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## **Beyond postmodernism: oscillation, reparation and affect in contemporary Dutch novels**

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## 2. Chapter 2 Oscillation foregrounded: textual movement between innovation and continuity in *Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis*

“In relatie met de ander besta je.”<sup>115</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

A choice to analyse one novel from an oeuvre of such a fruitful and respected author as Nelleke Noordervliet, is a difficult choice to defend. How does one say anything meaningful about an author who has been active as a novelist, playwright, essayist and columnist for thirty-five years when one analyses only one novel without having recourse to generalities or without overlooking the variety and diversity of genres, styles and themes that the author has incorporated? Noordervliet debuted in 1987 with the novel *Tine of De dalen waar het leven woont* (Tine, Or The Valleys Where Life Lives<sup>116</sup>) and between that moment and 2022, when she wrote her last novel to date, *Wij kunnen dit* (We Can Do This), she wrote ten other novels. She initially came to be known and is mentioned in academic publications on Dutch literary history as an author of historical fiction. Both *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen* (Evermore Birds Nesting Again) and *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Dutch Literature, A History) mention her work exclusively in this context. Jaap Goedegebuure writes in the latter publication: “A small revival occurred in the genre of historical fiction at the beginning of the nineties.”<sup>117</sup> He places Noordervliet’s early work (including the 1993 novel *De naam van de vader* (The Name of the Father) among a group of historical fiction writers alongside with P. F. Thomése, Thomas Roosenboom and others. Hugo Brems places Noordervliet in the same context in the former handbook of literary history but mentions her also in the context of “new gals”,<sup>118</sup> a conspicuous group of female authors (such as Kristien Hemmerechts, Charlotte Mutsaers and Tessa de Loo) who debuted in the eighties.

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<sup>115</sup> “It is in relation with the other that you exist.” Lex Bohlmeijer, “Zingeving in de zorg. Susanne Kruijs in gesprek met Lex Bohlmeijer”, published 29 June 2019, in *Goede gesprekken*, podcast, 22:30, accessed 31 October, 2022, <https://decorrespondent.nl/9661/patienten-herstellen-beter-als-iemand-naar-ze-luistert-hoe-krijgt-dat-een-plek-in-de-zorg/681030477072-b94a1f57>.

<sup>116</sup> None of Noordervliet’s novels are translated into English, according to the information available on the website of Nederlandse letterenfonds (Dutch Foundation for Literature). I use the English translations of the titles that are available on this website.

<sup>117</sup> “Aan het begin van de jaren negentig beleefde de historische fictie in Nederland een kleine renaissance.” Jaap Goedegebuure, In: Maria Schenkenveld-van der Dussen and Ton Anbeek (red.), *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Groningen: Nijhoff, 1993), 775.

<sup>118</sup> “Nieuwe meiden.” Hugo Brems, *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen: geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945-2005*, (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2006), 419.

Most of the academic attention that has been paid to Noordervliet's oeuvre, has been paid to the historical novels,<sup>119</sup> which she has kept on producing on and off throughout her career; the last one was *Vrij Man* (Free Man) from 2012. She has however also written novels that could be placed in the genre of the novel of ideas, such as *Snijpunt*, (Intersection) and *Aan het eind van de dag* (At the End of the Day). This is the genre into which Odile Heynders places both Noordervliet's more recently published novels. Among these she also explicitly names *Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis* in *Women's Writing in the Low Countries*: "a novel as an exercise in thinking".<sup>120</sup> Heynders sees "the explicit discussion of and philosophizing about humanism"<sup>121</sup> as the most important motif of *Snijpunt*. She discusses *Zonder noorden* as a work that raises "challenging moral questions, uses symbols and [...] allegorical figures"<sup>122</sup> which is a characteristic that, along with the "restrained and always lucid"<sup>123</sup> style "fits in with the novel as idea, as a philosophical experiment and an exhortation to reflect on one's own responsibility."<sup>124</sup> All of this sounds rather cerebral. Generally speaking, the academic critique has therefore mostly paid attention to Noordervliet's historical fiction and when it widened its scope in the choice of discussed novels, it still focused on the more rational, philosophical and idea-based aspects of the novels. My analysis will therefore focus on Noordervliet's work from an angle that has not yet been used. This will test out the presence of affective questions in a work outside of the so far tested corpus, consisting of novels of authors from the millennial generation or those who are slightly older.<sup>125</sup>

The reception of *Zonder noorden* in the newspapers has been varied and divided in its opinion about the quality of the novel. There are reviewers who do not shy from singing the novel's praise through a series of positive attributes: "intriguing and delicate novel",<sup>126</sup> "well-written, entertaining and gripping book".<sup>127</sup> There are however just as many reviewers who were not

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<sup>119</sup> *Lexicon van literaire werken* (Lexicon of Literary Works), contains two entries about Noordervliet's first and third novel (*Tine* and *Het oog van de engel*). Nora van Laar places the latter novel in the same context as Brems and Goedegebuure and defines the novel as having some characteristics of "a philosophical treatise." "Een filosofische verhandeling" (*Lexicon van literaire werken*, 11).

<sup>120</sup> Heynders, *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, 181.

<sup>121</sup> Heynders, *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, 180.

<sup>122</sup> Heynders, *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, 181

<sup>123</sup> Heynders, *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, 181

<sup>124</sup> Heynders, *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, 181.

<sup>125</sup> See Demeyer and Vitse, *Affectieve crisis*, 22-27.

<sup>126</sup> "Intrigerende en verrijpende roman." Fleur Speet, "De magneet van het leven", *Financieel Dagblad*, published 21 November 2009, accessed 23 April, 2022.

<sup>127</sup> "Goedgeschreven, boeiende en aangrijpende boek." Els Brussé-Dekker, "Behoeftte aan de pijn van het verlies," *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, published 8 April 2010, accessed 13 April 2022.

happy about *Zonder noorden*: “such a predictable and clichéd story,”<sup>128</sup> “the new Noordervliet could have been better”,<sup>129</sup> “thrilling up to two-thirds”<sup>130</sup> and “the rock bottom of Nelleke Noordervliet’s oeuvre”.<sup>131</sup> I have consulted ten reviews of the novel and out of that number, four were enthusiastic and admiring and four were critical. The diversity of opinions in newspaper-published criticism can be explained by a reference to oscillation between the three different dominants – epistemological, ontological and affective – that characterizes the novel. Each of these dominants focuses on different concerns. For some professional readers this diversity of themes apparently results in a disjointed novel that “is not in all respects evenly well-developed”<sup>132</sup> and whose affectively satisfying ending is “is almost too good.”<sup>133</sup> The relationally and affectively rewarding ending therefore makes a kitschy and too artificial impression on some reviewers, especially seeing that the ending follows on the heels of deeply felt and disorienting feelings of doubt, anger and trauma in the protagonist. Jann Ruyter comments on this aspect of the novel by observing “in that case, there is just too much that is being taken out of the reader’s hands.”<sup>134</sup> because, as Pieter Steinz observes “almost all the loose ends are neatly tied up at the end.”<sup>135</sup> This disunity of the novel combined with the subsequent impression of a too artificial and strongly governed happy-ending can also be explained by means of my methodology combining oscillation with foregrounding of various questions characteristic of various dominants. I will read *Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis*, through the concept of oscillation between the epistemological and ontological foregrounded questions which pose, generally speaking, rational issues and affective questions, which focus on affective and/or relational issues.

A couple of reviewers noticed a characteristic of *Zonder noorden* that invites and requires a reading by means of the methodology of oscillation and foregrounding of several questions. The novel contains two interwoven and interconnected plotlines. The first plotline bears resemblance to a detective story. The self-appointed detective is the protagonist, Robert

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<sup>128</sup> “Zo’n voorspelbaar en clichématig verhaal”. Danielle Serdijn, “Sleutelen aan ’t innerlijk kompas,” *de Volkskrant*, published 20 November 2009, accessed 13 April 2022.

<sup>129</sup> “Nieuwe Noordervliet had beter gekund.” Erik De Vries, “Niemand. Iedereen. Alleman,” *Vrij Nederland*, published 14 November 2009, accessed 14 April 2022.

<sup>130</sup> “Spannend tot tweederde.” Pieter Steinz, “Ik had behoefte aan de wond,” *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 November 2009, accessed 13 April 2022.

<sup>131</sup> “Dieptepunt in het oeuvre van Nelleke Noordervliet.” Coen Peppelenbos, “Geen veellezer,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, published 30 October 2009, accessed 14 April 2022.

<sup>132</sup> “Heeft niet aan alle kanten sterke stekels.” Steinz, “Ik had behoefte aan de wond”.

<sup>133</sup> “Bijna te mooi.” Jann Ruyter, “Welke vrouw hoort bij deze huisraad?”, *Trouw*, published 7 November 2009, accessed 12 April, 2022.

<sup>134</sup> “Dan word je als lezer net wat te veel uit handen genomen.” Ruyter, “Welke vrouw hoort bij deze huisraad?”

<sup>135</sup> “Bijna alle losse eindjes worden aan het eind afgehecht.” Steinz, “Ik had behoefte aan de wond”.

Andersen who moves from the Netherlands to a small village called Horn on the west coast of Canada. He rents a house of a woman who has been missing for two years. Robert takes it on himself to investigate the circumstances around the disappearance of Beverly Walker. Behind this first, conspicuous, detective-like plotline, there is another one that slowly but surely reveals that Robert has a trauma in his past that he has not fully processed. His wife Suzanne has been murdered by a burglar, Johnny H.. Robert's remorse, loneliness, fear, rage and vengefulness play an important role in this second plotline; it is in short dominated by feelings that are connected to Robert's attempts to process his trauma and become reconciled with it. He leaves for Horn because he cannot stand the idea that he would encounter Suzanne's murderer, who is going to be able to leave the prison earlier, somewhere in the small country that is the Netherlands. So he flees from Johnny to the other side of the world. He tries to build a new life for himself here, to become a part of the local community and to start a new relationship. Steinz (as well as Ruyters) notices these two plotlines in the following aside: "Robert's research and the self-inquiry that takes place in parallel with it."<sup>136</sup>

The places where these two storylines intersect and influence each other are numerous, so that the reader gradually realizes that Robert's investigation into the cold case is a substitute for the real activity that he is not consciously engaged with and aware of but that is happening incidentally: dealing with his rather explosive pain and finding a way in which he can meaningfully spend the rest of his life without his wife Suzanne. The detective plotline can be seen as foregrounding *epistemological* questions. McHale gives an example of epistemological questions: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?"<sup>137</sup> Accordingly, Robert interviews his neighbours in Horn, talks to the local journalist and the police officer with whom he shares his suspicions and insinuations. All these investigative efforts revolve around the questions of knowing and not knowing, guessing, interpreting and information that is either being revealed or concealed, thus foregrounding epistemological uncertainty around the life, disappearance and supposed death of Beverly Walker. Yet the plot of the detective story (according to McHale "the epistemological genre par excellence")<sup>138</sup> is connected and interwoven with an equally central *ontological* uncertainty foregrounded by the existence or non-existence of Beverly. Robert's investigation and the

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<sup>136</sup> "De naspeuringen van Robert, en het zelfonderzoek dat daarmee parallel loopt." Steinz, "Ik had behoefte aan de wond".

