

## BOOK REVIEWS

Jozef Deleu (ed.): *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*. A Yearbook 1995-96. Rekkem, Belgium: Stichting Ons Erfdeel, 1995. pp. 320. CAN \$97.00

Like the previous two yearbooks published in this series, this edition is an exceedingly handsome book, printed on quality paper, copiously illustrated with fairly good reproductions, and nicely bound in a visually attractive cover. As is the case in the two other volumes, the articles (thirty this time) are meant to inform the English-speaking public of the heritage and contemporary contributions of the Netherlands and Flanders in the fields of architecture, music, literature, theatre, dance, film, the visual arts, science, society, politics and religion. These articles are followed by shorter notes on the same topics in a section entitled "Chronicle", and a list of Dutch books published in English translation, compiled in 1994, concludes the volume.

As a source of information about culture and the sciences in the Netherlands the book is invaluable for the English speaking reader. The eclectic nature of the selection of material, however, has both its advantages and its disadvantages. On the one hand, the reader is fascinated by the amount of activity in cultural, sociological and scientific areas carried on by the relatively small portion of the world's population that claims Dutch as its native language, but on the other hand, one is puzzled at times by the selection of topics discussed and their presentation. It is all very well to cover the period from the Middle Ages to the present, but one wonders why the first article, which deals with children's literature and rightly states that "Dutch Children's literature, once an unknown lowland terrain" (11), has been translated into many languages, has to be followed by an article on the Jewish community in Antwerp, which in turn is followed by one on post-World War Two politics in the Netherlands.

The editorial decision not to group the articles chronologically or by particular areas of interest does have its drawbacks and its advantages for the reader of the book. To name but one example, an

informative presentation on the state of Catholicism in Flanders in the last few decades is sandwiched between an introduction to Margriet de Moor's work, with an excerpt from her *Chosen Landscape*, and an article on the Beast Epic. There is nothing wrong with this approach; in fact, it encourages the reader who is browsing through the book to read a particular article and then, perhaps, look at an adjacent one on a topic about which he or she may know relatively little.

As far as the style and the tone of the essays are concerned, they vary greatly, of course, according to the background, training, and interest of their authors. In this particular instance, it is delightful to compare the approach of Sötemann to de Moor's work with that of Kerkhofs in the latter's discussion (complete with tables showing the decline in church attendance) of the Catholic church in contemporary Flanders. Where else but in such a collection would one find an essay on a Dutch contemporary writer of prose, an essay composed by a renowned scholar of Dutch literature, who is known for his incisive analyses of twentieth century Dutch poetry and his efforts to place this poetry within a European context, next to one by an emeritus professor of theology who optimistically concludes that in spite of "priestless parishes and empty cloisters" (230), and the "general alienation from the Church [which is] gathering speed" (228), as is indicated by the decline of church attendance in Flanders, "no alternative has yet succeeded in replacing Christianity as a meaningful ideology" (232)?

As is to be expected in a compendium of this sort with contributors from such a variety of disciplines, the style and format of the articles are not consistent, and this at times - but certainly not for the main part - may be the fault of a few of the translations. At times too much information is packed into an article, so that one is simply bewildered by names, performances and dates. This is certainly the case with the articles on the history of the "Nederlands Dans Theater" and contemporary music in the Netherlands. It might have been useful at times to put some of the topics discussed into some sort of perspective.

For the most part, suggestions for further reading in English or sources of information on a given subject are provided at the end of an article, and this is extremely useful. On the other hand, one wonders, since hardly any articles are followed by footnotes, why there are more than two pages of notes, with many references to works not accessible to the non-Dutch speaking reader, at the conclusion of S. Groenveld's "The Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Wars: Economic or Political Issues." Some further editing would have solved this inconsistency.

On the whole, however, in spite of or perhaps because of the variety of topics discussed, this book is extremely worthwhile for the English speaking reader who wishes to know more about Flanders and the Netherlands.

JOHN MICHIELSEN  
Brock University

Klaas and Reindert De Vries: *Leaving Home Forever*, Electa Press Series, number 2, 1995, Windsor: Netherlandic Press. 64pp.

J. and A. De Groot: *Separation and Inheritance*, The Story of Jan and Aagje De Groot, Electa Press, Windsor: Netherlandic Press, 1995. 90pp.

The Netherlandic Press continues to publish a number of most interesting books. The two books reviewed here are part of a new series, called *Electa*. The first is a translation of a rare brochure entitled *Van Amsterdam naar Canada*, printed in October 1892, in which the brothers describe how they departed from Amsterdam on the 14th of May of that year aboard the steamer Didam and arrived in Brockville, Canada on the 2nd of June, having docked in New York. From Brockville the journey went on by train to Winnipeg and then to Yorkton, from where they had to walk another 18 to 20 miles to the farm where they were to start working.

The booklet (64 pages) opens with a valuable Preface by the historian Dr. J. Th. J. Krijff, who tells about the economic and social situation in the Netherlands at the end of the Great Depression (1873-1896). One of the poorest areas was the Southeastern part of the province of Friesland. Most people were unemployed, especially during the winter time, and had to live on charity. Sod huts were the usual dwellings for many of the peat-workers. The De Vries brothers decided to leave Jubbega-Schurega where

they lived, to emigrate to Canada, which was advertising for strong young men.

In an Appendix Klaas de Vries tells the story of the establishment of the Christian Reformed Church in Elmwood, Winnipeg in 1907, which was the second Christian Reformed Church on Canadian soil after Nobleford (Nijverdal).

Hendrika Ruger has produced an almost perfect translation of the old Dutch documents. The appearance of this publication is — like everything which comes from the Netherlandic Press — impeccable. A number of excellent illustrations help considerably in understanding the written text. We are thankful that, with the support of the Canada Council, an important part of the history of the Dutch Reformed immigration into Canada at the end of the 19th century has been preserved for us and future generations.

The second booklet shows on its cover an aerial photograph of Broek op Langendijk, where the De Groots came from (they live now in Sarnia). Jan de Groot did what all people of his age should do, he wrote his life-story in a scribbler. Many of our older immigrants could tell similar stories, but - alas - oral tradition gets lost easily. (Some people today use a computer). His wife Aagje added some comments, and Dr. Michael Vander Weele, professor at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, who is married to one of the De Groots' six daughters, edited the volume.

From this book I learned a lot about the cabbage growers in Broek op Langendijk, which is indeed on a "lange dijk" — the illustration on the cover makes this quite clear.

The composition of the book is a bit confusing. It opens with a section called "Introduction: Cold Storage and Anchors", but it is simply the first chapter. The so-called first chapter says it deals with ship-burning, but actually describes the voyage on the Statendam, not the burning of it. The next chapter deals with Holland after World War II and is followed by a chapter dealing with the settlement of the De Groot family in Canada. But then in a following chapter we return once again to Broek op Langendijk during the war. A more chronological order might have made the reading easier.