

The Biographical Embrace

Who is Afraid of the Historical Biography?

The art of historical biography in the Netherlands has undergone a renaissance since the beginning of the 21st century after its unpopularity in the 1970s and 1980s. In this introduction to the volume *Aspecten van de historische biografie* (Aspects of the historical biography), edited by Bert Toussaint and Paul van der Velde, the question is raised as to the relationship between the historical and the literary biography while issues around how the lack of first-hand material may shape the historical biography are discussed.

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No Country for Great Men

Although biographies are as old as historiography itself, the biography has never made much of an impression in the Netherlands. Jan Romein, professor of Dutch History at the University of Amsterdam, attributed this to the domesticised Dutch culture which keeps the individual imprisoned between respectability and coziness, cramping any opportunity to rise above mediocrity (Romein 1946: 62). This atmosphere has produced a virtually ingrained suspicion of biography which, no matter how one looks at it, places the individual center stage. Needless-to-say, this attitude did not produce fertile soil in which the biographical tradition could flourish. In historical circles, at the end of the 1950s the anti-biographical attitude was reinforced by the growing academic approach to history which excluded every form of narrativity, hence of course biography. Heaping coals on this negativity, in the 1960s, progressive intellectuals equated biography with the history of Great Men, which was an anathema to them. By the beginning of the 1970s, it seemed that in the Netherlands the biography, the narrative genre *par excellence*, was dead and buried. "Rather than paying homage to Clio, the historian presents an academic textbook which, as a proof of empirical social research, should be elucidated with tables, maps, calculations and diagrams", the social philosopher Kees Bertels was able to claim in his work *Geschiedenis tussen Structuur en Evenement* (History between Structure and Events) (Bertels 1973: 23).

Revival of the Biography as a Historical Genre

The socio-empirical research models produced dry-as-dust specialist studies which were read only by a small in-crowd of fellow scholars. However, when the French history of mentalities made its debut at the end of the 1970s, it led to a renewed interest in the behaviour of groups and individuals. Joining forces with the tendencies towards individualisation which was gaining ground at the beginning of the 1980s, this created a new breeding-ground for biography. In a bibliographical study by H. Poeze and M. Ros reviewing biographies between 1988 and 1990, they list no fewer than 262 biographies (Poeze and Ros 1991). After forty years of lying fallow, the theory of biography had once again finally begun to attract some attention. In 1982, H.W. von der Dunk devoted an article to biography and historiography and in 1989, in his historico-theoretical exploration of the biographical element in history, A.A. van den Braembussche gives a handy breakdown of historical biography (Von der Dunk 1982:39/Braembussche 1989:26-60).

J. Fontijn, the biographer of the early twentieth-century Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden, categorises the literary biography as a separate sub-genre of biography (Fontijn 1992: 8). The most salient point in this connection is not so much the question of whether historical biography has the same status; this is indisputable. The more interesting quest is to find an answer to the question of how the aversion to or fear of biography as an historical genre can be eradicated and in what form. At present, the absence of a tradition means that it is best to assume that the biography is an academic genre. This acceptance is crucial when the financing of biographical studies by researchers in universities and other institutions is taken into account.

The point of departure for finding an answer to the question which has just been posed is the requirements for the entries of mini-biographies, a maximum of 2,500 words, set by *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (Biographical Dictionary of the Netherlands). "In view of its purpose as a scientific reference work, chronology, clarity, tight-knit structure, empirically based facts and a large dose of objectivity on the part of an unobtrusive author should continue to be the points of departure of the biographical dictionary" (Gabriëls 1992: 50-64). In a historical biography, not all of the stipulations laid down for the entries apply because this sort of biography is an independent academic work not bound by any circumscribed length. A historical biography should unquestionably be based on verifiable facts. When the condition that an author should remain in the background of a biography can be construed as the writer should refrain from entering into a dialogue with his or her subject, we have no difficulty in accepting this requirement. However, there is a great deal to be said for a biography with a clearly defined, loose but not necessarily chronological structure which is based on sub-studies of the life of the person who is the subject of the biography. Because of the absence of a seminal biographical

tradition, this loose structure, given its similarities to regular historical research, could prove to be a stimulus for new biographical research. May this anthology prove to be just the spur needed!