<sup>137</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 9.

<sup>138</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 9.

epistemological questions that he poses: “Oh, what was, after all, the story of Beverly’s life and loves?”<sup>139</sup> can be seen as a reaction to an ontological uncertainty.

The doubtful (non)existence of Beverly is raising questions such as: is Beverly still alive? Does she still exist somewhere in this world? These questions are of the ontological kind because Beverly’s ontological status is uncertain. McHale’s example of ontological questions is more cerebral and literary, but it principally still accords with the questions that Beverly’s disappearance foregrounds: “What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?”<sup>140</sup> According to the Canadian law, Beverly Walker cannot be declared dead until the seventh year since she has gone missing. Robert’s investigation draws attention to this otherwise inconspicuous motif by making the ontological uncertainty into the spark that lights up his obsession for more knowledge and more information about Beverly. Robert finds the richest source of information close to home in the end. He discovers Beverly’s documents that remained in the house she owned: photos, sketches and letters. Robert’s tendency to gather all the information can be likened to a process of equipping himself with epistemological weapons to combat the ontological questions caused by the uncertainty around Beverly’s existence. In the course of this process, he becomes aware of and is tortured by the dubiousness of the conclusions based on his interpretations. In the spirit of the foregrounding of epistemological questions, he becomes confronted with the impossibility and inaccessibility of an objective judgment or truth.

The detective plotline thus clearly contains both epistemological and ontological questions. There is however also the less conspicuous plotline in which Robert attempts to deal with the trauma of his wife’s murder, the hole that it has left in his life and a general sense of aimlessness. This plotline foregrounds affect because it shows the protagonist in the process of coming to terms with a past that he is ashamed of, being consumed by feelings of revenge, fear and cynicism and with remorse about the disappearing memories of his wife. The affective questions are defined by Demeyer and Vitse as follows: “‘how can I feel reality (myself, the other, the past, the present, etc.)?’; ‘how can I feel to belong to reality?’; ‘how can I feel reality to be real?’”<sup>141</sup> Applied to the less conspicuous plotline of *Zonder noorden* dealing with Robert’s private life, this foregrounds questions like: How will Robert process his trauma? How can he become reconciled with the way in which his life and his family’s life were influenced

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<sup>139</sup> “Ach wat was toch het verhaal van Beverly’s leven en liefdes?” Noordervliet, 152.

<sup>140</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10.

<sup>141</sup> Hans Demeyer and Sven Vitse, “De affectieve dominant: een ideologiekritische lezing van recent Nederlandstalig proza,” *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 134, No. 3 (2018), 220.

by a crime? What direction will he give to the rest of his life? As the plotlines with very different content and aim develop, the reader realizes that Robert's investigation into the cold case is a substitution for his real concern; the processing of his trauma, which happens incidentally: "This place was chosen as a temporary exile, where I would exorcise the demon of Johnny H., not bring Beverly Walker back to life."<sup>142</sup> This is one of the few places in the novel where it is made explicitly clear that the research into the case Walker and Robert's private memories of Suzanne and Johnny are related. Generally speaking, the two plotlines therefore foreground sometimes two, in some places even all three questions that define the epistemological, ontological and affective dominant.

### 2.1.1 Methodological sketch: oscillation and foregrounding

Because of the interconnectedness of the dominant questions and the textual signals that foreground them and because of my wish to map the continuities in literary historiography, *Zonder noorden* cannot be meaningfully described by looking for one single principle or concept that would capture and describe all the aspects of the novel. Neither is an account based on a periodizing frame suitable because such an account contributes to falling into the methodological traps of periodizing approaches, such as emphasis on innovation at the expense of continuities. The interconnected subplotlines and the interdependence of the issues discussed in them makes analysing *Zonder noorden* in terms of a unidirectional shift beyond postmodernism described in most obituaries of postmodernism impossible. The textual signals of the novel do not support this idea. The rather structuralist and autonomy-based use of foregrounding that I apply in this chapter makes it possible to analyse the novel with regard to the question of periodisation without having recourse to some more specific topic, such as the use of irony in postmodern novels.<sup>143</sup>

The first conceptual tool that accounts for continuities instead of breaks between periods, is *oscillation*. Oscillation is central to Van den Akker and Vermeulen's conception of a new period beyond postmodernism, which they call metamodernism. They define it as follows: "metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern."<sup>144</sup> In this quotation from the 2010 article that has launched the term metamodernism – repeated in the introduction to *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism* – metamodernism is

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<sup>142</sup> "Deze plek was gekozen als tijdelijk ballingsoord om de duivel Johnny H. uit te drijven, niet om Beverly Walker tot leven te wekken." Nelleke Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2009), 124.

<sup>143</sup> See for comparison Lee Konstantinou, *Cool Characters Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) and Doyle, "The Changing Face of Post-Postmodern Fiction".

<sup>144</sup> Van den Akker and Vermeulen "Notes on Metamodernism," 60.

proposed as a successor to postmodernism. The conception of Van den Akker and Vermeulen thus also shows some signs of the periodizing framework. This focus on a break is however outweighed by a particular characteristic of metamodernism: the unceasing pendular movement of oscillation: “One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles.”<sup>145</sup>

Because Van den Akker and Vermeulen define oscillation as a structure of feeling governing all cultural production since approximately the year 2000, for the purposes of literary critique, we need a different tool. This is where the second concept comes in, that I need in order to be able to apply oscillation to the considerably smaller-scale and more detailed level of individual novels: *foregrounding*. This is a principle by means of which the dominant question posed by a literary text can be described and that is at work on the level of the text. I am going to use foregrounding as a method for textual analysis to find out what questions are being provoked by a given textual signal. Here, my approach is in dialogue with another account of contemporary literature that departs from a break with postmodernism: the 2018 article “De affectieve dominant. Een ideologiekritische lezing van recent Nederlandstalig proza” by Demeyer and Vitse. In this article, they suggested that contemporary literature is governed by the affective dominant. According to Demeyer and Vitse, the aesthetic shift beyond postmodernism moves from the ontological questions observed in postmodern novels to affective questions foregrounded by contemporary literature. The observation about postmodern novel being governed by the ontological dominant first introduced in Brian McHale’s *Postmodernist Fiction* that Demeyer and Vitse depart from, reveals the influence of McHale’s use of dominant, as when an affective dominant is introduced by the Dutch literary critics.

At each formal feature or passage from the novel, I ask myself what question or problematization a given textual feature most urgently poses. The main question posed by a literary text does not have to be foregrounded only based on themes but also by means of formal features. From the perspective of literary historiography, there is one problematic consequence of the structuralist influence within McHale’s and to a lesser extent of Demeyer and Vitse’s use of the dominant. Because structuralism is seeking unity, the idea is that the dominant governs all aspects of the literary text. The consequence of this methodology for the literary-historiographical perspective is that there when all aspects have to be governed by one dominant

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<sup>145</sup> Van den Akker and Vermeulen “Notes on Metamodernism,” 62.

question, attention cannot be paid to continuity with regard to other questions. I resolve this problem in my first chapter by making oscillation between several dominant questions the issue that is being foregrounded in *Zonder noorden*.

The concept of foregrounding makes me zoom in on the textual signals that draw attention to the aspects of the novel where the oscillating dynamic between epistemological, ontological and affective questions is especially interesting or complicated. The textual signals that foreground oscillation are the plotline in the first section of the chapter, the representation of consciousness in the second section and in the third section, motif and intertextuality. All these textual signals foreground often two, sometimes even three questions at the same time. The foregrounded issues are therefore interconnected, and the interpretative task of this chapter will be to describe the movements between them through the concept of oscillation. By means of these formal and thematic characteristics of the text, I am going to point out the specific continuities between previous dominants or periodic concepts and draw conclusions on the literary historiographical level. The reason for this is that the analysis of *Zonder noorden* connects to the first debate to which this dissertation contributes, namely the debate about periodization.

## 2.2 Interconnected plotlines: oscillating between epistemological, ontological and affective questions

The way in which the interconnected plotlines foreground several dominant questions at the same time can clearly be seen in chapter 44, where, in a condensed form, various important developments of the two plotlines intersect, are resolved, or significantly pushed along. The chapter concludes the detective plotline concerned with foregrounding Robert's investigation into Beverly's life and assumed death governed by epistemological questions. It also however sets the stage for the subsequent processing of Robert's emotions caused by the death of his wife, his remorse about some aspects of his life and his revengefulness against Johnny. First, I will discuss the parts of the chapter that are connected to the results of Robert's investigation. After that, I focus on how the chapter contributes to the development of the affective plotline.

Robert experiences the greatest epistemological uncertainty and doubt when the community in Horn reacts to, and processes new facts about Beverly. Based on his nosing around in her documentation, he finds out about her complicated relationship with her sister, which he leaks to the community in Horn via Jane Miller, the local journalist. In an interview that appears in the local newspaper, he reveals that Beverly has been the sister of the late Sarah Molyneux, a

well-known TV presenter who has died of cancer in the nineties. The board of the local heritage centre, which Beverly has founded with some others, uses this information to name the centre after Sarah and Beverly's maiden names: "the Sinner centre for the history of Horn and environs".<sup>146</sup> At this moment, on an occasion of public gathering during the opening of the heritage centre, the freedom that Robert has had until now to interpret Beverly's life and to come to his own conclusions in his investigation, is taken out of his hands when the board announces their interpretation of the relationship between the sisters by uniting them in the naming ceremony. Beverly is in this way posthumously given a role and a place in the social fabric of the village community. The board offers a positive interpretation of the relationship between the sisters and thus formalizes and anchors this interpretation of the memory of Beverly in the heads and the hearts of the villagers.

