

## Review

*Standing Clear, a Festschrift for Reinder P. Meyer.*  
Ed. Jane Fenoulhet & Theo Hermans. London:  
Centre for Low Countries Studies, 1991.

This collection of essays was written by former students and colleagues of Reinder P. Meyer, who retired in 1988 from the Chair of Dutch Language and Literature at the University of London, which he had held since 1971. Meyer is known not only as the co-author of a *Dutch Grammar and Reader* (1958) but especially for his *Literature of the Low Countries* (1971). In addition, it is estimated that he wrote some 700 book reviews, primarily in the Literary Supplement of the *NRC Handelsblad*.

The essays collected here in typical Festschrift fashion, lack an overall theme; rather, it appears, they are organized in order of proximity to Meyer's own specialty. Six of them deal with modern literature, four with 16th and 17th century literature, and two with linguistics. An outsider in these groupings is the article by Dick Boukema, in which he examines Meyer's own book reviews and, by means of statistics and tables, derives a set of criteria which Meyer uses in the description and evaluation of texts reviewed.

Margaretha H. Schenkeveld opens the collection with an article on Gerard Reve's novel *Werther Nieland* (1949), in which she sets out to prove, using categories introduced by Frank K. Stanzel (*Typische Formen des Romans*, 1965) that it is necessary for an adequate understanding of this novel to recognize the crucial relationship between the older, narrating Elmer and the younger, experiencing Elmer. The presence of this narrator is felt in certain elements of style, in the use of parentheses, in the symbolic structure of the novel - a circle - and in frequent narrator interventions. The use of symbolism is also briefly discussed.

In "Willem Elsschot's *Kaas*," Lesley Gilbert attempts to show that the "Inleiding" Elsschot wrote for the novel is by no means a mere afterthought, but that this preface discusses concepts (especially the idea of

life being "tragic"), certain matters of style (rhythm, cohesion and abstraction) and specific techniques with which Elsschot works in the body of the novel itself. Though Gilbert's essay is, as he claims, not intended as a profoundly scholarly work, and though much of it is concerned with plot, his interesting conclusion that *Kaas*, so far from being poorly put together, is perhaps rather too constructed, is on the whole convincing.

Jan Fenoulhet examines the topic of voyeurism in the novels of Simon Vestdijk, in "From Peeping Tom to Prophet." Voyeurism is an important device in Vestdijk to set up a dynamic between text and reader. It can be used in different ways, and can have several functions. In the case of *De Ziener*, it could be argued that there are parallels between the main character Le Roy's type of voyeurism and the "voyeurism" of writers in general, who spy on people in order to write about them and reveal their secrets; in the case of *Het verboden bacchanaal* voyeurism is shown in a more innocent form, as adolescent discovery of sexuality and an unorthodox form of emotional gratification. In both novels, it is particularly in the case of isolated and lonely individuals that the need for contact with others takes such a problematic form. Fenoulhet wonders whether voyeurism expresses a basic human instinct, or whether the need to spy on others merely indicates the hope one will observe something sexual.

Frida Balk-Smit Duyzentkunst follows Fenoulhet with a short article setting out to prove that science and poetry, specifically "magical" poetry, need not be mutually exclusive. She uses poems by Gerrit Achterberg to demonstrate this. Not only does this author have a predilection for highly specialized scientific terms: he also argues in a strictly logical, quasi-scientific fashion in his poems, and shares with science the belief that a whole is the sum of its parts and nothing more. But at the same time Achterberg proposes the possibility of literally bringing the dead beloved back to life. Balk-Smit Duyzentkunst suggests that such beliefs come from the author's strict, fundamentalist background,

which accepts the possibility of miracles without argument.

Another major poet of the 20th century, Martinus Nijhoff, is the subject of an essay by William Woods. He argues that the mysterious man in "Het uur U" is a double symbol: for Death and for Christ. Nijhoff as post-Symbolist, frequently works with such double symbols and "doubled images," at times going so far as to develop two quite independent strings of images or ideas from the same original symbol.

In contrast to Woods, Kees Snoek, himself a poet, discusses a much less known poet, G.J. Resink, born in 1911 in Indonesia, who in 1952 published a small volume of poetry, *Op de breuklijn*, and in 1963 *Kreeft en steenbok*. Snoek is particularly interested in the cosmic imagery of Resink's poems, for which he finds sources in J.A. Dèrmouw (who wrote under the pseudonym Adwaita) and Hendrik Marsman. With the former Resink shares a preference for creating new compound nouns, and a striking plasticity, whereas a sense of dynamism links him with the Expressionist verse of Marsman. Though some vague intimations of afterlife are present in *Kreeft en steenbok*, Snoek feels that Resink's cosmic consciousness is ultimately shown in his Balinese poems to be of an agnostic and Darwinian kind.

In 1591 the Renaissance poet Jan Vander Noot published a bilingual (French/Dutch) poem entitled "Ode Teghen d'onwetende vyanden der Poëteryen" (an ode against the ignorant, the enemies of poetry). At first sight an excessive self-glorification, the poem is, according to Karel Bostoen, part of an "Europeiad," a large work intended to celebrate an ideal concept of Europe. Because of external circumstances, primarily wars and discord among the nations, Vander Noot never finished this project, but Bostoen, who traces the poet's career, can point to a number of poems in which his intention to write such an extended work are indicated.

One of the main activities of the group around Reinder P. Meyer, which beside teaching and doing research is also involved in the publication of *Dutch Crossing*, has always been translation. Theo Hermans, himself a very active and able translator, contributes an important essay to the collection in which he deals with a crucial problem - that of the translator's choice (or hopefully a synthesis) between an elegant and a faithful translation. Hermans shows how this problem was enunciated already in the Dutch Renaissance, in the debate about a "Rhetorijckelijk" and "getrouwelijck" translation. Hermans deals with such important figures as Cornelis van Ghistele, Coornhert, Marc Antonius Gilles and Johan van Heemskerck to show the range of opinions

concerning this problem, and the art of translation in general. The author states that his article is intended as a report of work in progress; the exhaustive bibliography indicates that this ambitious project is being undertaken in a splendidly scholarly fashion.

Similarly informed and informing are the other two articles dealing with this period in literature. Peter King links Dutch genre painting and drama in the 17th century and shows how many paintings are inspired by contemporary plays, especially comedies; King notes a marked softening of earlier licentiousness and a distancing from breaches of decorum in the 17th century. Most genre paintings he examines introduce a moral integrity which provides a backdrop to the surface realism and naturalism we cannot and should not ignore. In a very different vein, Ton Broos, who has just completed a major study of the writer and painter Jacob Campo Weyerman, provides a short piece of detective work establishing the possibility that Weyerman personally knew the hack writer Ned Ward, part of whose *The London Spy* he translated. Weyerman was also the translator of a number of other English texts, among them by Jonathan Swift.

The Festschrift is rounded off by two articles on linguistic topics. J.W. de Vries shows how Indonesian has adopted to some extent (especially in the written language) a system of relative clauses which it did not formerly have. Reinier Salverda, finally, provides what he feels is a long overdue discussion of the contribution of H.J. Pos to early structural linguistics.

All in all, this Festschrift provides an interesting cross-section of the kind of activities in which the British "Neerlandici" are involved. Though one might quibble with the differences in quality, degree of scholarship and range of tone (from almost cosy-familiar to dauntingly learned) displayed here, the collection, especially in its interdisciplinary character, is a welcome addition to the still small body of writings on the Low Countries in English.

The Festschrift includes a list of the major publications by Meyer.