From Theory to Practice

The first three contributions to this collection [*Aspecten van de historische biografie*] are of a theoretical nature and examine the relationship between the historical and the literary biography as well as that between art and historiography. The remaining five contributions are the fruits of biographical research and the book concludes with a *catalogue raisonné* of biographies and biographical studies which have appeared in the last few decades.

In her contribution, Hella S. Haasse makes a comparison between the literary or author's biography and the historical biography. The writer of a literary biography should try to probe the essence of the author through his or her work, attempting to piece together a reconstruction of the motives behind his or her authorship. This identification of the biographer with his or her subject and the intense engagement with his or her oeuvre makes the work of this sort of biographer a complex, exciting affair. In contrast, the principal task of the writer of a historical biography is to investigate the interaction between the individual and the society in which he or she lived; this permits the preservation of some distance between the biographer and the subject. Because Haasse considers the biography a literary genre, the similarity between a literary biography and a historical biography lies in the style set by the language. This choice for a biography is also one of authorship.

Nanda van der Zee shares this view. She does not see any dividing-line between historiography and literature. She blames the idea that this should exist on the fact that modern historians are devoid of any literary ambitions. Moreover, Van der Zee sees biography as a suitable vehicle to accomplish a rapprochement between art and the study of history.

In his article, Jos de Mul also examines the position of historical biography between art and science but adopts a philosophical point of view. The central role in his article is accorded to the German philosopher and historian W. Dilthey, who made an enormous contribution to the development of the modern biography. Dilthey saw the individual as a convergence of social powers to which he or she was not just subject but upon which they could also exert influence. The importance of the individual can be revealed in his or her interrelatedness with his or her contemporary cultural system. The greater the interconnectedness, the greater the chance the biographer has of gaining an insight into the historical social reality in which the subject of the biography lived. De Mul demonstrates that Schleiermacher's

biography, whose aim was total historical reality, was unattainable. Therefore, a less pretentiously set up historical biography has the greatest chance of breaking through the compartmentalisation in historiography.

In his contribution, A.J.C.M. Gabriëls describes the setting up and development of the short biography in the *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*. The biographical dictionary has a long history in the Netherlands. The *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* by A.J. van der Aa (1852-1878) and the *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* (1911-1937) both spring to mind. The reason Romein gives to explain the absence of a biographical tradition can, with the same justification, be used to explain the rich tradition of biographical dictionaries; it corresponds better to the domesticised Dutch culture. In the *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, of which three volumes containing 1,326 entries have already appeared, we come across many descriptions of people whose lives have been less than inspiring. Gabriëls argues that the entries are an excellent starting-point for more far-reaching biographical research.

In his contribution about Albrecht of Bavaria, Count of Holland, Dick E.H. de Boer claims that the almost total lack of ego documents is one of the biggest hurdles with which a biographer working on a personage from the Middle Ages has to contend. The upshot is that, when set in the Middle Ages, the biography assumes the character of a reconstruction of the collective environment. The historical material is organised around the person who forms the theme and is used as a compositional aid to conjure up the collective environment of his or her era.

In his contribution about William of Orange, K.W. Zwart weighs up the various interpretations of the role of William of Orange in the struggle for independence. Zwart certainly believes that “Father of the Fatherland” is not the most appropriate title for someone who had no objection to subjecting the Netherlands to perpetual foreign (French) rule. In his many articles about William of Orange, Zwart sets himself the task of militating against the tendency to idealise the man in recent literature.

In my own contribution, I try to present a picture of P.J. Veth's youth in Dordrecht; the house in the Voorstraat in which he was born stands just a stone's throw from “t Hof” where today's lectures to celebrate the day of historical biography are being given. The limited amount of material which is usually available about the youth of a subject often leads to the fact that one has to limit oneself to no more than a rough sketch of the environment in which the subject lived.

That circumstances and events experienced at a young age can exert a great influence in later life is demonstrated by W. Ottespeer in his contribution about the attitude to prostitution adopted by the cultural philosopher G.J.P.J. Bolland. A Leiden professor as advocate of well-run brothels at the beginning of the twentieth century can be compared to – measured by the amount of moral indignation such a

person evokes – a Leiden professor at the end of the twentieth century advocating *apartheid*.

