INTRODUCTION

Fifty-one years ago, a chapter of Dutch-Indonesian history came to a close. The far-away islands that most Dutchmen had never seen became independent and ceased to be a part of the proudly proclaimed kingdom of the Netherlands. But "Indië," as the Dutch called it, had left its mark on those that came to visit and those that stayed, and nowhere is that mark more evident than in what is usually referred to as Dutch "colonial literature."*

From the first encounters, Dutch literature written about the Indies showed distinctive features, brought about by the particular nature of the Asian experiences of the Dutch authors. Most of the Dutch who went to the Indies did not settle there. They served their time as captains with the Far East India company like Johan Stavorinus, as officials of the colonial government like Eduard Douwes Dekker (pseudonym Multatuli), or as employees of corporations. After their service they returned to Holland, to cities like Hoorn, Middelburg, and the Hague, where neither the population, the surroundings, nor the weather reminded them in any way of those distant islands. It was in these cities that most of the "colonial literature" was published. Dutch literature that has the Indies as its locale is, therefore, the expression of an attempt to share an unforgettable experience with a reading public which in most cases had not experienced the same events and impressions. Even those that stayed and those who were born and/or raised in the Indies (Louis Couperus, Ed du Perron, Rob Nieuwenhuys and others) directed their writings mainly to the reading populace in Holland. With a few exceptions, the indigenous population did not partake in the Dutch literary process. (It is, therefore, with even more pleasure that I call to your attention Gerard Termorshuizen's contribution to this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* about the Javanese author Soewarsih Djojopoespito, one of the few Indonesians to write in Dutch.)

Indonesian independence did not halt the stream of "colonial literature". Among the repatriates who returned to the Netherlands were those who had gone there and those who had been born in Indonesia and were now forced to choose between what Ed du Perron called their "land of origin" and the country from whence their forefathers had come. Their writings dealt not only with far-away-places, but also with "tempo dulu", times that had gone, never to return.

Although they often wrote thinly veiled autobiographical accounts about unique experiences (or maybe just because they did), many of the authors enjoyed considerable success with the reading public throughout the three centuries of Dutch occupation with the East Indies. In fact, the literature about the Indies contributed more to the Dutch view about their colonial experiences than the most incisive and well documented reports. Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* is a case in point, and in this issue of *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies,* Robert Van Niel describes in detail Multatuli's own conceptions and misconceptions which exerted such great influence on the colonial perceptions of the Dutch. Some authors won critical literary acclaim. Louis Couperus belonged to the cadre of Dutch literati, Multatuli has been hailed as a world class author. However, it took a long time for literary historians to recognize that the various works which had the Indies as their locale formed an identifiable category of Dutch literature. It was overlooked that the experiences which they all shared gave rise to a body of work with common features. Furthermore, neither its sometimes strong autobiographical overtones, nor its willingness to go beyond traditional genres, nor its popularity with the general reader helped this literature to gain acceptance in the eyes of literary scholars,

who held that literature had to be fiction, that the only acceptable genres were poetry, the novel and short story, and that those were the exclusive domain of connoisseurs.

The first one to bring into focus that the East-Indies had had an identifiable influence on Dutch arts and letters was Gerard Brom. His *Java in Onze Kunst* (1931) was followed a few years later by Ed du Perron's anthology *De Muze van Jan Compagnie* (1939). However, it was Rob Nieuwenhuys in his thorough and expansive study *Oostindische Spiegel* (1972)** who delineated and brought into focus this particular genre of literature. Nieuwenhuys' work had an immediate impact upon the Dutch literary scene, as did the ensuing debate about what Nieuwenhuys had chosen to include and what he had excluded, that is, in final analysis, the long-standing question of what is literature and what is not. Since the classification "Colonial Literature" is determined by the locale, a determination whether a work that fits this classification is literature, or even whether it is "good literature", cannot always be readily made. Nieuwenhuys' decision to be inclusive rather than exclusive does serve to conjure up a literary world in which marginal writings as well as the undisputed literary highlights all help to illuminate a multifaceted but still very uniform literary scene. The classification also encompasses several genres, with an outspoken preference for novels, letters, etc. There are also several kinds of authors: Dutch, Dutch-Indonesian, and even Indonesians. Moreover, whether one calls this literature "colonial" or not, the fact remains that the Dutch were indeed a superimposed force upon a native locale, an issue the authors had to come to terms with throughout the three centuries.

