

What If the Twain Do Meet? Prevalent Patterns in the Encounter between East and West in Some Dutch Novels of the East Indies

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I

The encounter -- often the confrontation -- between representatives of East and West is a prevailing theme in Dutch novels set in the former Dutch East Indies. That especially *this* theme is capable of a tremendous range of variations should not surprise us, since it is both a profound one, capable of intellectual, sometimes philosophical treatment, and one which may entail passionate involvement. To even begin to catalogue all occurrences of the theme would be impossible and, because of its wide range of treatment, probably not very rewarding. A "structural" approach seems therefore to be not only appropriate, but necessary.

What I would like to offer in the following paper is a sketch of work in progress, based for the moment on an extremely modest choice of titles. I have examined five texts: E. Breton de Nijs' *Vergeelde Portretten uit een Indisch familiealbum* (Yellowed Portraits from a Dutch Indies Family Album) (1954), Augusta de Wit's short novel *Orpheus in de dessa* (Orpheus in the Dessa) (1903), Maria Dermoût's *De tienduizend dingen* (The Ten Thousand Things) (1955), H. J. Friedericy's *De raadsman* (The Councillor) (1958) and Johan Fabricius' *Eiland der demonen: roman over Bali* (Island of Demons: Novel about Bali) (1963).¹ Since all of these novels were written either during or relatively shortly after the end of the Dutch colonial period, the authors, most of them born in the Dutch Indies themselves, still had first-hand experience of the country and the people about whom they were writing. This in itself proves of course very little about the "reliability" of these texts in an empirical sense; in fact I am not particularly interested in their truth-value in a concrete

and absolute sense. To be sure, the sociological information contained in these works of fiction is seemingly so great that the temptation exists to read them as documents rather than as literary texts. That this would lead to a very strange and distorted view of the Dutch Indies, however, becomes clear very quickly. After all, each author's view of this country and its inhabitants is determined first and foremost by his need to shape his subject in terms of a work of art. This does not mean that the image of the Dutch Indies as it appears in such fiction has no relation at all to reality, or that one cannot draw some conclusions about the country that existed and continues to exist in time and space. But we must realize that the Dutch Indies in a work of art is primarily a construct of the mind, not a photographic record of a past reality. The advantage of looking at texts written by people with direct knowledge of the colonial period is, nevertheless, that the more deliberate fictionalizing which generally comes with greater distance and freedom, is likely to be less great in the earlier texts than in those of younger authors, and that the mental construct--because it is a product of experience as well as a message intended for readers to whom the Dutch Indies represent a reality still fairly close to the heart and mind--yields more in the way of classifiable and quantifiable elements.

Even when the authors are writing from experience, however, (though obviously transformed through the process of art), the range of views is considerable. This is first of all a question of a number of deliberate choices. In the case of E. Breton de Nijs (pseudonym of Rob Nieuwenhuys), for example, there is a deliberate attempt to reconstruct some kind of personal family history. Breton de Nijs was the compiler of the important photobook *Tempo Doeoe*,

fotografische documenten uit het oude Indië 1870-1914 (Tempo Doeoe, Photographic Documents from the Old Indies 1870-1914), and a number of anthologies of Dutch East Indies literature. He was born on the island of Java in 1908 and had a typical Dutch Indies childhood. In writing his novel *Vergeelde Portretten uit een Indisch familiealbum* this family background became alive again for him. But he also has a "hidden agenda," which he states explicitly at one point in his narrative. His interest in the main character among his many family members lies in her representative character:

...hoe sta ik tegenover deze mensen, hoe sta ik tegenover Tante Sophie? Ik wil haar nu maken tot het middelpunt van mijn verhaal. Om haar familieverwantschap, maar ook omdat ze een individuele nuancing vertegenwoordigt van een soort mensen, van deze soort Indische mensen. Hoe sta ik tegenover haar? Ik kan het niet zeggen. Alweer met "gemengde gevoelens." (55)²

And specifying the "soort" (kind) to which Aunt Sophie belongs, he tells us:

Via haar kan ik immers anderen ontmoeten . . . ik kan ze horen praten en zien handelen in al hun, nù, voor mij angstwekkend clan- en klassegevoel. Want ze vertegenwoordigen allen tezamen niet alleen maar "een grote familie", maar ook een, reeds bij hun leven stervende klasse . . . Een klasse van heersers, gewend te bevelen, gewend recht te spreken en desnoods te beschikken over andermans vrijheid. (53-4)³

Such formulations must alert us to the author's intentions not simply to tell a story, but to draw some kind of moral from his story. By contrast, Augusta de Wit, who for a number of years was a teacher on Java, did not, in her most famous short novel *Orpheus in de dessa*, set out to reconstruct more or less realistically her experiences, or to describe the Dutch Indies

in a general way. Her novel is deliberately poetic, deliberately held vague as to time and location, and concentrates on the crucial encounter between a Dutch engineer and a handicapped native flute-player. Her theme is specifically the impossibility of the Westerner to understand the Eastern mind. Equally lyrical and poetic, Maria Dermoût's novel *De tienduizend dingen* resembles Augusta de Wit's novella, but the novel is far larger in scope, and attempts to give a more panoramic view of an island in the Moluccas. The very title of the novel hints at a basic unity underlying the multitude of observable phenomena, just as the novel's construction fans out from the main character, Mevrouw Kleyntjes, to embrace most of the social strata and a number of striking personalities on the island. And while H. J. Friedericy, in his short novel *De raadsman* concentrates, like Augusta de Wit, on the relationship between a Dutchman and a native of Makassar, this time the dichotomies are not so much between the Western and the Eastern mind or mentality, as between the status quo, in the final analysis embodied by both the Dutch official and his native administrative assistant and counsellor on the one hand, and the problematic future of the Dutch Indies (partly represented by the latter's son) on the other. In Johan Fabricius' novel *Eiland der demonen*, finally, the contrast between East and West is worked out not in terms of sociological, political or economic problems, but is narrowly focussed on the impossible love between a Dutch artist and a native girl on the island of Bali.

Varying intentions and experiences, different underlying philosophies and obvious differences in temperament, even the gender of the author -- all these are important factors entering into the image the novel presents of the encounter East/West. To these must be added the various types of narratives and prose structures of the texts. Two of the novels under discussion have a loose episodic structure; this results in a kind of

structure; this results in a kind of panoramic impression of a whole community or region, even, in the best of cases, in a concise characteristic of a whole nation. This is the structure of *De raadsman* and of *De tienduizend dingen*. In both novels, the necessary unity is provided by linking devices: in *De raadsman* it is the relationship between the Dutch official and his native assistant, in *De tienduizend dingen* it is the old Mevrouw van Kleyntjes, whose presence is felt throughout the novel, and whose garden and city property provide the location for other episodes in the novel. *Orpheus in de dessa*, by contrast, has the classical construction of a novella, with a maximum of concentration on essentials, and a minimum of ballast of psychology, sociology or naturalistic description. The story moves quickly from encounter through enchantment to deception and catastrophe.

As indicated earlier, Breton de Nijs' *Vergeelde portretten* is basically the story of one family; it begins with the end, with the death of the main protagonist, "tante Sophie," then returns to the past to reconstruct the story of the Dutch Indies family's progress from the narrator's youth to his final encounter with the protagonist. While embracing all the members of the family, the focus remains nevertheless on aunt Sophie.

Only one novel can be said to have the typical structure of a realist novel, Johan Fabricius' *Eiland der demonen*. Its plot is linear, it moves in strictly chronological order and all sub-plots and other elements are closely tied to the main action. It too, like Augusta de Wit's novella, moves from encounter to enchantment, from deception to catastrophe, but it attempts to give a much more elaborate and detailed picture of the island on which the action takes place, and presents a much broader view of local customs, personalities and the problems facing Bali in its rush towards modernity.