Robert has been looking for an answer to his epistemological question: who was Beverly and what happened to her? He was expecting to find it by working with the epistemological tools that could provide him with knowledge: doing research in the form of interviews, reading online, looking at archival documents (Beverly's correspondence). The board of the heritage centre is however offering mainly a relational and, for the community, an affectively satisfying answer. 'This is who Beverly was to us,' says the board's announcement: a founder of the heritage centre and a sister of a TV celebrity. The interpretation of Beverly's life that the board offers is so positive and satisfying that it almost borders on a cliché. In his commentary on this, even the sceptical Robert cannot but feel a certain satisfaction as he digests the announcement: "Everything always turned out just fine here. All stories became part of the tapestry. Each thread got its colour and location in the tissue [...] And Beverly was part of it. Very much so!"<sup>147</sup> She is now no longer the great unknown. On the contrary, through the decision of the board, she becomes a character in the story of the village, her role in the life of the community is interpreted and she is given a place in the collective memory. Robert's reaction to this is initially an acceptance of the interpretation given by the board of the heritage center: "Beverly has reached her destination. The village has given form to her memory. [...] The sisters have been reunited. [...] The vase has been glued together. All's well that ends well."<sup>148</sup> However, because in his investigation, Robert was looking for a differently oriented answer, this one does not satisfy

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<sup>146</sup> "Het Sinner-centrum voor de geschiedenis van Horn en omstreken." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 216.

<sup>147</sup> "Alles kwam hier altijd goed. Alle verhalen werden in het tapijt geweven. Elke draad kreeg zijn kleur en plaats in het weefsel. [...] Maar Beverly zat erin. En hoe!" Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 219.

<sup>148</sup> "Beverly heeft haar bestemming gevonden. Het dorp heeft de herinnering aan haar vormgegeven. [...] De zusters zijn samengebracht. [...] De vaas is gelijmd. Eind goed, al goed." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 218.

him. Moreover, based on the documents in his house, especially Sarah Molyneux' letter to her sister, Robert knows that the sisters themselves probably would not be filled with joy about the connection between them and the interpretation of their relationship which the heritage centre's new name suggests. Their relationship was more complicated and more embittered than the board knows. At this point of the novel, the uncertainty about the true interpretation foregrounds an epistemological question based on the contrast between what the reader knows about the relationship between Sarah and Beverly and the positive, public interpretation of the board.

Apart from a partial denouement of the detective story plotline, chapter 44 significantly accelerates Robert's processing of affective questions. Throughout the novel, Robert is plagued by doubt and uncertainty about his relationship with Suzanne: he considers it a great loss, when he realizes that he no longer remembers her voice, her smell. With these memories fading away, he begins doubting the strength and quality of their relationship, which had always been plagued by his fear that she would leave him. In this passage, he is trying to convince himself of the strength and durability of their bond preserved in the memories even after her death:

The memories, the real memories were incommunicable. [...] All the cells in my body had renewed themselves since Suzanne's death, but they passed their knowledge on. I was trying to persuade myself. She is just as she had been. I know how she has been. I know how we were. [...] But I was scared. I did not trust my memories anymore.<sup>149</sup>

In this situation, Robert's mistrust in his memories touches on an even deeper doubt - that he has never known, appreciated or loved his wife enough when she was still alive. The epistemological doubt also encroaches upon the affective and relational aspects of Robert's life. This is therefore a moment of oscillation between the epistemological and affective questions, a dynamic we will see frequently throughout the analysis of this novel.

At the barbecue in front of the heritage centre, where the announcement of its new name cements the place that Beverly has been given in the collective memory of the village, the appearance of Robert's dead wife Suzanne as a projection does the same for his memories of her. This results in Robert being emotionally relieved and able to process his intense and complicated feelings and doubts caused by his memories of her. In contrast to the public announcement by the board that resolves the epistemological questions around Beverly, Robert

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<sup>149</sup> "De herinneringen, de echte herinneringen waren ondeelbaar. [...] Sinds Suzannes dood hadden al mijn lichaamcellen zich vernieuwd maar hun kennis van haar doorgegeven. Ik prentte het mezelf in. Ze is nog zoals ze was. Ik weet hoe ze was. Ik weet hoe we waren. [...] Maar ik was bang. Ik vertrouwde mijn herinneringen niet meer." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 142.

uses private and personal means (imagination) to resolve affective questions. His affective doubts become stilled by his encounter with Suzanne. It is a memory of her that is presented by the novel as embodied – when she speaks, Robert feels her breath in his ear and she opens the door of his car and nudges him out. The appearance of what could be seen as a ghost is one of the few unrealistic elements in the novel that otherwise does not breach the bounds of realism. However, it is presented with the highest possible degree of realism, by making Robert's projection assume very human and embodied characteristics.

The appearance of an embodied projection or memory of Suzanne, something that does not exist, but that Robert experiences bodily as being there, could lead to a foregrounding of ontological doubt in the form of a questioning of the fictional status of the world presented in the novel in accordance with one of McHale's questions characterizing the ontological dominant of postmodernism: "What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?"<sup>150</sup> There are however too few such moments in the novel that one could conclude that the novel is governed by the ontological dominant of postmodernism. The novel situates this moment of ontological doubt in such a context (Robert coming to terms with his relationship to Suzanne) that it is the affective question that is foregrounded here rather than ontological one. Such a moment must therefore be characterized as an instance of oscillation between the ontological and affective questions.

The same textual element, Suzanne's appearance, could foreground an affective question and thus be preparatory and necessary step for the denouement of the plotline. The Suzanne that materializes for Robert is an idealized version, endowed with her most loving and supportive feelings towards him. The fact that the manifestation of the ghost-Suzanne does not lead to considerations of the breach of the illusion of a fictional world is caused by the natural and realistic way in which she appears in the story world. It is almost as if Robert is being addressed by a good friend accosting him during the party in front of the heritage centre:

Someone tapped me on my shoulder and whispered in my ear that I was exaggerating. Suzanne. My beautiful, blonde Suzanne. [...] Her breath in my ear warmed me up. [...] 'I am with you,' she said, 'all the days of your life.' 'I know', I said. 'Well, what's holding you back then?' 'She's afraid of me.' 'She hears you calling' 'She's got Mike.'

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<sup>150</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10.

‘She might want you.’ ‘I don’t want to betray you.’ ‘You cannot lose me now. I am with you all the days of your life.’ She opened the car door and gave me a nudge.<sup>151</sup>

In his imaginary conversation with the ghost, Robert processes several of his fears and uncertainties, that have been plaguing him throughout the novel. His imaginary wife assures him that the difficult parts of their relationship embittered by his mistrust and jealousy, do not have to stand in the way of a positive and loving interpretation of their life together. This is of course an instance of wishful thinking in Robert. A reading informed by the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion could easily discredit it as a fantasy. From this point of view, the use of the word fantasy would point to the object of the fantasy not being real. In other words, the ontological status of the fantasy would be in question. However, if the affective and relational aspects of the fantasy are taken into consideration, fantasy can also be seen as a resource through which Robert can process his emotions and reconcile himself with his loss. During the imagined exchange with his wife, Robert resolves his implicit feeling of betraying Suzanne by pursuing Jane. Suzanne thus gives her blessing to this new relationship that is going to be important for Robert’s life going forward.

All in all, the appearance of Suzanne as a ghost foregrounds various issues in chapter 44: the ontological question about the manner in which the fictional world exists and the affective questions where Robert resolves his personal doubts, remorse and uncertainties relating to his marriage. Both are being connected by oscillation. This oscillating movement foregrounded in chapter 44 departs from epistemological uncertainty caused by the opposition between the public interpretation of Beverly’s life offered by the board and the private conclusions Robert reaches based on her correspondence. Later, the appearance of Suzanne’s embodied projection moves us in the direction of ontological uncertainty. This is however not sufficiently foregrounded by a combination with other elements of the novel’s text to assume the position of a dominant. The conclusion that I am drawing from this analysis of interconnected textual signals foregrounding several interconnected issues is not which one is ultimately the dominant one, but that innovation (the affective questions dominating contemporary novels can be seen in this way) and continuities (the epistemological and ontological questions) are inextricably linked by the oscillating movement. From the literary historiographical point of view,

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<sup>151</sup> “Iemand tikte me op mijn schouder en fluisterde in mijn oor dat ik me aanstelde. Suzanne. Mijn mooie, blonde Suzanne. [...] Haar adem in mijn oor verwarmde me. [...] ‘Ik ben bij je,’ zei ze, ‘alle dagen van je leven.’ ‘Dat weet ik,’ zei ik. ‘Nou, wat houdt je dan tegen?’ ‘Ze is bang voor me.’ ‘Ze hoort je roepen.’ ‘Ze heeft Mike.’ ‘Misschien wil ze jou.’ ‘Ik wil je niet verraden.’ ‘Je raakt me nu niet meer kwijt. Ik ben bij je, alle dagen van je leven.’ Ze deed het portier open en gaf me een zetje.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 214.

oscillation is therefore a way to zoom in on and keep track of the continuities between periods on the level of the literary text.

The oscillatory movement that I have traced throughout the whole chapter 44 is shown to be what is being foregrounded not only by the larger textual units such as chapters, but also to operate in smaller units of text, on the level of paragraphs, for instance within the space of five sentences which appear in chapter 45, in the aftermath of the barbecue party. The act of naming the heritage centre after the Sinner sisters influences Robert's investigation that now must negotiate a great epistemological doubt. He finds himself in a dilemma: what should he do about the difference between the affectively and relationally satisfying interpretation of the board on the one hand and his own, more bleak, conclusions based on the documents found in his house on the other?

I was the only person in the village who knew the story; I was free to rewrite it as I pleased. To wipe it out. To change everything. I had the power  
to write Johnny H. out of my life. To destroy him with my vigorous ability to love and to heal.<sup>152</sup>

The exaggerated reliance on knowledge and information expressed by the first three sentences of the quotation before the indent is typical for Robert's reaction to the initial impulse for his investigation, namely the ontological doubt about Beverly's existence. In spite of the confrontation with the two widely different interpretations of Beverly's legacy and her role in the community, he still believes that the strategy of studying and interpreting sources and archival documents will help him to reach a conclusive answer. Perhaps this is a professional bias, Robert is after all a journalist. His attitude illustrated by the emphasis on power still expresses his belief in the epistemological weapons with which he was planning to confront the ontological doubt. By means of the inconclusively resolved plotline of investigation into Beverly's death, the text of the novel is again moving away from foregrounding an epistemological uncertainty to foregrounding affective uncertainty, in this case with regard to the issue of how Robert is going to confront the trauma he incurred by Suzanne's murder. With respect to this, it is telling that the fourth sentence of the quotation, with the enjambement, represents through typography that Robert's thinking gets rerouted. His realization of his power

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<sup>152</sup> "In het dorp kende alleen ik het verhaal; het stond me vrij het te herschrijven. Ongedaan te maken. Alles te veranderen. Ik had de macht

Johnny H. uit mijn leven schrijven. Hem vernietigen met mijn vitale vermogen tot liefde en herstel." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 220.

over the collective interpretation of Beverly's life (gained by obtaining information no one else in Horn has access to) is suddenly channelled in a different direction.

