality displays some affinity with fictional telling, and that we might find ‘fictional signposts’ (in the sense of D. Cohn, 1999), textual markers that generally induce the reader to read the text (or part of the text) as non-referential, as ‘fiction’.

Alfred Birney and the Interpreter from Java

The autobiographical novel, *De tolk van Java*, ([*The interpreter from Java*] Engl. translation by D. Doherty announced for 2020), written by the Dutch author Alfred Birney (°1951) is a good example of an plurivocal autobiography. The subtitle already gives an indication of this: ‘In which the recollections of a little chamber elephant, the memoirs of a war interpreter hammered on a typewriter, interrupted by stories, letters and the grumbling of the eldest son, commented upon by his brother.’¹ Birney’s oeuvre largely consists of autobiographical fiction and non-fiction, in which the history of his family, closely linked to the Dutch colonial history, plays a central role. For his most recent book *De tolk van Java* he has been awarded several prizes in the Netherlands.

According to the jury of the Libris Prize Birney has ‘cast a new light upon a poisonous period of Dutch history’. The Dutch Indies were colonized by the Dutch since the 17th century, and remained so until the Second World War. In 1942, the main part of what now is Indonesia with the then capital Batavia fell to the Japanese, who occupied the region until 1945. They used the economic sources for war purposes and imprisoned Dutch people in internment camps. When the war was over and Japan had surrendered, the Indonesian national struggle for independence burst out. The Dutch Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (so-called KNIL) was the military force that for four years tried to maintain power over this colony, until on the 17th August 1949 the independence of the Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed.

Birney’s novel is one of the first literary works that treats this painful period in Dutch history and is, according to Paul Doolan (2017), ‘a relentlessly violent postmemory novel’, ‘a searing indictment of not only Dutch colonial brutality, but also the willingness of a society to forget or unremember the uncomfortable parts of the nation’s past. Birney’s work forms a corrective to many historical myths regarding the decolonization of the Dutch East Indies.’ And indeed it was not until recently that historical research published in 2016 negated the myth that only ‘incidental excesses’ by the Dutch army had taken place at the time and furnished proof of structural violence by Dutch political and military leaders.²

Birney not only tells the story of the excessive violence during the Indonesian National Revolution, but he does so from the perspective of those Dutch people that ‘were slightly darker skinned’, the Indo’s, who, like Birney’s father himself, were of mixed Asian-European heritage. Many Dutch authors have written about the colonial past before the war, about the occupation by Japan and the imprisonment of Dutch citizens in Japanese camps during the Second World War, but those stories were mainly told from the point of view of the white Dutch. As Birney put it in an interview with the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, there exists a type of ‘apartheid’ in the Dutch literary world, that privileges the experiences of the white Dutch. His book, which includes the terror and violence suffered by the *Indos* outside the camps, can be considered ‘a magnificent corrective to this blindness.’ (Doolan, 2017)

Arto Nolan is the interpreter from Java figuring in the book title. He was the illegitimate son of an *Indo* (Eurasian) lawyer and his Chinese housekeeper. He later changed his family name into the speaking name ‘Noland’. During the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949), Arto, just like Birney’s own father, chose to fight on the side of the Dutch against the Indonesian republican nationalists. Arto had become a translator or ‘interpreter’ for the Dutch Royal Marines, a euphemism, because in reality the father interrogated prisoners of the Dutch and thereby was allowed to abuse and torture them, which he abundantly did.

The author's intention was double. Alan, Birney's alter ego in the novel, is driven by the urge to understand his father, his past and thus to understand himself. In a conversation with his mother, Alan represents the typical voice of a second generation, the 'postmemory generation' in the words of Marianne Hirsch (2008): 'I'm afraid that I will look deeper into that rotten war of yours than you do yourselves. That is the destiny of someone from the post-war generation who thinks that his future is determined by the past of his ancestors.'³