Such structural and generic features are obviously not without consequences; and when one then turns to their

specifically narrative features, the significance of the "how" for the transmission of the "what" becomes even more obvious. For one thing, the focalization in these novels, the narrative perspective, is almost exclusively tied to that of the Westerner. In every novel, the angle is one of "strangeness:" In *Orpheus in de dessa* this is made a theme in the very first pages. The Dutch engineer reacts to the unfamiliar sound of a flute in the night with the exclamation: "Een wielewaal in de middernacht!"⁴ immediately to be followed by the remark: "Waarom niet, hier in Indië, waar alles zo vreemd was en verrassend, dat het gewone niet van het onmogelijke onderscheiden kon worden?"(6)⁵ In *Eiland der demonen*, the local king asks an obviously rhetorical question when he says: "Wat zoeken ze hier toch allemaal, die vreemdelingen? Verschilt uw land zoveel van het onze?"(15)⁶ It is the element of strangeness which creates the multiple tensions between what is perceived and what is supposed, what is assumed to be understood and that which remains "ondoorgrondelijk" (impenetrable), as the hero of *Eiland der demonen* finally has to admit his beloved has remained for him.

There are few exceptions to this focalization. True, in *De raadsman* the native administrative assistant, Toewan Anwar, is in the beginning of the novel seen to be awaiting the arrival of the very young new Dutch administrator (the Toewan Petoro), and we glimpse his bewilderment over the wisdom of the Dutch to send such inexperienced officials into this territory (the novel is told in the third person, with an omniscient, though not very intrusive narrator.) With the arrival of Toewan Petoro, however, the focus shifts, and stays from then on with the Dutchman. This is the "normal" procedure in most of the works under discussion. It obviously has momentous consequences, because the "native" point of view is in all cases a mediated one, and the image of the Easterner is "available" only through the prism of Western eyes. Only in one of

these texts is there a significant deviation from this viewpoint, in the episode entitled "De professor" (The Professor) in Dermoût's *De tienduizend dingen*.

Having gathered some insight into the structural features which color the descriptions of the encounter East/West in these novels, one could now proceed along various lines to analyze the actual nature of this encounter. There are many possible ways to go about it, and what is offered here as a set of questions is the mere outline of what a more extensive study of the theme would have to entail. I propose the following ways of looking at the problem, as a kind of turning around the subject much as one might turn around a piece of sculpture.

1. What contacts do exist between representatives of East and West? The answer to this question involves a short description of the various subgroups in each category.

2. What is the frequency of the contacts between these various groups?

3. How could we characterize these various relationships? (Typology). Here the generic and structural features enter once more into it, and the style, mood and tone of the narratives become important again.

4. How can the poles negative/positive be used now to evaluate the image each of the two categories has of the other?

5. How do these poles lead to a problematizing of the encounter in specific terms (personal, intensive relations) and in general terms (East is East, and West is West etc)?

6. Finally, the question might be asked, what the subtext of a number of these texts is. Here not only that which is explicitly stated has to be taken into consideration, but also that which the texts allow to remain silent, or that which it actually tries to hide.

I shall now give some brief indications of my own findings.

II

1. If we look at the two large groups with which we are concerned, the Westerners and Easterners, we notice that we can subdivide both categories into a number of sub-categories. For the Westerners there are the Dutch, and the non-Dutch. Within the Dutch group there are officials (government and army representatives at various levels of the hierarchy); there are those engaged in commerce or agriculture; and finally the professionals such as artists, doctors, lawyers and teachers. In the group of the non-Dutch we find, in *De tienduizend dingen* for example, the Scottish professor; and in *Eiland der demonen*, the American tourists and the Swede Gustavsson, from whom the narrator inherits his isolated beach house and his mistress.

In the large category "natives" we also find sub-groups. In the category of true Dutch Indies natives there are first of all the "Vorstenhuizen", the local dynasties, who figure prominently in all novels; then there are the lower echelon rulers, the heads of the kampongs, for example. Finally there is the mass of the population, which forms a steady background to events, as soldiers in *De raadsman*, as fishermen in *Eiland der demonen*, but which most often appears on the scene in the form of servants, particularly in those novels in which commercial and agricultural European families are depicted. Apart from these "Indiërs" there are the Indos (mixed race), who play a prominent and rather negative role in *Orpheus in de dessa*, in *Vergeelde portretten* and in *De tienduizend dingen*. Finally, there are the other non-European groups such as the Chinese, the Arabs, etc. This is the least prominent group, they tend to appear and disappear without playing a recognizable role, except in *Eiland der demonen*.