It is as if Robert's realization of the power gained through information forms the most extreme point of the oscillating movement (the epistemological pole) of an imaginary pendulum. When this point is reached, the pendulum is drawn by another pole: the need for a personal, affective resolution and a processing of traumatic experience. The oscillating movement is expressed through the typography representing the break in Robert's thoughts where his attention is redirected towards his private, affective problem. A possible interpretation of this connection between epistemology and affect is that Robert's preoccupation with various epistemological questions caused by the ontological doubt around Beverly's existence is a substituting activity for his real concern. The affective and relational questions therefore function as a hummus-layer out of which the epistemological doubts grow, fed by the ontological doubt functioning as fertilizer.

The sudden turn to affective concerns in this quotation can be seen as an instance of oscillation. The interconnectedness of the textual signals foregrounding the various questions and the interconnectedness of the questions themselves makes it difficult to reach a final conclusion about this novel by means of the instrument of foregrounding. With regard to the literary historiographical level from which we have departed that carries the question of continuities between postmodern and contemporary novels along, we can now conclude that what the textual signal plotline seems to be foregrounding is oscillation between the already identified dominant questions rather than *one* dominant question. What therefore seems to be dominant for this contemporary novel is the continuity itself, expressed by means of oscillation. Let us now look at a different textual signal to see whether this preliminary conclusion will be confirmed.

### 2.3 Representation of consciousness: oscillating between affect and rationality

The following textual signal that this chapter will focus on is representation of consciousness in two different scenes from the novel. The textual signal that foregrounds oscillation is in both scenes the inner process of consciousness in the protagonist and narrator Robert. The reader has access to the fictional world of *Zonder noorden* only and exclusively through his thoughts, perceptions and feelings. He is an extra- and homodiegetic narrator who also focalizes everything throughout the text. This time around, there are always only two poles of the oscillating dynamic in these scenes, so it is less complicated than in the previous section of this

chapter. The representation of Robert's consciousness is characterized by an oscillation between rationality and affect. Generally speaking, ontological and epistemological questions (about knowledge and existence) can be characterized as rational, with affective concerns standing in opposition to this. In *Zonder noorden*, however, both types of questions bear witness to the dynamic between rationality and affect as it was described by Spinoza;<sup>153</sup> the rational and affective questions are again interconnected. This is why it is worthwhile to look more closely at the dynamics and the oscillating movement. The textual characteristics of the novel pose the question of causality and primacy of affect and rationality and illustrate the interplay by means of oscillation which thus becomes foregrounded.

The ambiguity of the novel is not caused by two different directions of causality. The question that the text poses by representing both types of the oscillating dynamic is: in what phase of the process of cognition does affect appear? Is affect a reaction to an impasse of rationality that surfaces when cognition reaches a dead end? Or is it the subconscious source of thought and action that gets processed and eventually expressed in language, cognition and action? The novel contains scenes that illustrate both types of the dynamic, thus foregrounding oscillation again and choosing not to choose. Oscillation is in *Zonder noorden* thereby characterized by the same unceasing movement as in Van den Akker and Vermeulen's original conception.<sup>154</sup> Regarding causality, the two types of oscillation illustrated by means of two different scenes are, firstly, that affect appears as a reaction to an impasse of rationality. The rational subject moves beyond the epistemological questions caused by the developments in modernity and encounters ontological doubt in the form of a critical reaction and an intensifying scepticism with regard to the possibility of finding satisfying epistemological answers. Thus, the subject enters the realm of ontological questioning. This radical ontological doubt causes the arrival of affect on the scene.

### 2.3.1 Affect as a consequence of the impasse of cognition

Affect emerges as a reaction to an impasse of rationality in the following scene. Robert is confronted with the boundaries of (his) knowledge, with lack of information and doubt about the right interpretation of the information that he has got during his investigation into the case Beverly Walker: "These dry, barren pages with their statements and confessions lacked the

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<sup>153</sup> See Chapter 1, debate 3 of this dissertation for the role of Spinoza's writing as the earliest source of reflection on affect and a conception of affect that unites thinking and feeling.

<sup>154</sup> See Van den Akker and Vermeulen, "Notes on Metamodernism," 61, 67.

context that brought them to life, they were missing the voice.”<sup>155</sup> This brings him to a cognitive dead end. In such moment despair surfaces as an affective reaction to this impasse of thinking and he doubts the meaningfulness of his attempt to reconstruct Beverly’s life’s story and the sense of the whole investigative project. The despair that Robert expresses here, as he attempts to contend with the epistemological puzzle represented by Beverly’s letters and documentation, is reminiscent of one of Moyano Ariza’s categorizations of various uses and conception of affect. This scene in *Zonder noorden* is “taking affect as excessive”<sup>156</sup> understanding “affect as linked to cognitive processes”.<sup>157</sup> Affect is that which is in excess of cognition, that which escapes it. Moyano Ariza is connecting the approach to affect grouped under ‘affect as excess’ “as continuation of the poststructuralist and deconstructivist concern with excess”.<sup>158</sup> Again, the way in which Noordervliet represents affect in this novel is one of the ways in which the continuity with postmodernism works through in the text.

A moment later, Robert manages to break through a sense of impasse to find some worth in his attempt to concern himself with the case nonetheless: “I could add Beverly’s true story to the stories of the village at the end of my reconstruction. I would describe how the tissue that formed the community came to be.”<sup>159</sup> Based on these two quotations, it is clear that Robert’s thoughts about his role in Beverly’s life and in the local community are changing. The more Robert finds out about Beverly, the more he doubts the meaningfulness of his undertaking and his role in it: “I was the voyeur, the snoop, intruder, I trod with my great big Dutch feet on Beverly’s secret soul.”<sup>160</sup> The following passage is an echo of Robert’s earlier quoted idea about the addition of Beverly’s story to the stories of the community which he now disdains:

How daring, the idea that I could contribute to the story of the community, that I should play a role. [...] The truth could never be found and did not need to be found. Was there ever anyone who got wiser by knowing the truth? The truth, you say? Put it down over

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<sup>155</sup> “Deze dorre, droge papieren met hun mededelingen en ontboezemingen misten de context die ze tot leven bracht, ze misten de stem.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 122.

<sup>156</sup> Moyano Ariza, “Affect Theory with Literature and Art,” 4.

<sup>157</sup> Moyano Ariza, “Affect Theory with Literature and Art,” 4-5.

<sup>158</sup> Moyano Ariza, “Affect Theory with Literature and Art,” 4.

<sup>159</sup> “Aan het eind van de reconstructie kon ik Beverly’s ware verhaal toevoegen aan de verhalen van het dorp. [...] Ik zou beschrijven hoe het weefsel tot stand kwam dat de gemeenschap vormde.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 122.

<sup>160</sup> “Ik was de voyeur, de luistervink, de indringer, ik trapte met mijn grote Hollandse poten op de geheime ziel van Beverly.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 122.

there, we can have a look at it for a bit, when we find the time and later, we'll toss it out behind the rhododendrons.<sup>161</sup>

This is a moment of deep and fundamental doubt about the meaning and worth of each human life and life's story. In this phase, the ontological critique and the accompanying doubt about being is so deep that there are no rational solutions available as an answer to or a way out of the doubt. When a deconstructive, suspicious phase of critical thinking is reached, there is no possibility to use rationality to arrive at answers.

Robert has a strong affective reaction to this moment of doubt about the possibility to attain the truth: "I could not breathe. I wanted to take a deep breath but the air got stuck. [...] A case of hyperventilation. I was familiar with it. It made me angry to no end to be so completely a victim to fear."<sup>162</sup> The affective reaction of panic can be connected to the doubt about the sense and meaningfulness of every human endeavour. The anxiety that causes Robert to have such a strong physical reaction is evoked by doubt about the possibility to discover the truth and ascertain the value of the endeavour of searching for it. His panic is caused by being confronted with the possibility that the striving for a meaningful narrative would not have any worth. Robert may hold cynical speeches such as this question that he poses to Jane: "how much do we actually matter to each other?"<sup>163</sup> The involuntary affective reaction that he has to this idea however reveals a deeper desire or need for meaningfulness that can be unearthed under his endeavour of the investigation into Beverly's disappearance. When the option that this desire or need would be unmet becomes real, Robert's reaction is affective and intense. The text keeps silent on Robert's speculations about the search for the truth of Beverly's story on the following two pages after this affective short-circuiting. These scenes represent the first type of dynamic of oscillation where affect surfaces as a reaction to an impasse arrived at by an extreme intensification of rational (epistemological and ontological) doubt.

### 2.3.2 Cognitive processing of affect in language

The second time that affect appears in connection with the doubts about the investigation into Beverly's life demonstrates that affect is not only a reaction to an impasse of rationality but that

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<sup>161</sup> "Wat een gotspe, het idee dat ik iets kon bijdragen aan het verhaal van de gemeenschap, dat ik een rol moest spelen. [...] De waarheid was nooit te achterhalen en hoefde niet achterhaald te worden. Wie werd wijzer van de waarheid? De waarheid, zegt u? Legt u daar maar neer, we zullen er wel even naar kijken als we tijd hebben en hem dan achter de rododendrons flikkeren." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 124.

<sup>162</sup> "Ik kreeg het benauwd. Ik wilde diep ademen, maar de lucht bleef steken. [...] Een aanval van hyperventilatie. Die had ik wel meer gehad. Het ergerde me mateloos zo ten prooi te zijn aan angst." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 125.