In the final article in the bundle, Bert Toussaint gives us an idea of how the historical biography has developed over the last few years. Looking at the large number of collective bundles about certain personages, we know that there is no lack of interest either in the people or in biographies. However, so far this interest has not been translated into a proportionate number of biographies. We must wait and see whether the historical biography will emerge as the superior cultural historical genre able to remedy the disasters of integral history, as K. van Berkel hopes (Van Berkel 1986). Specialist research will remain an imperative, but after reading this bundle who could still be daunted by historical biography?

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The Indonesia and Africa Specialist P.J. Veth (1814-1895): Founder of the First Chair of Anthropology in the Netherlands (1877)

Pieter Johannes Veth was the greatest specialist in colonial affairs in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century and a prolific writer on Indonesia. "As far as a positive knowledge of the Netherlands East Indies is concerned (disregarding all political competence) Veth possesses an authority who signifies more than all other specialists put together. Showing proof of conspicuous diligence, he has mastered all the materials specialists have supplied him with. He surpasses everybody else, including myself. He who does not know Professor Veth does not know what knowledge is" (Multatuli 1951 [1872]: 444). Anyone who is even only passingly familiar with the megalomaniac nature of the author of these lines, the "enfant terrible", Multatuli, pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820-1887), will take his compliment very seriously.

Original source: Velde, Paul van der. 2003. "P.J. Veth Founding Father of Dutch Anthropology", *Tales from Academia. History of Anthropology in the Netherlands 2*, edited by Vermeulen, Han and Kommers, Jean. 647-672. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GMBH. Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change 40.

Therefore we must ask ourselves what had Veth done to be praised so excessively by a man who viewed himself as the authority on everything. Had it something to do with the extremely positive review of *Max Havelaar* that Veth had written in the cultural periodical *De Gids* in 1860? This review shot Multatuli, of whom nobody had ever heard of before, to instantaneous stardom. However, at the time Multatuli wrote this, in 1872, he had come to regard Veth as the man who had betrayed him a decade earlier when the latter refused to publish an appeal to the nation he had written to collect money for the impoverished Multatuli. Veth's refusal ended their short and intense relationship (van der Velde 1995a: 21, 2000: 174-177).

Further corroboration can be sought in the fact that Multatuli was not the only person to regard Veth as the leading authority on Indonesia. There were few people at that time who did not share his opinion, both in the Netherlands and abroad. In 1868, in his book on European Orientalists, the French Asian scholar Gustave Dugat was laudatory about Veth: "P.J. Veth is the European who is best versed in knowledge of the Netherlands Indies: he has studied the Archipelago in all its aspects. Undoubtedly he is the one whose work has to be consulted to form an exact idea of this faraway realm, whether this be geographically, commercially, politically, historically, or from a literary point of view" (Dugat 1868: 107-108). In 1865, closer to home, the gifted linguist H. Neubronner van der Tuuk pointed out that Veth was endowed with the talent for writing in an attractive, lively manner which appealed to the tastes of many readers. "Veth is a man who possesses the