His personal quest and attempt to comprehend his individual family history can not be seen apart from the crucial chapter of Dutch history sketched above. It goes hand in hand with a second myth on the period of decolonization, namely that of the silent *Indo* father, who 'has been scarred by his violent experiences during decolonization and [who] passes on to his Dutch-born children the burden of his awful silence.' (Doolan, 2017). Birney's father, however, didn't keep silent about his work at all. Instead of reading his five children children's stories in the evening he bombarded them with gory war stories. During daytime he was constantly pounding on his Remington; his wife and children thought he was preparing for an engineer study. The memoirs that apparently he was writing and that the son later discovered provide the basis for this novel. The son explains that apart from being one of those curious natures, who are so naive as to think they can scrutinize a completely mad fascist, he hopes that 'a paper monument' for his father can give that lying Dutch history a face.⁴

Structure, voices and fictionality in *De Tolk van Java* (1) *Structure*

The text is structured in five large chapters: I. II. and V. are entitled 'spekkoek', a kind of Indonesian layer cake. This 'spekuk' or 'lapis legit' in Indonesian refers to the different types of texts the book consists of. The main part is the memoir supposed to have been written by the father. In an interview Birney said that when he sought for the manuscript, the one said it was embezzled, the other that it had been burnt, but that at his insistence his father wrote it once again. (Vlaar, 2017) This does not sound completely convincing, contrary to the contention that he left out almost half of the manuscript, especially the boasting about girlfriends and trips on a Harley Davidson. The memoir is surrounded by and interspersed with comments and snatches from conversations between the son and the mother, and from email exchanges and chats between Alan and his twin brother Phil, with interviews, official documents, as well as more straightforward autobiographical narration. A variety of voices can be heard in the novel.

Whereas a classical autobiography normally opens with the first years of someone's life (or even with information on the grandparents and parents) and ends more or less with the moment of writing (sometimes close to the

end of life), no such teleological arrangement can be found here. Instead of starting with the beginning of life, the story of this (and other) relational autobiographies opens with an important information about the relationship between the narrator and a related other, here the father, thus illustrating at once the ‘entwined identities of parent and child’ (Porter, 2011, p. 8). Roger Porter (2011) speaks of an autobiography as a ‘Bureau of Missing Persons’ and compares relational autobiographies to detectives, since they often start in medias res, with some family secret, and present not so much a look back as a look ahead. The feverish expression of feelings of estrangement at the beginning of *De tolk van Java* is the starting point for Alan’s quest for understanding, as the author also indicated in the interview already mentioned: ‘I was looking in that chaotic manuscript for the development of my father and for a self-examination.’ (Vlaar, 2017)

The first sentence, more than one page long, evokes the father’s life in the Dutch East Indies in a furious eruption of violent recollections – everything from the atrocities of the Japanese occupation, and the war of independence that followed, to the torture that the father underwent himself and his violent and unpredictable treatment of his children in his new homeland, The Netherlands. (Doolan, 2017) So the reader immediately knows that this will be the stake of the whole enterprise, a search for explanation, for understanding if it was the war that made his father into a monster, ill-treating his wife and five children so badly that they were put up in a boarding school. In contrast to this it strikes how the inner story of the novel, told by father Arto himself, does start like a classical autobiography, beginning with the story of his parents and his own birth and even with an image of his birth certificate, stating that he is an illegitimate child. (Birney, 2016, pp. 86-87)

Like the story doesn’t start with a birth but with the evocation of the cruel father, no more does it end with the death of a character. After a chapter about the conversations that Nolan and his brother held about the memoir, it ends with Nolan’s words: ‘For a long time I’ve fought like a fool against his madness. Now I am a worn-out bridge bending over the past without seeing its own reflection in the water. I won’t fight anymore; I quit.’

This layered structure and the fragmented narrative not only express how Alan’s identity quest is intertwined with the search for understanding his father, they also reveal the various sources for telling this life story: the typescript with his father’s recollections – formally marked by italicized subtitles –, the official documents, conversations with his mother, mailchats with his brother Phil, the stories he heard from family members during his childhood, and of course his own memory.

(2) *Voice*

Already the structural fragmentation has made clear that this is not a monologist text, but the multiplicity of voices is also conveyed stylistically.

Every figure that appears is characterized by his or her specific manner of speaking, and also on the level of the communication between the characters, we see stylistic diversification.