<sup>163</sup> "Wat kunnen wij elkaar eigenlijk schelen?" Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 180.

it has existence prior to cognition. On the one hand, as demonstrated by the previous scene, affect is represented as a reaction to cognitive processes in *Zonder noorden*. On the other hand, there are other scenes that suggest that affect exists also outside of and prior to rational processes and conscious thought. The scene that illustrates this second type of oscillation concerns a later phase of Robert's investigation when he has come to know more about Beverly. Moreover, he has also learned about her relationship with her sister, Sarah. The research based on Beverly's documents becomes more and more a confrontation with his own past for Robert. The research forces him to reflect on his own life and his relationship with Suzanne. He has to come to terms with his remorse about several aspects of their relationship. When he reads a letter from Sarah to Beverly, he becomes painfully conscious of how selectively he remembers his marriage with Suzanne: "To remember is to select and selection is a strategy that does not always serve the truth."<sup>164</sup> The following quotation is another instance where both the investigative and the trauma-processing plotlines intersect:

I became curious about the clippings, theatre programs and pages of notes and whatever else it was that the nephew or Beverly herself had thrown into the box inscribed with various. What could I learn from that? As I was stretching my hand out for the not yet inspected material, I hesitated. My arm became heavy. Something surfaced in my head, and behind it I saw the unplastered wall of a thought that I had wanted to keep covered, of a memory that I had wanted to keep buried. And something in the letter from Sarah to Beverly made it happen. I did not know what. What did I want with these two sisters? Where was there a connection between their story and mine? For fuck's sake! Fuck Beverly, fuck Sarah, fuck Johnny H.! What's keeping me from booking a return flight, giving the Canadian spruces the finger and going back home?<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> "Herinneren is selecteren, en selecteren is een strategie die niet altijd de waarheid dient." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 165.

<sup>165</sup> "Ik werd benieuwd naar de knipsels, theaterprogramma's en bladen met aantekeningen of wat het dan ook was dat de neef of Beverly zelf in de doos met varia had geworpen. Wat kon ik daaruit nog te weten komen? Terwijl ik mijn hand uitstreekte naar het nog niet bekeken materiaal, aarzelde ik. Mijn arm werd zwaar. Er was een tegeltje losgeraakt in mijn hoofd. Daarachter zag ik de ruwe muur van een gedachte die ik toegedekt wilde houden, van een herinnering die ik weg wilde stoppen. En iets in de brief van Sarah aan Beverly had dat bewerkstelligd. Ik wist niet wat. Wat had ik met die zussen te maken? Waar sloot mijn verhaal op dat van hen aan? Godverdomme! Fuck Beverly, fuck Sarah, fuck Johnny H.! Wat lette me om een terugvlucht te boeken, de Canadese sparren de middelvinger voor te houden, en terug te gaan naar huis?" Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 168.

In the second scene, the affect that surfaces is anger and aggression expressed by means of several swearwords. The passage illustrates the second route of affect and shows that the order of the oscillating dynamic between affect and rationality has switched.

The anger that takes over Robert's thinking functions as a defensive mechanism against another affect – the pain of a realization or the surfacing of an unpleasant and negative memory that places him in a bad light (the precise content of the memory is unclear at that moment). Robert realizes an ugly truth about the nature of his and Suzanne's relationship and becomes vicariously angry with Sarah, Beverly and Johnny. The painful history of the sisters confronts him with his own unresolved and problematic past. The intense affect (anger) cannot immediately be bypassed to uncover what is the real affective source of the reaction. The trauma cannot be processed, integrated and expressed quickly. It is only at night that follows this fit of rage, that Robert has had the time to realize what the anger is a reaction to and admit it to himself. The difficulty and slowness of the process by means of which affect is transformed into an expressible, cognitively approachable and individualized emotion is expressed by means of the, at this point, still vague and mysterious reference: "something surfaced in my head."<sup>166</sup>

Only after the pause does the novel attempt a representation of the affect that is a source of Robert's angry reaction by means of language, namely through a dream. This is where the reader has the chance to realize that the anger has only been a vicarious affect. Robert's dream of Suzanne who is walking away from him and does not turn around despite him calling her has a different affective charge. The dream can be interpreted as Robert's subconscious that is processing the problematic memory of his life with Suzanne. The affective charge of the dream is clearly fear, Robert is afraid that Suzanne will leave him. Later that night, this interpretation is confirmed by another memory of Robert's, this time one where Suzanne's father warns him of Suzanne's free spirit and independence: "Don't delude yourself, son. She comes and she goes whenever she pleases. She's free."<sup>167</sup> Behind the shameful memory of how he had behaved to his wife which has surfaced during his reading of Sarah's letter that has caused the vicarious affect of anger, there is something else hidden. It is fear of being abandoned.

"The atmosphere of the dream was still with me, but it remained impalpable. I was looking for words that would help me to put my finger on the emotion and tame it."<sup>168</sup> It is only after Robert

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<sup>166</sup> "Er was een tegeltje losgeraakt in mijn hoofd." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 168.

<sup>167</sup> "Maak je geen illusies, jongen. Ze gaat, ze komt, wanneer zij dat wil. Ze is vrij." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 170.

<sup>168</sup> "De sfeer van de droom was nog bij me maar ongrijpbaar. Ik zocht naar woorden om de emotie thuis te brengen en te temmen." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 169.

has processed the elusive atmosphere of the dream that the fear-inducing memory and feeling can be communicated to the reader:

‘To remember is to select’ The sentence shot through me like a lightning strike and echoed, three, four, five times. Yes, Sarah, now I know. It’s as if I had known it this whole time. It’s as if I had not known that I looked at the coat rack every time I came home. And always wanted to know where she went, where she was. I was controlling her. Until she got mad about it. ‘You’re watching over me! You are my husband, not my jailor.’ She was right. I promised to do better. I did my best. It went well. Was it going well?<sup>169</sup>

Here, Robert realizes that his controlling attitude towards Suzanne was caused by fear of losing her. He now feels shame when he thinks about his jealousy and how, under its influence, he has reacted to Suzanne’s death: “I felt relief for an instant, standing there at Suzanne’s body. Now she would not go anywhere. Now she would not be able to leave me anymore.”<sup>170</sup> This second scene shows that the processing of trauma that causes intense affects requires time and space which is expressed and represented in the novel by means of pauses and dreams. The intense affective experience of the panic attack in the first scene discussed within this section is followed by a short silence on the topic of meaningfulness of Robert’s endeavour to investigate the documents that Beverly has left behind. In the second scene, the protagonist needs a series of dreams and memories before he can get in touch with what is the source of his affective reaction and for these to be able to be represented in language.

The second scene that I have just analyzed is illustrative of a dynamic in which affect is at its source and needs to be processed by language in order to be expressed and represented<sup>171</sup>. It also corresponds to another characterization of ‘affect as excess’ according to Moyano Ariza’s categorisation. In the second scene illustrating the second dynamic between affect and rationality, a slightly different function or use of affect is shown. It still corresponds to the same category of approaches described by Moyano Ariza, however: “(a)ffect [...] offers a lexicon to expand on the analyses of pre-cognitive processes that lead to emotion in order to open a space

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<sup>169</sup> “‘Herinneren is selecteren.’ De zin schoot als een bliksemschicht door me heen en echode, drie- vier- vijfmaal. Ja, Sarah, nou weet ik het wel. Alsof ik dat altijd heb geweten. Alsof ik niet weet dat ik elke keer dat ik thuiskwam naar de kapstok keek. En altijd wilde weten waar ze heen ging, waar ze was. Ik controleerde haar. Tot ze er gek van werd. ‘Je bewaakt me! Je bent mijn man, niet mijn cipier.’ Ze had gelijk. Ik beloofde beterschap. Ik deed mijn best. Het ging goed. Het ging toch goed?” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 170.

<sup>170</sup> “Bij het lichaam van Suzanne had ik een ogenblik opluchting gevoeld. Ze kon niet meer van me weg.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 170.

<sup>171</sup> In Massumi’s terms the intensity or affect would thus become an emotion.

to think how these processes are represented in literature and artworks.”<sup>172</sup> Both scenes that I am focusing on from *Zonder noorden* to describe the oscillation between affect and rationality bear similarity to the perspective on affect that is an heir to Sedgwick and Frank’s approach to affect, as has been suggested earlier in the discussion on the genealogy of affect theory. In the second scene from *Zonder noorden* the dynamic between affect and rationality looks different: affect must first be processed by means of cognition that uses a structure of mutually dependent and variously connoted concepts also known as language. It is only after affect has gone through this process that it can be represented in a novel, an artistic medium based on language.

Especially the second type of oscillation between affect and cognition illustrates a shift away from a postmodern conception of affect, as in Jameson’s “waning of affect,”<sup>173</sup> to a conception of affect under metamodernism observed by Alison Gibbons in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*: “In the contemporary, then, we can perhaps speak once more of a hermeneutics of the self, a will and ability to process intensities so that we can articulate meaningful emotional reactions or cognitive responses to today’s social situation.”<sup>174</sup> This general statement is illustrated in *Zonder noorden* by the inclusion of both types of oscillation in a representation of conscious processes. It is also an illustration of the ways and processes by means of which intensities can be processed and emotional or cognitive reactions are articulated. In conclusion, in this section we have seen that the textual signal representation of consciousness also foregrounds oscillation between affect and cognition and thus contributes to the hypothesis that oscillation is the governing and structuring principle in this novel.

#### 2.4 Motif, intertextuality: oscillating between various constructions of identity

In the last section I will discuss two textual forms of equivalence, one internal and one external to the text, namely, motif and intertextuality. I will first discuss what connects an *abstract* motif, as defined by Van Boven and Dorleijn, to a textual motif.<sup>175</sup> Then I will point out the oscillation of the way that the motif is embedded in the novel. Both motif and intertextuality foreground oscillation between epistemological, ontological and affective questions and at the same time contribute to the denouement of the trauma-processing affective plotline. The concrete textual motif of an encounter between man and animal, Robert and a doe, is an important textual signal

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<sup>172</sup> Moyano Ariza, “Affect Theory with Literature and Art,” 4.

<sup>173</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism Or Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, 9.

<sup>174</sup> Alison Gibbons, 2017, “Metamodern Affect” In *Metamodernism. Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, edited by Robin van den Akker et al., 85.

<sup>175</sup> For the difference between textual motif and abstract motif, I am drawing on Erica van Boven and Gillis Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek: inleiding tot de analyse van verhalen en gedichten* (Bussum: Coutinho, 1999), 272-273.

because it structures the affective plotline of the novel. It appears both at the beginning and at the end of the novel. The second time that the concrete textual motif of the doe appears, it becomes clear that on the level of abstract motifs, it is contributing to the development of ideas around Robert's identity. The doe motif is also connected with the use of intertextuality in *Zonder noorden* – it contains a reference to a classical work of English literature, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. In what follows, I am first going to analyse the relevant passages where the foregrounding of both abstract motifs and oscillation of various questions occurs and then I am going to contextualize my analysis of textual signals motif and intertextuality by references to secondary literature about contemporary novels.