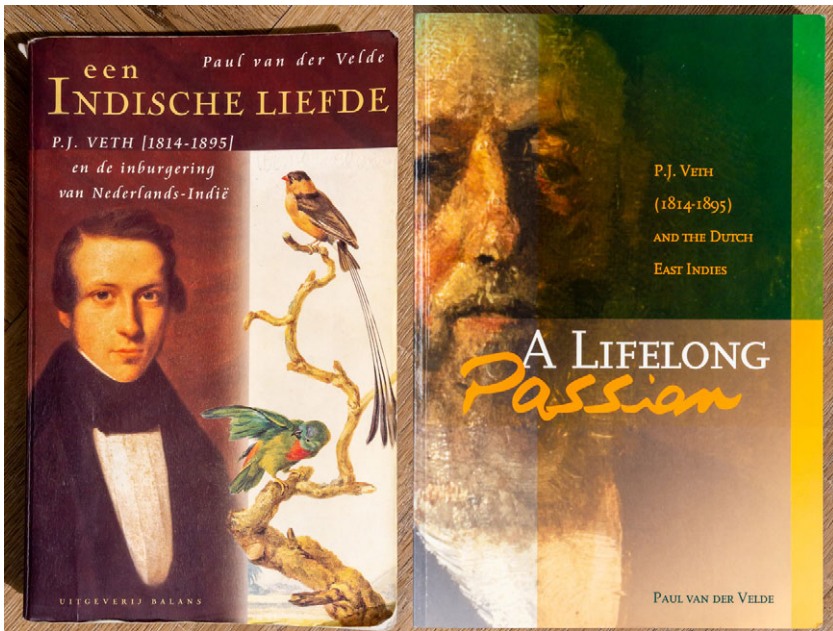


Figure 7. Covers of Dutch and English editions of P.J. Veth's biography. Photo: Cindy Bakker

rare talent to inform a civilised audience about what has recently been done in all kinds of fields of science, usually as dry as dust. Every specialist should be grateful to him" (van der Tuuk 1865: 10). Veth regarded the fact that he was seen as standing head and shoulders above others with mixed feelings. "Owing to the fact that I am regarded as an Indies specialist, I am overburdened with the silliest questions about the Netherlands East Indies. I wish people would leave me alone and just let me do my job" (Veth 1864a: 134-135).

The question of how someone who had never visited the Indies came to be regarded as the foremost specialist on that area is fascinating. If a specialist today were to claim, and certainly if he or she were an anthropologist, that he or she had written a standard work on a region without ever having been there, his or her findings would be treated with the utmost suspicion, not to mention circumspection. This is understandable in the present-day context of a world, which has shrunk to an incredible degree. But in Veth's day, travelling to Indonesia still entailed considerable dangers, which would have been debilitating for Veth who suffered among other ailments from a severe form of asthma (van der Velde 2000: 327). In how far does the interesting thesis put forward by Justin Stagl in his book on the theory of travel apply to Veth that, "Whoever first built a bridge into a particular region,

thereby established for himself a monopoly of access to it and therefore also a monopoly on the disposition of it. He could use it for political, commercial, religious aims and, by describing this region, even for his own cognitive goals. In the latter case he would become the 'leading authority' on that region. Now he only could be dethroned by other authorities contradicting his own and appearing more credible to the public" (Stagl 1995: 204). How then, from a biographical point of view can we explain Veth's status and what were the main influences which affected him? How did Veth go about collecting the data that would enable him to give an authoritative vision of Indonesia in the eyes of his contemporaries? Before addressing these questions, it is essential to gain some insight into Veth's personal and intellectual career, all of which influenced the way he perceived the Netherlands East Indies.

From Theology to Indology

Veth, who was born in 1814, had bourgeois roots in the Protestant section of the entrepreneurial, liberal middle class of Dordrecht, a city in the southwest of Holland with the third busiest harbour in the Netherlands. His father was a scrap iron merchant who sent his son to the French school (*Franse school*), what we would nowadays call a commercial school, founded on the principles of the Enlightenment where such practical subjects as arithmetic, bookkeeping, geography, and modern languages were taught. It was not long before it became apparent that Pieter was a prodigy who could make the transition to the elite grammar school or *gymnasium*, where the curriculum was based on Greek and Latin, with ease. This unique educational background, combining vocational and theoretical training, made Veth an ideal candidate for the universal training given at universities in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

When Veth enrolled at Leiden University in 1832 as a theology student, a study which was supposed to prepare him for the pulpit, the Netherlands was plunged into a national identity crisis, one of the results of the secession of Belgium (1830-39), the effects of which lingered on until the beginning of the 1870s. The gloomy economic outlook did little to dampen the lively cultural atmosphere which prevailed in Leiden, then called the 'city of light'. During the first two years of his study, in which he had to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree as a prerequisite for beginning his theological studies, Veth was exposed to European Romanticism embodied in such writers as Scott, Byron, and Hugo. His literary patron was Professor Jacob Geel, head of the university library and a typical exponent of the progressive tenets of the Enlightenment. Geel's evocative and ironic literary style made him a refreshing phenomenon in the dull Dutch cultural landscape of the time. Veth would prove an assiduous student because not only did he emulate Geel's literary style in his later

writings, he also internalised Geel's precept that it was the task of the intellectual to express controversial opinions about social problems. Veth's deep-seated love of literature did not pass unnoticed: "He was a fervent admirer of the literatures in the modern European languages and there were few contemporaries at Leiden University who equalled, and certainly did not surpass, his vast knowledge of the products of French, German, and English literatures" (Kern 1895: 609).