2. The subdivisions just indicated allow us to distinguish more clearly the frequency of contacts between representatives of East and West. Thus, the contacts are most intense between Dutch officials and all groups of the native population, as one would expect. In the

frequent depiction of ceremonies of marriages, funerals and other occasions of pomp concerning the native nobilities, government participation is always indicated. The "residents," "controleurs" (comptrollers) and other administrators are constantly in contact with the native rulers; this is particularly the case in *Eiland der demonen* and *De raadsman*. The contact can go so far that a Dutch official is adopted by a native ruler as his son, as happens in *De raadsman*. Such idyllic circumstances tend to be rare, however; generally, Dutch government representation is of the ceremonial and non-personal kind. Those Dutch people engaged in trade, commerce and agriculture have fewer contact with the higher echelons of native power; their relations are with the kampong heads and with the mass of the population, especially in the latter's function as the servant class. It is fascinating to notice in *Vergeelde portretten* how small a role the natives in fact do play.

Contacts between non-Dutch Westerners and natives can vary significantly; in *Eiland der demonen*, the American tourists complain of Dutch government attempts to prescribe a code of behavior in dealing with natives; by contrast, Helen, the former lover of the narrator, distinguishes clearly between a native prince and the mass of the population. Her contacts with other natives is restricted to observing their ceremonies and folklore. The same applies to her friend Dorris, who has learnt Balinese dancing, but who is, like her husband, ready to utter grave racial slurs about the blacks back home. Interestingly, as far as the encounter between East and West is concerned, these novels do not distinguish between various national origins, but rather tie the few attempts at personal relationships to certain professions; the Swede in *Eiland der demonen*, like the Dutch narrator, is an artist; in *Orpheus in de dessa*, the narrator is an engineer who introduces new equipment in a sugar factory; in *De tienduizend dingen* it is a

Scottish professor who develops a working relationship with his clerk.

Other groups, when shown to be interrelating at all, are, with a few notable exceptions, never center stage. In *Eiland der demonen* the local Chinese merchant is depicted as a "bloedzuiger" (bloodsucker), who makes the lives of the natives miserable. The narrator's attempts to interfere in this practice remain without result. In *Orpheus in de dessa* the assistant engineer is an Indo; his opinions of the natives is so low that the Dutch engineer is shocked. Indos are an extremely problematic group in *Vergeelde portretten*, and the theme of blood mixture runs through the whole novel.

3. If we now turn from the *frequency* of encounters to the *type* of relationships maintained by representatives of East and West, we can come to a preliminary kind of classification (which ought to be further differentiated, while at the same time the base of texts ought of course to be broadened). For the sake of convenience I suggest the following typology.

a) *Functional relationships.* These relationships do not necessarily involve personal *engagement*: they are determined by lines of command, by ceremony, by power distribution. Such relations are those we see primarily in *De raadsman* between the Toewan Petoro and his small administrative staff and police force. It is also the relationship which the controleurs and the residents maintain with the higher and lower nobility, especially in *Eiland der demonen* and *De tienduizend dingen*. To this broad category also belongs of course the relationship master/servant, which predominates in *De tienduizend dingen* as well as in *Vergeelde portretten*. In all the novels examined, the best way to get an impression of the exact nature of such relationships is to observe the way in which the various groups use body language: how they greet each other or stand or sit before each other. There are many excellent examples of this in *De tienduizend dingen* and in *Vergeelde portretten*. Seldom do these relationships

develop beyond the strictly functional: notable exceptions are the growing friendship and trust between the Dutch official and his native assistant in *De raadsman*, and the unspoken friendship and tragic relationship between the professor and his scientific co-worker Raden Soeprapto in *De tienduizend dingen*. True partnership between representatives of the two cultures is extremely rare.