#### 2.4.1 First encounter with a doe

As has already been mentioned, the doe motif appears at the beginning and at the end of the novel. In both cases, the encounter with the doe is accompanied by an intense affective experience during which Robert's rationality becomes overwhelmed and momentarily replaced by an intuitive, sense-based perception, by hunches, and an experience of déjà vu. The motif of the doe is first introduced when Robert first arrives at the rented house that he is to inhabit in Horn:

And suddenly, as a dea ex machina crossing my path, a doe was standing in the spotlights twenty meters from my kangaroo bar. I slammed on the brake. Because I was driving very slowly anyway, it seemed as if we had arranged to meet: I had a rendezvous with her. [...] A shiver ran over the sleek brown body of the animal. She moved her thin legs, stepped aside as if she wanted to let me through. I waited. She did the same.<sup>176</sup>

This moment of a significant encounter between man and animal is described in such a way that the prevalence of other than rational and sensual perception becomes emphasised, as is evidenced by phrases such as “dea ex machina”,<sup>177</sup> “rendezvous with her”.<sup>178</sup> The textual motif can be read in connection with the interruption of Robert's cognitive responses to impulses from his surroundings on the abstract level of motif analysis. Instead, he is being led by affect and intuition at this moment. When we move in the motif analysis to the level of abstract motifs, the encounters with the doe can be connected with different constructions of identity. By means

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<sup>176</sup> “En opeens, als een dea ex machina op mijn weg neergedaald, stond daar in de spotlights op twintig meter voor mijn kangaroo bar een ree. [...] Ik trapte op de rem. Omdat ik toch al heel langzaam reed, leek het afgesproken werk: ik had een rendez-vous met haar. [...] Een rilling gleed over het ranke bruine lijf van het dier. Ze verplaatste haar dunne poten, stapte opzij alsof ze me door wilde laten. Ik wachtte. Zij ook.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 19.

<sup>177</sup> Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 19.

<sup>178</sup> “Rendez-vous met haar.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 19.

of the textual motif, the novel thus foregrounds epistemological, ontological or relational constructions of identity. This particular encounter with the doe can be seen as a disruption of Robert's identity as a modern, rational individual. The break with this type of identity construction marks the beginning of the destabilization and development of a new type of identity construction which can be traced by means of oscillation.

Robert enters the novel as a rational individual. This claim rests on an observation of his activities around the investigation where he hopes to discover the truth through rational deductions and logic. This makes him a character striving for the ideal of knowledge that is typical for a modernist (often failing, but ever more attempted) struggle to reach some kind of epistemological certainty. It is this model of self-understanding and identity that Robert momentarily strays from when he arrives at the house that he is to inhabit in Horn for the first time. The motif can also, with a view of the further development of the story be read as a premonition of the affective questions that are discussed in the trauma-processing plotline. The change of Robert's identity construction is ushered in by his experience of *déjà vu*. When the doe disappears into the forest, Robert's attitude to the place that he has arrived at, changes:

Obeying an impulse, I stepped out of the car and walked the few last steps to the house. I needed to approach it cautiously and humbly, lay aside the coarse posture of the owner. [...] I had already experienced this. Exactly like this. I had thought 'still fifty meters to go' once before. I knew this feeling of expectation. [...] I had not been alone the last time, just like I was not alone now. There was someone with me. [...] I cleared my throat to get rid of the emotion. There was only one reality.<sup>179</sup>

Robert's arrival at the house of Beverly is characterized by the primacy of intuition and a strange, rationally unexplainable feeling of *déjà vu*. He feels like he is not alone. When his rational defences and well-worn neural pathways that he is accustomed to use are suspended and rerouted for a moment, he is overcome by the irrational feeling of not being alone, in contrast to what his sensual perception tells him and to how he has been used to living in the last eight years since Suzanne's death. A swift rational reaction to this affect however follows and muffles the intensity, significance, and poignancy of that moment. In the last sentence of the quotation, Robert assures himself of the ontological stability of his world. This marks the

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<sup>179</sup> "Gehoorzamd aan een ingeving stapte ik uit en liep het laatste stuk naar het huis. Ik moest omzichtig en nederig naderen, niet met het ordinaire air van de bezitter [...]. Dit had ik eerder meegemaakt. Precies zo. De woorden 'nog vijftig meter' had ik eerder gedacht. Dit gevoel van verwachting kende ik. [...] De vorige keer was ik niet alleen geweest, zoals ik ook nu niet alleen was. Er was iemand bij me. [...] Ik kuchte om de ontroering te verdrijven. Er was maar één werkelijkheid." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 20.

end of intuition and other affective means of relating to the world being given free reign for the following several months until the supernatural experience with the embodied projection of Suzanne occurs during which his affective needs are sustained. With regard to the rest of the novel, this moment of rationality getting the upper hand ushers in the part of the novel where Robert ostensibly and consciously pays most of the attention to the epistemological investigation of Beverly's disappearance (the investigative storyline). The unexplainable déjà vu can be interpreted as foregrounding the affective questions. As has been already pointed out, the motif analysis on the abstract level connects the textual motif of the doe with a construction of identity.

A concept that helps to think about an identity construction within the affective dominant is relationism. 'Relationism', a term introduced in the writings of Yra van Dijk, Merlijn Olon and Esther Op de Beek,<sup>180</sup> as a characteristic of contemporary literature, has to do with a new construction of identity visible in the novels written in the new millennium, especially those written by authors of the millennial generation. Identity construction is no longer a matter of course in the works of the authors Van Dijk, Olon and Op de Beek are looking at. Demeyer and Vitse even speak of an "crisis of identity"<sup>181</sup> as one of the many crises that the millennial generation is confronted with.<sup>182</sup> Van Dijk and Olon see the fact that identity is being subjected to inquiry in contemporary novels as a result (among others) of the disintegration of metanarratives characteristic of postmodernism and resulting in relativism. They give the following definition of relationism: "These texts go further and explore the possibilities and limitations of the construction of the individual (or subject) in the midst of, and above all, through others."<sup>183</sup> What makes relationism a relevant term for the discussion of this first appearance of the motif of the doe is Robert's sense of not being alone. I interpret this as a foretaste of the connection between the textual motif of the doe and the abstract motif of a construction of relational identity that is developed more fully towards the end of the novel.

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<sup>180</sup> Relationism has been introduced in two articles about relationism. One was authored by Van Dijk and Olon under the title "Radicaal relationisme, het andere engagement in de jongste Nederlandstalige literatuur". The second one, "Niña Weijers en Nina Polak. Een nieuwe generatie auteurs maakt naam" was written by Van Dijk and Op de Beek. There is a significant overlap in the definition of relationism but the term has not been demonstrated on the same corpus of novels. The new generation of writers from the millennial generation has received much wider notice between the publication date of the first and second article (2015 and 2019).

<sup>181</sup> "Identiteitscrisis." Demeyer en Vitse, *Affectieve crisis*, 13.

<sup>182</sup> This is such an important insight for Demeyer and Vitse that they introduce their book *Affectieve crisis, literair herstel* with it.

<sup>183</sup> "Deze teksten gaan een stap verder en verkennen de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van de constructie van het individu (of subject) te midden van, en vooral ook *door* anderen." Merlijn Olon and Yra van Dijk, "Radicaal relationisme," *De Gids* 2015 No 3, accessed 13 August 2019, <https://www.de-gids.nl/artikelen/radicaal-relationisme>.

Right before the second appearance of the textual motif of the doe and before Robert's second encounter with it, the motif of identity construction appears again. While right before the first appearance of the doe motif, Robert's identity was constructed in modernist terms, the second time the motif surfaces, Robert reflects on identity in postmodern terms. He looks at himself in the mirror of the car during a drive in the surroundings of Horn and thinks: "Who was it looking at me there? Who was it thinking there? [...] The hands of the stranger that I was laid calmly on the steering wheel [...]." <sup>184</sup> He experiences estrangement, emptiness and doubt about his identity. Earlier in the book, during a conversation with his (at that point still platonic) love interest, Jane Miller, he experiences his identity as a void: "In a flash, I experienced my life as a fruitless attempt at covering my emptiness up with stories." <sup>185</sup> Robert's self-image has something in common with the "absence of the core" <sup>186</sup> foregrounded by characters in postmodern novels. The previous quotation refers to the worldview present in postmodern novels and described by Bart Vervaeck as follows: "the absence is central to every postmodern novel." <sup>187</sup> Absence as the main feature of characters means that they become "what they 'really' are, that is a collection of words and texts." <sup>188</sup>

The way in which Robert describes his identity at certain points in the novel foregrounds ontological themes having to do with realness and existence of fictional reality as has been suggested previously. The foregrounding of ontological questions is another pole connected by the oscillating movement with other passages in the novel where the theme of identity construction foregrounds different questions. The most striking moment of reorientation of Robert's identity towards another in relationship with whom he begins to understand himself happens also in the presence of another (or the same?) doe.

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<sup>184</sup> "Wie was dat die daar keek? Wie was dat die daar dacht? [...] De handen van de vreemdeling die ik was lagen rustig op het stuurwiel [...]." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 224.

<sup>185</sup> "In een flits nam ik mijn hele leven waar als een vruchteloze poging mijn leegte te verhullen in verhalen." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 179.

<sup>186</sup> "Afwezigheid van de kern." Bart Vervaeck, *Het postmodernisme in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse roman* (Nijmegen/Mechelen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2007), 47.

<sup>187</sup> "De afwezigheid staat centraal in elke postmoderne roman." Vervaeck, *Het postmodernisme in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse roman*, 47.

<sup>188</sup> "Wat ze 'echt' zijn, namelijk een verzameling woorden en teksten." Vervaeck, *Het postmodernisme in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse roman*, 64.

#### 2.4.2 Second encounter with a doe

Robert's first encounter with the doe happens in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. It stands in sharp contrast to another interaction between man and animal that takes place towards the end of the novel and is anything but harmonious:

It happened shortly before I would take a turn for the dirt road by the mailboxes. Our paths crossed at full speed. I didn't see her. She didn't see me. [...] A thud, the hard kangaroo bar of the Dodge in her muscled hind end. The deer flew up and fell down, I had already passed her by, stood on the brakes, cursing. [...] She lay twenty meters behind me, a motionless animal. When she heard me coming closer, she lifted her head and looked at me with gleaming eyes.<sup>189</sup>

Robert is shocked by the accident and is unable to accept that this time, his encounter with the doe should result in the death of the animal. He picks up the injured but still breathing doe, puts her onto the tailgate of his car and rides her to Jane, who lives closest and knows the vet. He wants to do everything in his power to save the animal's life. Jane tells him, however, that the doe's spine is broken and that transporting her to the vet to give her an injection will only prolong her suffering. She offers Robert her gun and does not give him much space to refuse to relieve the animal's suffering.