Veth's innate linguistic talent also embraced Oriental languages such as Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac, which were compulsory for theology students. His language professors, H.A. Hamaker and H.E. Weijers, advocated a thorough appraisal by textual criticism applied to the Holy Scriptures. This approach was regarded with abundant suspicion by the followers of the prevailing supranaturalist theology, who considered every attack on the historical truth of the holy scriptures to be heterodoxy or, worse, heresy. From his masters Veth inherited this critical, scientific attitude along with a commitment to accuracy. Already more bent on language studies than on theology, Veth showed himself extremely receptive to modern German theology encapsulated in the epoch-making book by D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Christ (Das Leben Jesu)*, 1835) in which big question marks were placed over the historicity of the Bible, completely in line with the text-critical method to which Veth adhered. Faced with a dilemma, Veth, who was nearing the completion of his theological studies, decided not to take his finals and did not enter the ministry. Needless to say, this decision was not really welcomed by his immediate family and constituted a grave breach of the social code. This left Veth undaunted. Because of the intercession of Geel and of a factor we all too readily underestimate, coincidence, in 1838 Veth received an offer to become a tutor in English and Malay at the prestigious Royal Military Academy (*Koninklijke Militaire Academie*, KMA) in Breda, where officers for the Netherlands East Indies received their military training (van der Velde 1993a).

Veth became the assistant to Professor P.P. Roorda van Eysinga (1796-1856), head of the colonial section and the godfather of the study of Malay and Javanese in the Netherlands. In contrast to the rest of the country, an optimistic, progressive, and religiously tolerant atmosphere prevailed at the academy and this exerted an undoubted influence on Veth. Although it was never with much pleasure that Veth looked back on his semi-military existence, it was at the same Academy that for the first time he set foot in a field of study in which he would later reign as a sovereign: the geography and ethnography of the Netherlands East Indies. But still the focus of his study was languages. He completed an anthology of English literature (Veth 1840-41) and mastered Javanese and Malay. He received a doctorate *honoris causa* from his alma mater in 1841 for a treatise on an Arabic manuscript dated 856 AD (Veth 1842). Subsequently, he was appointed a professor of Oriental languages at the Franeker Athenaeum. In Franeker he befriended the first Dutch modern theologian J.H. Scholten. Building on

Strauss's ideas, Scholten no longer adhered to the revelatory aspect of Christianity but preferred to emphasise the ethical and civilising values which it represented. This view would profoundly influence Veth's ideas on the relationship between the motherland and the colony (van der Velde 1995b). In 1842, just before the abolition of the Franeker Athenaeum, Veth was appointed a professor of Oriental languages at the Athenaeum Illustre in Amsterdam (later University of Amsterdam), as successor to Taco Roorda who became professor of Oriental languages at the newly established Academy for the training of colonial officials in Delft.

At the beginning of the 1840s, Amsterdam was predominantly conservative in its political outlook. It was the city which thrived on trade with the Netherlands Indies, riding the crest of the Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) of forced crop cultivation by the Indonesians, instigated in 1830, which made the colony increasingly profitable. The liberals were still an insignificant minority but it was in this milieu that Veth would come to play an influential role; a role which he could assume thanks to his standing in Amsterdam society, the fruit of his professorship at the Athenaeum Illustre, which was regarded by the citizens as the temple of Enlightened thought. In 1843 Veth, *ex officio*, became a member of the board of the Netherlands Bible Society (*Nederlandsch Bijbel Genootschap*, NBG) in which capacity, over a period of twenty years, he stimulated translations of the Bible into the languages of the Archipelago as well as the proto-anthropological work carried out by Bible translators such as the earlier mentioned Neubronner van der Tuuk (Groeneboer 2002). Such efforts clearly fitted into the civilising concept of Christianity and gave Veth the opportunity to deepen his linguistic study of the languages of Indonesia. Although his interest in Indonesia was primarily of a linguistic nature, it would soon expand to cover all aspects of Indonesian society and civilisation.