The newly found awareness of the existence of a colonial literature provided the catalyst for a number of activities in the Netherlands, dissertations, anthologies of literature, books and articles. In 1985, the *Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde* was founded and in 1986 the first issue of *Indische Letteren* appeared. It is ironic, or it may be indicative, that this process of literary recognization and appreciation has come to fruition in the decades after Indonesia gained independence, when most India-farers have finally come "home".

It has taken the rest of the world even longer. Although Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* was hailed by D.H. Lawrence as great literature, the world has been largely ignorant of the fact that the Dutch possess three hundred years worth of "colonial literature" which does not only make for good literary reading but offers an insight into East-West encounters and the question of a small North Sea nation's rule over a foreign archipelago.

Over the years a fair amount of colonial literature was translated into English. (See the Bibliography in the back of this issue.) Finding that little was available in print, I published a modest anthology of translations in 1978 called *Insulinde*. Since then the series *The Library of the Indies* has appeared, edited by E.M. Beekman. Its twelve volumes present an extensive selection of Dutch colonial literature in translation as well as Frans van Rosevelt's translation of Rob Nieuwenhuys' *Oost-Indische Spiegel* (1982). Various other translations have recently appeared, for instance as Oxford Paperbacks, published by the South-East Asia Publishing unit of Oxford University Press. There is also a growing body of secondary literature in English on the subject of Dutch colonial literature, of which this issue of *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* is a part.

The contents of this issue reflect the various aspects of Dutch literature of the East Indies. First of all, the contributors are from the Netherlands as well as Canada and the United States. Most of them have earned their reputations in the English-speaking world as experts in the field of Dutch Colonial Literature. The

subjects of their essays span three centuries from the eighteenth-century sea captain to the modern repatriates discussed in the articles by A. Dierick and F. Van Rosevelt. E. Beekman's article about the famous botanist Junghuhn deals with works which were not always regarded as literary, as does my article about Stavorinus. On the other hand, the literary quality of an author like Multatuli (see the article by R. Van Niel) has been clearly established. The autobiographical aspects are present in almost all the authors presented, but are especially highlighted in Gerard Termorshuizen's discussion of the Javanese author Soewarsih Djojopoespito. The difficulty of relating these unique experiences to a reading public unfamiliar with the Indies is emphasized by Beekman's article on Junghuhn and Seymour Flaxman's discussion of the enigmatic in Dutch colonial literature. The interactions between representatives of sometimes incongruent civilizations is the topic of A. Dierick's "What if the twain do meet"and F. Van Rosevelt's essay on Maria Dermoût. M. Jalink-Wijbrans's contribution actually falls outside the scope of this collection of essays *about* the literature of the Indies. However, it does deserve a place here. In this century, the Dutch have had two types of war experiences, a European as well as an Asian one. The latter has not always received the focus it deserved. With the emigration of many Dutchmen to Canada, these experiences have become part of the Canadian experience as well. It is with this in mind that this collection closes with a slightly different perspective on Dutch-Indonesian history.

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** Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel. Wat Nederlandse schrijvers en dichters over Indonesië hebben geschreven, vanaf de eerste jaren der Compagnie tot op heden* (Amsterdam, 1972, 1978[3]). *Mirror of the Indies, A History of Dutch Colonial Literature,* Transl. Frans van Rosevelt, ed. E.M. Beekman (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).