As Robert aims the gun at the doe's head, he relives the trauma of Suzanne's murder. The text does not make this connection explicitly; however it is obvious from the following conversation between Robert and Jane:

I screamed as I pulled the trigger. [...] Death drew a film over her eyes. Life had left her. Carcass. My breath came in huffs. I wasn't getting enough air in. I was standing by the car, head bowed, I let the weapon fall on the ground and couldn't recognize the sound that came out of me. I was howling like a siren at night. [...] The sound of the shot was echoing in my head. ... I experienced the reality as if from behind a thick glass wall. This has already happened before. [...]

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<sup>189</sup> "Even voordat ik de dirt road bij de brievenbussen zou inslaan gebeurde het. Onze wegen kruisten op volle snelheid. Ik zag het niet. Zij zag het niet. [...] Een doffe klap, de harde *kangaroo bar* van de Dodge in haar gespierde achterlijf. Het hert vloog op en viel neer, ik was haar al voorbij, stond vloekend op de rem. [...] Twintig meter achter me lag ze, een roerloos dier. Toen ze me hoorde naderen hief ze haar kop en keek me aan met glanzende ogen." Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 224.

‘Alright’ said Jane. ‘What’s all this about? This is not a normal reaction.’

‘I will tell you all,’ I said, hoarsely.<sup>190</sup>

The description of re-traumatization and the ensuing panic attack that this moment induces in Robert harkens back to the panic attack described earlier (in section 2.3.1) in reaction to the momentarily perceived meaninglessness of the investigation. This time however, the affect is not induced by the stand in for the Robert’s real concern (foregrounded by the detective-like storyline), but with what he has been trying to process during his time in Horn; with Suzanne’s death (foregrounded by the affective storyline). It is therefore much more direct, raw and intensive. All the grief and anger at the catastrophe that has struck at his doorstep eight years ago is expressed and finally released in the screaming and the crying. The fact that Robert has had to kill the animal has triggered his old wounds and his pent-up emotions that completely overwhelm him with their intensity.

The connection between the concrete textual motif at the beginning and end of the novel (which causes all manner of symbolical layers and affective significance to attach to the latter moment) does not only frame the novel as what happens in between these two encounters. The second encounter between Robert and the doe is, just as the first one, a signal that the epistemological and ontological ways to construct identity are going to be bypassed, thus giving affective questions and relational construction of identity free reign. This time, unlike with the feeling of *déjà vu*, Robert makes more space for affect in his life, thus giving himself the chance to fully experience, acknowledge, process and integrate feelings in his life.

The fact that the doe motif is accompanied by an irrational component (in the first doe scene, this was the feeling of *déjà vu*) is augmented in this scene even further by another kind of textual signal; intertextuality. The use of intertextuality foregrounds both affective questions and creates an atmosphere of heightened affect here. The scene that occurs after Robert’s accident with the doe has an intense emotional atmosphere - the accident happens at night, Robert’s remorse about hurting an animal that has initially welcomed him to his new home plays a role, as well as his decision to involve Jane, in whom he is interested romantically. The significance

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<sup>190</sup> “Ik schreeuwde terwijl ik de trekker overhaalde. [...] De dood trok een vlies over haar ogen. Het leven was weg. Kadaver. Mijn adem gierde. Ik kon geen lucht meer krijgen. Ik stond naast de auto gebogen, liet het wapen vallen en herkende het geluid niet dat uit me kwam. Ik loeide als een versleten sirene. [...] Ik hoorde het schot in mijn schedel echoën. [...] Vanachter een dik glazen scherm nam ik de werkelijkheid waar. Dat had ik eerder meegemaakt. [...]”

‘Oké,’ zei Jane. ‘Wat heeft dit allemaal te betekenen? Deze reactie is niet normaal.’

‘Ik zal het je vertellen,’ zei ik schor.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 227-228.

and affective intensity of this moment is amplified by intertextual echoes of another scene in which a man in dire straits and in an emotionally intense situation calls a woman whose name is Jane. In the intertext, she hears his call spiritually, by means of an intuition or unusually heightened sensual experience, rather than by means of hearing.

Here, the text of *Zonder noorden* refers to the finale of *Jane Eyre*, particularly to the moment where Jane hears the desperate call of her lover, Edward Rochester although they are physically very distant from each other. The strange, almost supernatural atmosphere of *Jane Eyre* lends its intensity to the comparatively more mundane (although affectively also significant) scene in *Zonder noorden*. It is the famous finale of *Jane Eyre*, in particular the following scene, that is being referred to. The heroine, Jane, recounts:

The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh quivered on my bones. [...] I saw nothing: but I heard a voice somewhere cry—

“Jane! Jane! Jane!” Nothing more. ...

(I)t was the voice of a human being—a known, loved, well-remembered voice—that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe—wildly, eerily, urgently.<sup>191</sup>

For the reader who already recognizes the allusion (Robert and Jane later refer explicitly to the canonical work of English literature when reflecting on this scene), the intertextuality heightens the emotional and affective intensity and significance of the moment. Robert also echoes Rochester’s words, calling Jane’s name twice during this night scene, first when he arrives at her house and calls her in his distress about the doe and for the second time after he has shared with her why his reaction to this situation had been so intense:

When I was done talking – empty, done, raw – she remained seated and deep in thought. ... She stood up, came up behind me and took the blanket off of my shoulders. Her small hands began to massage my neck and shoulder muscles. ... She slipped her hands into the opening of my shirt. I raised my arms and pulled her head

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<sup>191</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre. an Autobiography*, (London, 1847), 220, ProQuest, <https://search.proquest.com/books/jane-eyre-autobiography-edited-currer-bell-three/docview/2138576735/se-2?accountid=35514>.

closer to me, next to my head, cheek to cheek.

‘Jane,’ I said. ‘Jane.’<sup>192</sup>

The second time Jane Miller’s name is spoken, it is after the crisis has passed. The name sounds like a sigh, expressing intimacy, relief and desire.

The doe accident leads to Robert opening up before Jane; his cathartic release of his emotions makes this moment even more significant. The interpretation of the relational consequences of the accident as a basis on which Robert can build his identity becomes more plausible by means of a contrast with the previously mentioned emptiness and absence of a core or essence that was foregrounded by the ontological construction of his identity. The expression of feelings in the presence of Jane creates a connection, a relationship, based on which Robert can build his identity although it is unstable and relativist. The relationship with Jane represents a hope for a richer and more stable life for Robert. With the relationship he has the chance to really become rooted in Horn. When it comes to sex on the night in question, the text emphasizes the significance of physical closeness for the construction of identity of both Jane and Robert: “We stepped, lightfooted, into each other’s territory. ... No longer were we who we had been before, became new and different.”<sup>193</sup> According to Aukje van Rooden, sex is imbued with a large amount of significance in the novels of millennial authors which can also be read as one of the expressions of relationism: “the many other bedfellows in these millennial novels (are) not a symbol of emptiness, but functional means through which one can experience connection [...]”<sup>194</sup> Still, despite this relationalist element characterizing the representation of a sexual act in this novel, Robert cannot be seen as the same type of character as the ones populating novels written by millennials, as we will see below.

The relativity and lack of stability that goes hand in hand with the relational identity is highlighted by means of oscillation that “overcomes and undermines [...] conflicting positions.”<sup>195</sup> Robert and Jane do not immediately throw their all into the relationship, they are

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<sup>192</sup> “‘Toen ik uitverteld was - leeg, op, rauw - bleef ze een tijdje zitten denken. [...] Ze stond op, kwam achter me staan en nam de deken van mijn schouders weg. Haar kleine handen begonnen de spieren in mijn nek en schouders te masseren. [...] Ze gleed met haar handen de opening van mijn overhemd in. Ik hief mijn armen en trok haar hoofd dicht naar me toe, naast het mijne, wang aan wang.

‘Jane,’ zei ik. ‘Jane.’” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 228.

<sup>193</sup> “We betraden lichtvoetig elkaars terrein. [...] Waren niet meer wie we waren, werden nieuw en anders.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 230.

<sup>194</sup> “De vele andere knuffelmaatjes in deze millennialromans (zijn) geen symbool voor ledigheid, maar functionele middelen om je verbonden te weten [...]” Aukje van Rooden, “Had ik maar een hondje Engagement van de millennialgeneratie,” *De Reactor*, published 30 October 2020, accessed 31 October 2022, <https://dereactor.org/teksten/aukje-van-rooden-had-ik-maar-een-hondje-engagement-van-de-millennialgeneratie>.

<sup>195</sup> Van den Akker en Vermeulen, *Metamodernism*, 10.

being cautious. Jane expresses it as follows: “I am not going to deny what has happened between us tonight no more than what it meant for me. But we don’t have to make a big deal out of it. I am free. You are free.”<sup>196</sup> Both of them, however, ascribe a lot of significance to the night that they have spent together, which becomes clear from how Robert thinks about it: “This was a night that you only experience once in your lifetime, so fully alive on the edge of death, with emotions of laser-sharp intensity, so completely in the moment, with all cells on high alert, so out of time.”<sup>197</sup> Even in this quotation we can hear echoes of the *Jane Eyre* intertextuality with its focus on heightened sensual perception: “it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor, from which they were now summoned and forced to wake.”<sup>198</sup> Based on this quotation, the significance of this moment as a basis for Robert’s new conception of relational identity would seem to be confirmed. However, next time the intertextual reference with *Jane Eyre* is foregrounded, it can be interpreted as another pole between which the novel oscillates again. Oscillation is therefore not only traceable on the level of the abstract motif but also foregrounded by means of the textual signal intertextuality.

The instability of relational identity and perhaps more specifically, of the budding relationship between Robert and Jane becomes clear when the intertext, *Jane Eyre*, is explicitly mentioned in the text:

‘But if I am blind and needy and if my soul cries out to yours in my lonely home,  
‘Jane! Jane!’ will you hear me then and will you come?’  
‘Yes, Mr. Rochester,’ said Jane.  
‘Edward. You can call me Edward.’  
‘Okay. Edward.’  
This was the first time that I really heard her laugh [...].<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> “Ik ga niet ontkennen wat er vannacht tussen ons is gebeurd, en evenmin welke betekenis dat voor me had. Maar we hoeven er geen consequenties aan te verbinden. Ik ben vrij. Jij bent vrij.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 233.