Apart from his obvious interest in Indonesia, the main reason for this shift was that he found out that the study of Oriental languages as such was not his forte. "In this profession I am a mere dilettante", he wrote after R.P.A. Dozy, a bright young scholar of Leiden University, had severely criticised Veth's Franeker inaugural lecture in *De Gids* at the beginning of 1844 (van der Velde 2000: 100). At that time, Veth had just become one of the editors of this critical cultural periodical. It was a sign of Veth's open-mindedness that he did not stifle this criticism and of the openness in all aspects of life for which he strove. He was also the first of a new liberal generation of editors who would turn the journal into the semi-official herald of the liberals. The backward-looking romantic nationalism of the editor-in-chief, E.J. Potgieter, who glorified the Golden Age and the Dutch East India Company (VOC), was replaced by a progressive liberal outlook.

Veth did not react publicly to Dozy's criticism in *De Gids*, choosing to reply in a personal letter in which he denounced Dozy's unconsidered criticism but also defended his scientific working method: "Every book or article which structures

the subject matter better, which points out misconceptions and corrects them, has, if I am not mistaken, the right to exist and to be viewed as a contribution to science although it still leaves a great deal to be investigated which has not yet become clear" (quoted in Van der Velde 2000: 99). All of Veth's later scientific contributions were imbued with this enlightened, encyclopaedic way of practising science in which the comparison of available sources and the adding of new data would convince its practitioners of the progress of knowledge and of science.

One should realise that science at that time was struggling to free itself of the fetters of theology. Together with his more liberal colleagues at the Athenaeum Illustre, Veth fended off an attack by the Reformed synods to get a tighter grip on theological education. In its development, science should not be hindered by theological concepts. Notwithstanding this problem in the relationship between Christianity and science, the former was heavily in debt to the latter: "Science only flourishes in the fields which Christianity has fertilized" (quoted in van der Velde 2000: 115). Veth went on to state that he hoped for an alliance between science and Christianity for the intellectual and moral improvement of all people. This motive should be seen within the context of the Western movement of development then gaining momentum. In this respect, Veth was pointing his countrymen in the direction of the study to which he would devote the rest of his life: "It is in the Netherlands East Indies that one might expect a rich harvest from the co-operation between science and Christianity, where millions under the influence of a mild religion for centuries have remained on a low rung of semi-civilisation, while others have sunken into a hole of animal-like crudeness and ignorance" (Veth 1847: 4). The superiority of Western civilisation, and its potential to influence other less developed societies for the better, lay unequivocally at the base of Veth's concept of the Netherlands East Indies.

Destiny and Identity

In 1846, W.R. van Hoëvell (1812-1879), in his capacity as the director of the Netherlands Indies Bible Society, who since his arrival in the Indies had striven to expand the knowledge of the Archipelago, contacted Veth whom he already knew to be one of the very few learned people in the Netherlands with a genuine interest in the Indies. Van Hoëvell was the founder of the Journal of the Netherlands Indies (*Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*) and in his capacity as president of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (*Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, founded in 1778) he had seen to it that the monographs (*Verhandelingen*) of that society were published regularly. He shared an enlightened liberal background with Veth. On several occasions he had clashed with the colonial government, in particular with its censors. At the time there was a strict censorship imposed on all information

pertaining to the Netherlands East Indies, which was reminiscent of the complete ban on information which the Dutch East India Company had upheld for two centuries. Needless to say, this censorship stood in the way of a free circulation of knowledge about Indonesia, which consequently was meagre and thin on the ground, to say the least. This situation was not going to change without a major political revolution. Both Veth and van Hoëvell were completely aware of this, but Veth was more cautious in taking political action than van Hoëvell was (van der Velde 1998).

