

BOOK REVIEWS

Bruxelles, croissance d'une capitale. Sous la direction de Jean Stengers. Editeur: Fonds Mercator, Lange Nieuwstraat 76, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, 1979.

Thirty-five historians and folklorists contributed to the composition of this monumental book (six pounds!), crowning the millenium of the Belgian capital. It is the only book on Brussels written cooperatively by Walloons, Flemings and the natives of Brussels, thus combining the viewpoints of the two major linguistic groups. Supported financially by the various boroughs (communes) of Brussels, this publication stands out for its scientific approach, the exquisite taste in the choice of illustrations, and the luxurious aspect of the whole album. The book has also been published in Dutch. The organization of the team and the supervision of the work were done by Professor Jean Stengers. Various aspects of the history of Brussels are presented; its political, economic and social evolution are traced, with particular attention to the growing influence of French. Above all, it conveys a message of cultural tolerance between the two linguistic groups. It is a splendid book to read and to leaf through, a reference work for anyone interested in European history and in the history of the economic capital of Europe, Brussels.

Martin Monestier, Brel, le livre du souvenir. Editions Tchou, Paris, 1979.

Jacques Brel, famous composer and singer of popular songs, a native of Brussels, though often thought of as French (were we not told once that he was alive and well in Paris?), succumbed to cancer in October, 1978. This book reveals various facets of Brel: the eternal adolescent torn between his idealism and his awareness of the crude realities of life, Brel the poet whose songs always had a

deep human message, Brel the man who had experienced failure (in 1953-1954 he had eighty-two auditions and was turned down every time). Then there is his triumphant success and the trying tours all over the world, seemingly obligatory if a popular star is to profit from what is usually an ephemeral fame. Praised and loved in Europe, Africa, the United States and even Russia, Brel ended his career when he retired to Tahiti, apparently sick and lonely, to lead a quiet life. Before his death, he did complete a final album, parts of which became controversial in Belgium. He now lies buried in the Marquesas near Gauguin, that other famous exile. This work contains almost four hundred photographs of Brel and is a poignant celebration of one of Belgium's most vibrant popular singers.

Louise Nelson

Crones Utrecht. Utrecht: Vava, 1979.

Crone, C. C. S. Het feestelijke leven. Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1939.

Crone, C. C. S. De schuiftrumpet; verzameld proza. Amsterdam: Em. Querido, 1977.

Mielen, Eddy, comp. "C. C. S. Crone; kroniek van een Utrechtse schrijver." De Engelbewaarder, v. 3, April 1978.

Cornelius Carolus Stephan Crone was born on the Oudkerkhof of Utrecht in 1914, and remained a "Utrechtenaar" for some thirty years, from birth until he moved to Amsterdam in August, 1944. There he worked for the publishing firm of Strengholt. When he died, at the early age of 36, he was editor of the Rayon Revue, published by the AKU company in Arnhem, and a glossy house organ of international importance.

In spite of being away from Utrecht for the last six years of his life, during this period of exile, just as

earlier, he used the daily life of the city of Utrecht as the central theme of almost all of his works. In his stories he described in poignant detail events in the lives of insignificant people, suffering disease, poverty, sheer bad luck, an overwhelming shyness, all typical of the people of the urban middle and lower classes of the Netherlands during the depression years of Crone's youth. The stories are pervaded with an air of heavy melancholy, and set in the quiet streets and back alleys of the city. Yet the sadness is lightened by Crone's sense of humour, and his descriptions of such cheerful aspects as a familiar tune whistled by a delivery boy, or played on a barrel organ.

