

REVIEWS

David Kaufman/Michael Horn, **A LIBERATION ALBUM: Canadians in the Netherlands 1944-45**. McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, Toronto/Montreal/New York; 1980, pp. 178.

We all have our own war stories. I remember being hungry, eating steamed bread covered with a mixture of water and milk powder, and, of course, I was also one of those little boys who begged for cigarettes and chewing gum when the Canadians arrived. After the war the authorities deloused us, fed us sausages and crackers, and the Red Cross distributed clothes to the needy.

People in my village excused the Austrian troops who occupied us because they could not be blamed for the war what with being forced into it and all; everyone hated the Germans but we absolutely detested the collaborators. Everybody knew who they were, just as they knew who was in the underground. The Canadian troops were popular because they represented freedom, they had a lot of fun and they gave rides in their jeeps and tanks to young and old.

Kaufman and Horn's book, which is based on the film, "Liberation" by John Muller, takes the reader back to that period of history by means of photographs, a historical text, and interviews.

I studied the pictures carefully and discovered that half of the little boys looked like me; unfortunately, none of them looked particularly starved or hungry. Was that persistent gnawing feeling perhaps only a myth or does history eventually distort all events? But then, how can one measure hunger and suffering at any time?

The historical text, the interviews and autobiographical notes mesh nicely with the pictures and they provide a well-rounded image of what happened. This is not to say that the book is perfect. The historical text contains some peculiar statements, e.g.: "Objectionable too was the taking of hostages..." (p. 19) Another remark that makes little sense is the following: "No, this was infantry country if it was anything." (p. 23) There are other examples of the writer's Dutch getting in the way. As well, the admixture of the scholarly and the popular create a tone which is sometimes casual and uneven.

The interviews and autobiographical sketches provide that extra human dimension which is so often lacking in history texts. They also produce tidbits of information which illustrate how personal an affair war and liberation can be. Michael Horn retains vivid memories of the first time he ate chocolate. (p. 119) John Martens was amazed at the unequal stature of the Canadian soldiers: "You would see great, tall Canadians marching beside little ones - it was very funny." (p. 103)

Not surprisingly, the illustrations also underscore aspects of war and liberation that seldom reach the standard history text. This book abounds in pictures of happy couples, flag-waving Dutchmen, and grinning Canadian soldiers. Of course,

neither the text nor the pictures ignore completely the more gruesome aspects of the war years, but the emphasis is on the joy and the relief brought by the liberation.

The text's focus on the strongly positive impact made on the Dutch by the Canadian soldiers is quite justified because it is hard to think of any other people which so warmly remembers its liberators. After more than a century of neutrality, the Dutch had become ignorant of war and its viciousness. The German invasion overwhelmed them physically, psychologically, and morally. On the other hand, the Canadian soldiers brought with them values of generosity and of optimism and attitudes of openness and of simplicity which provided the Dutch with a glimpse of a new and different world. The Canadians' arrival did not eradicate in one fell swoop postwar religious infighting, political bickering, and the mean and petty authoritarianism which had characterized so much of Dutch life. It was not really until the 'sixties that Holland liberated itself from its own pettiness, but the short interlude of the Canadian presence had already given them a foretaste of other, and better, ways of living together.

A. van den Hoven

Under Dutch Skies. Edited and translated by Dorothy Howard and Hendrika Ruger. Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Netherlandic Press. 1981. 60 pages.

This most recent publication of Windsor's Netherlandic Press is an outstanding poetic picture of unique aspects of Netherlandic life, which should have obvious appeal for the scores of thousands of people who immigrated to Canada from The Netherlands after World War II. Its total audience will probably be much broader, however, for this book of Dutch poetry (with a careful English translation accompanying each poem) is a skilfully wrought vignette of Old world experience presented as a vivid contrast to the experience of North America. As the editors put it: "The Netherlands is a small country, and details are more important in an environment where space is precious." The volume is rendered yet more attractive by a number of complementary woodcuts from the Dutch-Canadian artist Gerard Brender à Brandis, who reveals a similar concern for "detail and space."

The editors offer excellent selections from the works of eleven modern Dutch poets. The poems have a good breadth, ranging from brief lyrics such as Paul Rodenko's "February Sun" and Jan Hanlo's "Poem" to idyllic long narratives and descriptive poems such as J.C. Noordstar's "The Bulbgrowers" and Koos Schuur's "Novemberland."

The translations themselves are sensitively done. They reveal a high fidelity to the original Dutch yet they emerge as excellent poems in English. In Morrien's "Snow", for example, the line "De laatste vlokken vallen" becomes "The last flakes fall." Thus both assonance and alliteration are retained in the translation, and while the shift is naturally made from the Dutch two-syllable words to the English

single-syllable words, the sense of emphasis in the meter is retained. The same sensitivity is suggested in lines from "The Bulbgrowers". An initial line, "handje in jandje", is translated as "little hand in little hand" to pick up the Dutch diminutive, but the principle is applied discreetly and not followed slavishly. Thus a later line in the same poem "stapje voor stapje" becomes appropriately "step by little step", avoiding an overly literal and damaging translation.

Similarly, the translators avoid following the original meter and rhyme in a mechanical fashion when to do so would result in an unpoetic English line or do violence to the original imagery. For

example, a line from Jan Hanlo's "Poem" has a strict iambic beat and rhymes with an earlier line: "Of laat des avonds langs de door de storm beruiste bomen gaan." The translators offer an equally poetic line and an iambic *emphasis* without the rhyme: "or late at night pass the trees in which the strong wind rustles."

The poetic sensitivity of the translators, the attractive layout of woodcuts and poems, and the thematic uniqueness of the selected poems combine to make this an exceptionally fine bilingual volume of poetry.

Arie Staal

BOOKS RECEIVED

SEEKING HEART'S SOLACE

An anthology of sixteenth & seventeenth century Dutch love poems. Selected and translated by Christopher Levenson. Toronto: The Aliquando Press, 1981, pp. 52.

SEEKING HEART'S SOLACE was designed, printed, and bound by William Rueter at The Aliquando Press, Toronto, using Poliphilus types impressed upon mouldmade Zerkall Nideggen paper, and bound into French marbled covered boards.

This edition is limited to 100 copies.

Price \$30.00, plus \$1.50 for postage and packing.

Direct all inquiries to:
William Rueter
236 Major Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2L6

Herman Bakhuis, **Catholic Power in the Netherlands**. Kingston-Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981, pp. 240.

Price \$24.95.

Direct all inquiries to:
McGill-Queen's University Press
63A St. George Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1A6

J. A. Theuws, **Transcendentale meditaties (Voor Dwarsfluit, Blazers en Violen) Transcendental Meditations (For Brass and Strings)** Windsor, Ontario: The Netherlandic Press, 1982, pp. 71.

Price \$4.95.

Direct all enquiries to:
The Netherlandic Press
1176 Ouellette Avenue, Apt. 605
Windsor, Ontario
N9A 6S9