b) *Mythicizing relationships*. Under this heading I would group those relationships which are no more "personal" than the previous ones, but which emphasize in some general way qualities in the native population (and the country) distinguished and appreciated by Westerners. The best examples of this are *De tienduizend dingen* and *Eiland der demonen*. What is involved here is an emphasis on the mystical, magical aspects of the country and its inhabitants, a preoccupation with folklore, with beauty and skills, with "wisdom" of a certain kind. This is on the whole a positive attitude, but at the same time also one which exemplifies the Westerner's tendency to appropriate cultures for his own benefit. The "Easternized" Dutch Indies family, such as the one depicted in *Vergeelde portretten*, will adopt recipes, artifacts, medicine, art and lore, music and dance, and even take these with them upon their return to Holland, while at the same time often maintaining a great distance between themselves and the producers of such lore or artifacts. In other cases the fascination with native lore and art is, of course, a kind of escapism, and a twofold one; first, the exotic realm and its inhabitants is interpreted as utopia (this attitude prevails in *Eiland der demonen* as well as in *Orpheus in de dessa* and necessarily leads to tragedy); secondly, the admiring attitude towards the more mysterious and mystic East prevents the real coming to terms of the Westerner with populations holding these beliefs; in other words, the exotic element blocks real relationships, the angle of "strangeness"

is an alienating one. This is visible both in *De tienduizend dingen* and in *Vergeelde portretten*.

4. There are a few *personal relationships*, and these deserve a more elaborate treatment than is possible here. Two novels stand out: *Eiland der demonen* and *Orpheus in de dessa*. In the former, the Dutch narrator's attempt to live an idyllic existence with a native girl on the island of Bali ends in disaster. The native girl's complete acceptance of the stranger is an aspect of the innocence of paradise which the Dutchman attributes to her; his own continued involvement with the white community, with his Austrian neighbor, with Dutch officialdom and with projects of various kinds (among others the building of an aquarium) ultimately destroy the love which has sprung up between himself and the native girl. Of course a number of clichés are involved also. Karti, as the female, is in any case representative of the passive principle, dependent on the man to set the pace. In her condition of native, of mistress and servant she is in a position of submission on several counts. The nature of the relationship between the Dutchman and the Balinese girl can be nicely determined by paying attention to the spatial relationships in the novel: Karti stays home, always awaiting the return of her master with impatience and anticipation; the master's life is elsewhere. The Dutchman also makes the understandable mistake of equating the East with Karti: once love has gone, his love of the country and of its population evaporates immediately, and he leaves Bali for Europe. Similar disenchantment has already overtaken the Dutchman's American friends.

In *Orpheus in de dessa* it is not love, but friendship which determines the course of the novel. The Dutch engineer's fascination with the lore of the East, with its music, magic and beauty is triggered by his encounter with the handicapped flute player Si-Bengkok, the Orpheus of the story, who resembles the Greek god by his power to subdue all of nature by the beauty of

his music. Through Si-Bengkok, the Dutch engineer is momentarily taken out of his normal context; in a series of epiphanies, he not only comes to see the beauty of the Dutch Indies landscape for the first time, but he acquires a vision of nature essentially as unified. Very soon, however, he is drawn back to his habitual sphere, first because of a case of sabotage in the factory perpetrated by a native, then by his feverish money speculations. When a series of thefts of water-buffaloes threatens his projects and consequently his income, he goes out in a blind fury and kills the thief, who, tragically, turns out to be Si-Bengkok. The futile escapist attitude of the Westerner vis-à-vis the East is sharply brought into focus by Augusta de Wit in the non-comprehending final questioning of the Dutchman, who only now realizes the grinding and humiliating poverty in which his "friend" has had to live. Exalted attitudes over magic, folklore and beauty hide economic realities and contrasts which make true friendship and partnership impossible.

Less utopian, but also ultimately problematic is the relationship which springs up between the Dutch official and his assistant in *De raadsman*. A gradual appreciation of the Dutchman for the wisdom and experience of this native, in reality a member of a high caste Makassar family, leads to a number of confidential conversations between the two men. The Dutch official, who, as the narrative shows, is naive but well-meaning, and who sees his role in the Dutch Indies as essentially a kind of educative mission, is attempting to envisage the future of his adopted country. Both he and the native identify with the Dutch cause at this point, which is to make a gradual transition to self-rule for the Dutch Indies possible. In the last chapter, which functions as a kind of epilogue, the Dutchman encounters a number of young Indonesian people in the airport lounge in San Francisco. The Dutchman now realizes that world history has pre-empted the plans of the Dutch; one of the Indonesian students now calls the

councillor "een van die collaborateurs, die ons land veel kwaad hebben gedaan."(122)⁷ Once we leave the small world of personal friendships behind, and once the perspective opens not only on the *future* of the Dutch Indies, but on the "real" past, even such positive relationships are relativized and shown to have been based on illusions.