Crone's unique method of composition has led to an oddly fragmented style of writing. He would jot down brief notes, clip them, and paste them in a bookkeeper's ledger. He would number these notes, and eventually retrieve them from his personal "writer's data bank", piece them together and cement them into a story. This odd manner of writing gives his prose a highly concentrated quality, for each of these vignettes of Utrecht life is the distilled result of an event or mood, its essence, as it was observed and meticulously recorded at the time. This may be seen in the following passage from his novel Het feestelijk leven:

Een man kwam op de drempel van zijn huisdeur staan om het draaiorgel beter te horen. Hij zag hoe de kinderen van de scholen aan het Damplein en Achter St. Pieter door de muziek waren aangelokt, maar werd opgeschrikt door de orgelman met het centenbakje. Toen hij naar zijn vestzak tastte, merke hij, dat hij pas half was aangekleed. Het draaiorgel reed al verder. Hij hoorde het gefluit van een slagersjongen, die plotseling haast had. Zijn huis leek hem opeens veel triestiger en hij maakte zich klaar voor een wandeling.

Simon Carmiggelt has called Crone the most neglected author in Netherlandic literature. However, the selective bibliography to be found in the journal De Engelbewaarder

provides a listing of a surprisingly large number of articles about Crone's work. Some of the titles indicate a growing interest in his work during the past decade: "De Carmiggelt van de jaren dertig", "Fijn Utrecht's proza van Crone herdrukt", "Crone verdient te worden herontdekt", etc. Within weeks of its publication Crones Utrecht went into its third printing because of the demand of Utrechtenaren for personal copies of this fine book of photographs, a work published with partial financial support from the City of Utrecht. C. C. S. Crone is a long neglected Dutch author who deserves his rightful place among recognized literary figures such as Nescio, Thyssen, Elsschot, Dorna, and Carmiggelt.



Fig. 10

Illustration from Crones Utrecht



Fig. 11
 "...het Klaasje"

De muren zijn te hoog en
 de stad verweert zich niet
 in hun betonnen greep en
 haar ziel is uitgeknepen;
 maar wat niet is vervlogen
 is Utrechts klein verdriet.

Want als men langs de werven
 zijn laatste adem schept,
 klinkt in de avond laat er
 muziek over het water.
 Nee, Crone zal niet sterven,
 zolang het Klaasje klept.

Uit: Arie Niemeijer: Leed in de provincie

Hendrika Ruger

Lof van Utrecht by Ad den Besten. Utrecht: Váva, 1976.

Utrechtse Sonetten van weleer by Jan Praas. Utrecht: Váva, 1978.

Sonnets make me think of Baudelaire and of Shakespeare's dark ladies but not of Utrecht. But, of course, there are two kinds of sonneteers - those who intend to revitalize the form and the others who use the form in order to insist on all that is traditional or even archaic.

Den Besten and Praas emphasize the latter aspects. Obviously, both of them love Utrecht more profoundly than I ever did and they manage to convey their affection through imagery and through a use of language which reveals that their roots are deep. Praas speaks of the city - its tower, its canals - with reverence and addresses it by using the polite "U" form. Den Besten insists that he can only speak of Utrecht in tones that are as serious as those that might be employed by a priest.

When one considers what Utrecht stands for one has to admit that their attitude is appropriate. Utrecht is the center of protestantism and is not to be confused with the boisterous port of Amsterdam, or the deliberate modernism of Rotterdam. As Den Besten puts it: Utrecht is a city along the canals of which one walks and whispers and where one dies without great sorrow. And, according to Praas, if one can find no peace it is because one thinks with melancholy of the past, which obtrudes everywhere even though it is not colourful and is encountered only as a shadow of Pope Adrian (my namesake!) which vanishes without trace of colour. Praas' dominant theme is not of time nor that of its passing; he registers a content recognition that Utrecht's meaning resides in the protrusion of its past.

Den Besten sees himself as the child of Utrecht and he adores the city as one might one's creator. The city makes him feel small because he owes his existence to it.

These two collections of sonnets do not introduce one to the marvels of modern poetic techniques; however, they are an excellent introduction to the atmosphere of a city, and these poets definitions of it delimit it well.

A. van den Hoven

CREDITS

Photographs: Municipal Photographic Service, City of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Poem: The two stanzas on p. 54 are from "CCS" by Arie Niemeijer, Leed in de Provincie (Utrecht, 1977) quoted in De Engelbewarder, Vol. 11, April, 1978.