When Alan recalls memories of his childhood, his parents and siblings, his fears and his love for playing the guitar, we generally hear his voice as in a classical autobiographical I-narrative, sometimes in the historical present. At certain points, however, this voice shifts into a different narrative position. The chapter 'Beerput' [Cesspool] starts with Alan telling a few anecdotes about 'my uncle' and 'my father' (20) and 'the German name he [his father, LM] got from his mother: Arend (Eagle) [though he was mostly called Arto]'⁵ Once this name 'Arto' has been introduced, the narrative voice goes on telling about this figure as if he were a character in a story told by an extradiegetical narrator. The following passage may illustrate this. One of Arto's friends has promised to bring him to a Chinese restaurant where they served the best pork: 'And yes, Arto had to admit that he hadn't exaggerated. Indeed, he had never eaten such delicious pork in his whole life.'⁶ This narrative mode, which suggests the narrator's access to the feelings and thoughts of the character, is considered a typical characteristic of fictional discourse (see Cohn, 1990, and (3)).

Father Arto directly comes to word in the memoir parts written in a rather unaffected style. They cover large parts of the book, one part taking up almost 200 pages (Ch. IV), and several smaller fragments in chapters I, III and V. The fourth chapter, entitled 'The Interpreter of Soerabaja' thus makes up a sort of inner narrative, but is not marked by italics nor by quotation marks, which could have produced the effect of an authentic 'document' within the novel. Instead of this, the author has opted for an artistic (re)construction. In an interview Birney said that he rewrote that text up till ten times 'until he felt it had become his and he had almost identified with his father' (Vlaar, 2017). This is one of the possible varied forms for dialogized transmission of another's word, about which Bakhtin wrote: 'all the forms for dialogizing the transmission of another's speech are directly subordinated to the task of artistically representing the speaker and his discourse as the image of a language, in which case the others' words must undergo special artistic reformulation.' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 255)

Arto's story, reporting on his own abominable youth of disownment and abuse, boasting on the hundreds of murders he has committed and on the valiant acts of sabotage, is interspersed with sarcastic comments and questions by the son. Sometimes he questions the reliability of his father's account of mammoth cruelties or he gives vent to his indignation – 'Why did you never stop counting your victims?'⁷ Sometimes he discovers resemblances between his father's youth and the violence and chilliness of his own childhood and feels a sparkle of understanding and empathy, or

he comments from a later moment of insight, f.i. when he reads how his father was proud on his collection of war records and illustrated books on the Indonesian war, saying: 'Later, much later, all those history books proved not to be any good.'⁸ It is significant how these interruptions gradually decrease and the story of the father seems to take over.

The complex communication between the son and the father and the entanglement of their discourses is expressed in various ways. The examples just quoted basically set up a dialogical structure, a well-known procedure in autobiographies: the dialogue with a *mute dialogue partner*, like in: 'Hey Dad, life is still like that in Holland [...] Smart of you to spend your last years in Spain'.⁹ Although no real dialogue takes place, the discourses of the two individual characters – the silent one of the father delayed – are present.

Individual consciousness processes of the autobiographical narrator often enter into dialogue with internalized voices of others. This is the case when literal quotes pop up in the autobiographer's memory: 'For five years I hadn't been living in your house, was taken away by Child Welfare when I was thirteen, and – to say it in your words – "deported to a boarding school"'.¹⁰ In this passage at the beginning of the novel Alan recalls an incident that occurred when he was eighteen. The children had been put in a boardinghouse for years, and the father had always been trying to get them back. One night Alan decided to escape from school and go to the place where he – according to his father – belonged. At the moment of his arrival his father opened the door with the words: 'Why have you forsaken me?'.¹¹ Alan's report on this incident contains thoughts and feelings that combine this particular moment with a later moment in his life, which is typical of the reflective nature of his autobiographical discourse. The following reactions by Alan may illustrate this: (1) 'The worst was that I really did believe that it was me who had left you',¹² is a reflection on the feeling of guilt that had weighed on him as a child. (2) 'Why did you keep my picture in your bible? [...] You wouldn't try to fool me into believing that you were praying for me, would you?'¹³ is a question that arises at the moment that he recalls this evening. (3) 'Later I've even thought that you pierced my picture with needles'¹⁴ is a thought at an unidentified later moment in his life.