The only episode within these novels which attempts to give a view of the encounter East/West from the other side is also a story which hinges on a personal relationship. It is the episode in *De tienduizend dingen* entitled "De professor." The original encounter between the clerk Soeprapto and the Scottish professor McNeil, in the office of the director of the Dutch botanical institute, is depicted almost in terms of caricature. The Westerner is suffering from heat, his appearance is extremely unattractive, especially in view of the extremely reserved, haughty and aristocratic attitude of the Raden. The contrast between Western vulgarity and Eastern subtlety, nobility and finesse is carried on throughout the story; but ironically, the young native's desperate attempts to maintain his distance, to practice "reverse racism", as the professor himself calls it, fail because of the basic decency and likeability of the Scotsman. Even at the very end, however, when the professor is killed by natives during one of his scientific field trips, the young native cannot let himself go and show his grief over what he now knows to have been a friend.

5. So far the discussion has already hinted at the various elements which play a role in assigning positive or negative qualities to both the natives and the Europeans. For the Europeans, the qualities which are most important in the assessment of the inhabitants of the Dutch Indies are those which have to do with such things as beauty, skill, myth, folklore, magic and mysticism, with pomp and ritual, elegance and grace. These are

factors which originate generally in an attitude which looks upon the Dutch Indies as an exotic, slightly primitive realm, from which the Westerner can choose freely for his own needs, without becoming further involved. This attitude sees the Dutch Indies as a storehouse, or as a treasure to be administered primarily for the benefit of the Western world, though in *De raadsman*, as we saw, an inevitable transfer of power is considered seriously.

Positive, but also far more problematic, is the view of the Dutch Indies as an alternative to the Western world, as a kind of asylum or sanatorium to which the damaged Westerner can come to find happiness. The attempts in this direction inevitably fail, usually because the native element is considered as remaining "strange" and inscrutable. In fact, of course, it is the Westerner who remains "strange." A good example of the confusion of issues in this sense is the issue of clothing in Fabricius' novel. The narrator's and others' gradual shedding of clothing does not lead to a sense of freedom, but becomes a parody of the native's attitude. In fact, the constantly reiterated preoccupation with dress and undress and with nudity does not indicate a liberating abandonment of unnecessary scruples, but rather reveals a continued sense of the importance of certain ingredients of Western culture. To be sure, the gap between the two ways of seeing the world can be bridged momentarily by an affective relationship such as friendship and love, but the essential "strangeness" of the East remains. In this view of things, it is mostly left unsaid what other factors stand in the way of true *rapprochement* and partnership, though in *Orpheus in de dessa* this is briefly hinted at near the end.

Negative qualities attributed by the Europeans to the natives also have to do with such questions. The native is incapable of entering the world of the European because he lacks the thing-oriented, materialist thinking required to succeed. The native who sabotages the new machines in *Orpheus in de dessa* is

perhaps the best example of this. Yet, native *superstitions* are presented in quite an ambivalent light. In these novels, the characters and the narrators oscillate between fascination and contempt; superstitions are often adopted by Dutch families, and in fact "imported" into Holland, as in *Vergeelde portretten*, and then depicted as charming. The same applies to artifacts, items of food and furniture pieces. They retain their veneer of mystery, while becoming detached from their origins. Again, however, it is their very "strangeness" which is appreciated; the producers disappear behind the thing.

The view of Europeans held by natives is, as already indicated earlier, strictly a mediated one in these texts. Although natives are allowed at times to speak their mind about their masters, though only very occasionally, such views are merely reported, and, as is the case in *De raadsman*, immediately commented upon in order to force the interpretation in one direction or the other, usually to defuse political or moral arguments. The one exception is the story "De professor" in *De tienduizend dingen*.