<sup>197</sup> “De nacht was er een geweest zoals een mens maar een enkele keer in zijn leven meemaakt, zo volmaakt levend op de rand van de dood, zo messcherp in zijn gevoelens, zo volledig overgegeven aan het moment, zo alert in alle cellen, zo los van de tijd.” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 232.

<sup>198</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre. an Autobiography*, 220.

<sup>199</sup> “‘Maar als ik blind en behoeftig ben en als mijn ziel in mijn eenzame huis naar de jouwe roept ‘Jane! Jane!’”, hoor je me dan en kom je dan?’

‘Yes, Mr. Rochester,’ zei Jane.

‘Edward. Je mag Edward zeggen.’

‘Goed. Edward.’

Voor het eerst hoorde ik haar echt lachen [...].” Noordervliet, *Zonder noorden*, 233.

This second intertextual reference foregrounds a different, namely an ontological, question. It can be seen as an expansion on the postmodern idea of identity as an emptiness, covered up, filled and masked by various stories. In this moment Robert is revising and re-remembering the night with Jane so that it would fit into the frame created by the hypotext, *Jane Eyre*.<sup>200</sup> He is re-forming his experience of the previous night so that it would be more in line with the emphases of the hypotext. This is the power of canonical texts – they function as frames within which the experiences of characters (but also of real readers, of course) can be recontextualized and by these means gain certain meanings rather than others. The explicit reference to *Jane Eyre* is re-formatting the memory that Robert has of the previous night and makes him see himself in the role of Rochester and Jane in the position of the titular heroine of the Victorian novel. This foregrounds an ontological question: does Robert's experience exist on its own or only as a reiteration of an influential cultural text, specifically the canonical work *Jane Eyre*?

This reframing of the experience (and the relationship with Jane) in terms of a well-known and widely available cultural story influences the way that Robert and Jane subsequently talk about their experience during their next date, which is the context wherein the previous quotation appears. They explicitly mention the source of intertextuality that has previously granted a special layer of mystery, intensity, and significance to the night of the doe which Robert called the most intense night of his life. The lightness and humor with which they refer to the Victorian novel now, on the evening after, alleviates the previously experienced seriousness and weight of the night. The use of intertextuality in the novel oscillates between the intensification of an intense and significant affective experience and the lightness with which that experience is relativized by means of a joke. The affective lightness connected with the second, ontological concern foregrounding the use of intertextuality can be related to the “free-floating signs and intensities”<sup>201</sup> characteristic of the postmodern waning of affect. However, speaking in Gibbons' terms, the meaningful emotional response that has been formulated is being undone again in the next oscillating movement. The metamodern affect – as opposed to Jameson's postmodern conception of affect – on which Robert pins his hopes towards the end of the novel is characterized by seriousness and intensity. The novel oscillates between both versions of affect and all three constructions of identity foregrounded by the *Jane Eyre* intertextuality and

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<sup>200</sup> I use the terminology of Gerard Genette who makes a useful distinction between a hypertext (in this case *Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis*) and an older text which is the source to which the hypertext refers (*Jane Eyre*). See *Draden in het donker*, ed. by Yra van Dijk, Maarten de Pourcq and Carl de Strycker (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2013), 44-45.

<sup>201</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism Or Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 9.

the doe motif, without giving a precedence to one or the other option. Thus, the third textual signal considered by means of the methodology of foregrounding confirms what the two previous sections have also shown – the novel is mostly governed by metamodern oscillation, a continuity between postmodernism and the contemporary which is more important as a structuring principle for *Zonder noorden* than either of the already identified dominants alone.

## 2.5 Conclusion

An analysis of a contemporary novel that aims to avoid inheriting the problems of periodizing accounts of contemporary literature needs to circumvent the problems paired with periodization. McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* contains a figurative passage, a parable of sorts, that illustrates the problem with a periodizing description of the aesthetic shift and at the same time also points to the shortcomings of the concept of dominant (as McHale uses it). He uses a quotation from an interview with an American writer, Steve Katz in order to illuminate the use of the dominant capturing “mechanisms of historical change”.<sup>202</sup> Katz speaks about the aesthetic shift in terms of crossing the street when the light turns green:

The logic of literary history brought writers in various cities—cities in Europe and Latin America as well as in North America—to a crosswalk; when the stoplights changed, they had one of two options, either to remain on this side and continue to practice a modernist poetics of the epistemological dominant (as many of them have done, of course), or to cross to a postmodernist poetics of the ontological dominant. The streets were different, but the *crossing* was the same.<sup>203</sup>

McHale uses the formalist tool of the dominant to describe the crossing from one governing aesthetic principle to another and the illustration he uses makes it seem like the nature of the crossing from modernism to postmodernism was very simple. Either stay on this side with the epistemological questions or cross over to the other side where one concerns oneself with the ontological questions. We could however ask ourselves whether the dynamic of historical change is as simple as crossing from one dominant aesthetic principle to another, as this image suggests.

Because the presupposed answer to this “whether” question is ‘no’, as Herrmann et al. also suggest, I have proposed a complication of the image of the crossing of a street by means of the concept of oscillation. The use of the concept of oscillation has allowed me to investigate a tool

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<sup>202</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 7.

<sup>203</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 11.

by means of which attention would not focus only on the new, innovative textual elements, as the use of the dominant as the only methodological concept for the analysis of novels would show me. It allowed me to focus also on the way in which continuities from earlier periods function in the texts. The complication of the dynamic of the shift with the back-and-forth of oscillation forces the literary critic or historiographer to slow down, check their methodology for periodizing and potentially distorting characteristics and lay aside the near-automatic focus on innovation and progress that characterizes this genre of writing about literature. By adding oscillation to Demeyer and Vitse's suggestion to read contemporary literature through the prism of the affective dominant, I have zoomed in on the specificity of the current aesthetic shift on the literary-historiographical level and have concluded that its dynamic is different than the one described by McHale, namely, much more aware of and favouring continuities. I have reached this conclusion after seeing plentiful examples of the functioning of oscillation as a continuity and as the foregrounded element in the text of *Zonder noorden*.

I sought for a way to analyze Noordervliet's novel without having recourse to references to current political situation, such as Herrmann et al. suggest in their call not to periodize but to still attempt historicization. Nor did I have recourse to ideology critique, as Demeyer and Vitse do in their attempt to historicize. I will return to the reasons why I have not chosen to follow the route of historicization and ideological critique in the conclusion to the dissertation. Although the concept of the dominant has not been helpful on the literary-historiographical level, it has still proven fruitful on the level of textual analysis where the methodology of foregrounding provided the necessary support in the analysis of a contemporary literary text. Foregrounding drew my attention to textual signals provoking various questions. The interpretive problem that *Zonder noorden* creates for analysis that uses foregrounding as a conceptual tool is that the textual signals foreground several issues at once. This is where oscillation came into play, this time also on the textual level, by enabling me to describe the movement between foregrounded questions and zoom in on their interconnectedness and mutual dependence. The continuities between postmodernism which have remained vague and unspecific in most obituaries of postmodernism or required the choice for a specific theme to provide a foothold for the textual analysis, have thus been decidedly put on the map throughout the analysis of *Zonder noorden*. The oscillation between foregrounding of various questions is both a continuity between contemporary and postmodern novels and also the characteristic that I consider to be most significant and descriptive for this contemporary novel.

While oscillation and foregrounding were the most important methodological instruments that I used for the analysis of *Zonder noorden*, I have also embedded the interpretation in recent insights into contemporary literature and affect theory. In the second section of the chapter, I have compared Gibbons' insights into the 'metamodern affect' with the postmodernist conception of affect as characterized by Jameson and shown how oscillation between these two conceptions is foregrounded by means of representation of consciousness. Both poles foregrounded by this textual signal and both oscillating dynamics explicated in section 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 of this chapter however illustrate that my approach to affect - described by Moyano Ariza as 'affect as excess' - is in keeping with the genealogical branch of affect theory that I use throughout in this project. Another embedding of my analysis in insights from recent articles analyzing contemporary Dutch novels, especially those written by authors of the millennial generation, came in the third section of the chapter. I have used the term relationism to describe one possible construction of identity that the novel is oscillating between in its use of abstract motifs. The other pole of the oscillation in the area of identity construction is the protagonist's identity as a collection of linguistic signs described by Vervaeck as representative for the postmodern ontological questions that also appear in *Zonder noorden*.

The attention that the novel pays to the representation of processes of consciousness and the various complications inherent to the representation of affect in literary texts bears witness to the fact that *Zonder noorden* is exploring the affective trend in contemporary literature only tentatively. The way in which affect is employed testifies to more creativity and playfulness in representation in the novels of the authors from the millennial generation who seem more committed to it.<sup>204</sup> This is visible especially where identity construction is concerned. Compared with the characters from the millennial novels,<sup>205</sup> Robert's relational identity is only partially sketched, and it is undermined by oscillation. The modernist aspect of identity construction foregrounded in the investigative plotline by means of Robert's emphasis on the power of information and the relativization of the significance of the night that he has spent with Jane prevent the possibility to read him as someone who understands himself, predominantly in relation to others. The description of his identity however does contain some

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<sup>204</sup> See, for example, Nina Polak's novel *Gebrek is een groot woord* with a representation of affective communication between a mother and a few weeks old foetus by means of a reference to arcade games. (Polak, *Gebrek is een groot woord*, 144)

<sup>205</sup> For a critical analysis of this aspect of the novelistic production of millennials, see Aragorn Fuhrmann, "Millennial fantasieën over oprechtheid bij Sally Rooney, Joost de Vries en Ben Lerner," *De Reactor*, published 10 March 2021, accessed 31 October 2022, <https://dereactor.org/teksten/millennial-fantasieen-over-oprechtheid-en-vervreemding-bij-sally-rooney-joost-de-vries-en-ben-lerner>.

characteristics of relationism and can therefore be seen as a sketch of a type of character that is more fully worked out and introduced in the novels by authors of the millennial generation. With oscillating and hesitating steps through the many nuances and oppositions, Nelleke Noordervliet's novel seeks a way towards a trend that academic critique has so far identified in mainly in the works of authors two generations younger.