So the voice of the father – even when imagined – regularly turns up in the recollections of the I-narrator, sometimes marked by quotation marks, like in the first example, sometimes hardly noticeable, as in the following example. After a family day on the beach, so Alan recalls, all saddlebags and the children themselves had to be rinsed off the sand: 'A garden hose is pushed into the sand, and the water flows lustily, like previously, in the Dutch East Indies, *there* you had waterfalls, here you have nothing of that, life is dull and boring in Holland.'¹⁵ The accent on '*there*' [my italics] –

‘däär’ in the original – can be read as an evocation of the father’s voice, quoted directly in this recollection.

Another way of subtly blending the perspectives, can be found in a comment by Alan, who seems to reformulate a statement written down by the father: ‘Your big dream [to be a soldier in the service of the Queen of The Netherlands] was a well-paid job for them, and for the madmen amongst them an adventure.’¹⁶ The information about what was the father’s dream most probably comes from the memoir, while the telling of it is done by the I-narrator.

We can also look at the way in which the voice of the autobiographical I adapts to his dialogue partner or his intended addressee. Alan’s recollections from the time that he and his twin brother were at the boarding school are recounted in a rather neutral and factual way. A quite different, sarcastic tone is heard when he replies to his father, and also in the communication with his mother Alan sounds differently. His mother, who was an overweight girl from a small town Helmond, called ‘the little chamber elephant from Helmond’, shows little interest in the memoirs of her ex-husband. She represents the short-sightedness of the Dutch people who avoid any reflection on the colonial past. The son tries to provoke her, he criticizes her ‘Belanda’-attitude – she apologized for her very own dark-skinned children – and in the pungent interaction between these two characters, flashes of understanding for his father emerge. It is as if the irritation on this hypocritical attitude brings him nearer to his father: ‘Dad had a war in his youth just like you. You had the German war, he had the Japanese occupation.’¹⁷

(3) Fictionality

A last point that has already been addressed by some of the previous examples – but that deserves further and deeper investigation than can be done here – concerns the fictional dimension of this book (Missinne, 2017). If the voices of family members are rendered and mediated by the subjective conscience of the autobiographer, it wouldn’t wonder that fictional modes for rendering those stories of the others are used.

A striking example of fictionality in this autobiographical account, that touches upon the life story of narrator himself, is a recollection of his own birth: ‘In the beginning all was unformed, dark and full of shadows. Sometimes a strange music was heard full of echoes and humming dissonant sounds.’¹⁸ Although Alan later admits that he can’t remember that, just image it (Birney, 2016, p. 53), he uses this recollection for self-explanation in an attempt to go as far back as possible to understand how he has become what he is now. The refiguration of a personal truth here necessitates the use of fictionality.

But fictional devices are also found in the representation modes. Relational autobiographies may render observations, inner thoughts and

feelings of family members and other characters in the same way as fiction does. D. Cohn (1999) considered these ‘inside views’ to be a main characteristic of fiction, because they show the subjectivity of a third person, while in reality this is only possible for a first person. So when Alan does not use ‘inferential statements’ – such as ‘Arto must have felt’ or ‘must have known’ – but instead writes ‘Arto felt’ and ‘Arto knew’, we can say that he writes in a ‘fictional’ way. The same holds for the descriptions of detailed scenes with long quoted dialogues in the memoir of Arto, where the reader can presume the hand of the son, making the account more lively for the reader. And although one might agree with Phelan (2017) about the existence of a ‘convention in nonfictional narrative that authorizes memoirists to quote long past conversations verbatim’ (p. 44), one may no less agree with Ruggemeier (2014), that relational autobiographies give a subjective account of facts and events, reconstruct reality and thereby not seldom resemble fictional texts (p. 77).