6. These last remarks bring us to the final way of seeing the encounter East/West; that of an *analysis of subtexts*. Here again, a close examination of these texts from the point of view of narration, style and structure would yield, I believe, significant results. I can only indicate a number of such elements here, without going into details.

There is, of course, first of all the question of racism. It is an explicit theme in "De professor," and certainly also in *Vergeelde portretten*. In the latter novel, it is the danger of mixing Indian with European blood which is constantly under discussion; the Indian branch of the family is to wither and die, the more respectable members to be "europeanized". There is in this novel, as in most, a preoccupation with the danger of sliding into a moral behavior associated with the East, of "disappearing into the kampong." And it is not only the Dutch government which is worried about

the whites' behavior; even mixed families and Indos try to equate correct morality with Western views. The notable exception here is the Swede Gustavsson in *Eiland der demonen*, who praises the people of Bali for their decency and moral qualities.

The question of hierarchy is a central one; it manifests itself during ceremonial occasions, but also in private life: who sits where, how, and who stands while others are sitting, is in itself almost a science. Much can be learned from the role of clothing, of gestures, of public appearance in these novels. Fine lines of demarcation exist, the general impression is one of highly subtle gradations of what is allowed and what is to be frowned upon. A special study of such elements would be fascinating and would reveal, I believe, a constant fear of loss of identity and status. Where the strictly maintained rules disappear, such as at the Dutch universities, bewilderment sets in, especially in the mind of the Dutch; good examples of this are provided in *Vergeelde portretten* and in *De raadsman*. The question of education for the natives plays an important role of course, though it is only touched upon briefly in most novels. In *De raadsman* schools are in fact seen as dangerous but necessary for the future of the Dutch Indies.

Politics in more explicit guises can be said to play only a minor role; this too provides the informed reader with a series of interesting inferences. In one or two novels the Indonesian Communist Party makes an appearance, but it is presented as being misguided and, in *De raadsman*, as not having the sympathy of the bulk of the population.

The final subtext, of course, is that which the narrators (and behind them, the authors) of these novels themselves provide. General conclusions in this respect are extremely hazardous. For some narrators and/or authors the Dutch Indies are part of their own personal past, and as such worthy of resurrection in literature, if only for nostalgic reasons. For others, the contrast East/West has philosophical

overtones; for yet others the Dutch Indies might represent a missed opportunity. Most authors seem to agree, however, that the Dutch mission in the Indies was a Mission Impossible, though most only gained this opinion long after the fact.

NOTES

¹The following editions were used for this paper: E. Breton de Nijs, *Vergeelde Portretten uit een Indisch familiealbum* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1973), Salamander, 6th ed.; Augusta de Wit, *Orpheus in de dessa* (Amsterdam/Bussum: Standaard Uitgeverij, 1983), 29th ed.; Maria Dermout, *De tienduizend dingen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1966), Salamander, 7th ed.; H.J. Friedericy, *De raadsman* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1973), Salamander, 3rd ed.; Johan Fabricius, *Eiland der demonen: roman over Bali* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1964), Meulenhoff pockets, 3rd edition.

²"[...] what is my attitude towards these people, what is my attitude towards aunt Sophie? I want to make her the center of my story. Because of her family relationship, but also because she represents an individual nuance of a kind of people, of this *kind* of Dutch East Indian people. What is my attitude towards her? I can't say. Again, I have 'mixed feelings.'"

³"Through her I can meet others [...] I can hear them talking and see them acting in all of their (now, for me) terrifying clan and class consciousness. For they represent all of them taken together not only a 'large family,' but also a class which was already dying out during their lifetime [...] A class of rulers, used to giving commands, and when necessary to decide about somebody else's freedom."

⁴"A golden oriole at midnight!"

⁵"Why not, here in the Indies, where everything was so strange and surprising that the ordinary could not be distinguished from the impossible?"

⁶"What are they all looking for, these strangers? Is your country so different from ours?"

⁷"[...] one of those collaborators who have done much damage to our country."