Conclusion

The investigation of the way in which structure, voices and fictional devices are used in relational autobiographies can be helpful in order to gain insight in the complexity and the relational character of autobiographical writing. Attention for the multilayered communicative structures, for the characters functioning as ‘agents of narration’, and for the implicit dialogues and interactions between the characters, as Phelan (2017) has suggested for fiction, is also advantageous for the research on autobiographical texts. At the same time this leads us to the mediality of the texts. According to Bakhtin it is thanks to the ability of language, that the narrator can sound as if he is both inside and outside of the person, and can talk about someone and at the same time talk with someone else’s voice. With regard to *De tolk van Java* a Dutch reviewer formulated it like this: ‘The son as an interpreter translates reality with empathy and imagination. Not the father, but the son is the main character. [...] That is the literary revenge of the writer.’¹⁹

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Notes

- 1 'Waarin de herinneringen van een kamerolifantje, de memoires van een oorlogstolk gehamerd op een schrijfmachine, onderbroken met verhalen, brieven en gemopper van de oudste zoon, becommentarieerd door zijn broer.'
- 2 Limpach, R. (2016). *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor & Roofstaat*. Amsterdam: Boom; Vanvugt, E. (2016). *Roofstaat. Wat iedere Nederlander moet weten*. Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar.
- 3 All translations from *De tolk van Java* are mine. 'Zeg, Ma, ik ben bang dat ik me meer verdiep in die kloteoorlog van jullie dan jullie dat zelf doen. Dat is het lot van iemand van de naoorlogse generatie die denkt dat zijn toekomst is bepaald door het verleden van zijn voorouders.' (Birney, 2016, p. 72)
- 4 'En helaas ben ik een van die nieuwsgierige naturen die zo naïef zijn te denken een volslagen gekke fascist te kunnen doorgronden. Misschien verdien je het ook wel, al is het maar dat jouw papieren standbeeld die leugenachtige Nederlandse geschiedenis een smoel kan geven.' (Birney, 2016, p. 18)
- 5 'Mijn vader had van zijn moeder de Germaanse naam Arend gekregen, maar werd meestal Arto genoemd...' (Birney, 2016, p. 21).
- 6 'En ja, Arto moest bekennen dat hij niet had overdreven. Zulk lekker varkensvlees had hij inderdaad zijn leven lang nog niet gegeten.' (Birney, 2016, p. 23)
- 7 'Waarom hield je nou nooit eens op met je slachtoffers te tellen?' (Birney, 2016, p. 62)
- 8 'Later, veel later, bleken die geschiedenisboeken geen van alle te deugen.' (Birney 2016, p. 19).
- 9 'Zeg, Pa, het leven is nog altijd zo in Holland [...] Wijs van je om je laatste jaren in Spanje te slijten.' Birney, 2016, p. 17).
- 10 "Nou ja, ik had vijf jaar lang niet bij je in huis gewoond, was op mijn dertiende door de Kinderbescherming bij jou weggehaald en, om met jou te spreken, naar een "internaat gedeporteerd". (Birney, 2016, p. 15)
- 11 'Waarom heb jij mij verlaten?' (Birney, 2016, p. 15; original italics)

- 12 'Het ergste was nog dat ik werkelijk geloofde dat ik je had verlaten.' (Birney, 2016, p. 16)
- 13 'Wat deed die foto van mij eigenlijk tussen die bijbelse bladzijden ? [...] Je wou me toch niet wijsmaken dat je voor me bad, hé?' (Birney, 2016, p. 16)
- 14 'Later heb ik nog gedacht dat je mijn foto met naalden doorstak.' (Birney, 2016, p. 16)
- 15 'Een tuinslang wordt in het zand geduwd en het water stroomt lustig, zoals vroeger in Indië, dáár had je watervallen, hier heb je niks van dat, het leven is eentonig en saai in Holland.' (Birney, 2016, p. 162)
- 16 'Jouw grote droom was voor hen een aardig betaalde klus, en voor de gekken onder hen een avontuur.' (Birney, 2016, p. 14)
- 17 'Pa had net als jij een oorlog tijdens zijn jeugd. Jij had de Duitse, hij had de Japanse bezetting.' (Birney, 2016, p. 84)
- 18 'In het begin was alles ongevormd, duister en vol schaduwen. Soms klonk er vreemde muziek vol echo's en zoemende dissonanten.' (Birney, 2016, p. 53)
- 19 'De zoon vertaalt als tolk de werkelijkheid met inlevensvermogen en verbeelding. Niet de vader, maar de zoon is de hoofdpersoon. [...] Dat is de literaire wraak van de schrijver.' (Keuning, 2017).