Equally important in this context was that Veth's marriage to Clara Buchler (1845) brought him into close contact with the growing liberal faction intimately related to the circles of the Society for the General Welfare (*Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen*), of which his brother-in-law, P.M.G. van Hees, was president. At the beginning of 1846 the liberal Amstel Society (*Amstel Sociëteit*) was founded, and Veth delivered the inaugural address which can be seen as a quite revolutionary pamphlet in which the members' main plea was for openness in administration and government (von Santen 1979). The society was in close contact with J.R. Thorbecke, the drafter of the new Dutch constitution promulgated at the end of 1848. News about the liberal revolution reached the Indies in May 1848 and van Hoëvell reacted very enthusiastically, in fact too enthusiastically because as a consequence of his alleged subversive activities he was banned from the Indies and had to take the boat home. By then, in their correspondence, he and Veth had developed the main tenets of a liberal colonial policy: openness in colonial affairs, freedom of the press and of speech, and the abolition of the Cultivation System. This policy was a step forward, away from that of the conservatives who saw the Netherlands East Indies predominantly in terms of profit.

Veth's paternalistic vision of Indonesia can be discerned in both the association and in the ethical policies introduced at the end of the nineteenth century. Veth, and in the long run many others who were dissatisfied with the minor role accorded the Netherlands in Europe, came to regard Indonesia as the fulfilment of Dutch destiny and identity. "Its possessions in the East made the Netherlands more important than other European nations with the same number of inhabitants" (Veth 1884: 150). With the liberals in power, a liberal revolution in the Netherlands East Indies seemed to be imminent, but affairs took another turn. It was to be another twenty years before the ties between the motherland and colony were liberalised. Veth would work assiduously towards that goal as a savant, critic, and publicist. Although his name was whispered in connection to the post of Minister of Colonial Affairs he would never become a politician. In a letter to van Hoëvell he described the job of a politician as accursed work (van der Velde 2000: 149).

By 1848 Veth had a clear vision of what the Dutch should do for the Netherlands East Indies: "Dutchmen! Now join hands to repay with moral benefits the enormous debt incurred from all the material goods which have flowed so abundantly from

Indonesia over the past 200 years. In order to familiarise the population of those territories with the benefits of pure religion and Christian civilisation, a thorough knowledge of that population and its institutions and customs is the first and indispensable requirement. Only in this manner will we be able to bring about a moral revolution" (Veth 1849: 4-5). One of the ways to achieve this goal was to improve education in the Indies. In 1850, as president of the afore-mentioned Society for the General Welfare, he pleaded for the foundation of departments of that society in the Indies which could commence their civilising task by founding schools (Veth 1850). These plans came to naught, thwarted by conservative bureaucrats in the Netherlands East Indies.

Veth also pleaded for better education about Indonesia in the Netherlands, convinced that this knowledge should not be a goal in itself but would serve higher purposes. "The knowledge of our possessions in the East Indies should be spread throughout all strata of society so that the Indies is made the main arena of the development of our national forces" (Veth 1852: 546). In this period, more than at any time before, a surge in the collecting of information about Indonesia took place. The lack of educational material was admittedly abysmal, but what was worse was the absence of institutional frameworks which could act as gateways to the knowledge essential for research. Veth was co-founder of the Indies Society (*Indisch Genootschap*, founded in 1854), a political debating club that covered all (former) Dutch colonial possessions, including Surinam.

Only once did Veth write an article about the so-called "West" or Netherlands West Indies in *De Gids*, which was primarily a direct attack on slavery still prevailing there when he wrote the article in 1855 (slavery was abolished in the Netherlands West Indies as late as 1863). He was deeply ashamed of his slave-trading forebears and described their behaviour as the worst national sin imaginable. Veth worked himself into a lather when he lashed out at the hypocrisy of many of his contemporaries. "What kind of person is a Dutchman who values honour so much and shows much compassion for the fate of the unfortunate ones in his native country, while overseas he turns into a shameless barbarian who does not display one smidgeon of humane behaviour" (Veth 1855: 219). Surinam has always been a blind spot in the Dutch national awareness, which is also exemplified by the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV, *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, founded in 1851) which only in the past decades has taken a vivid interest in Surinam (Oostindie 1997). Veth was a founding member of this Institute, which according to his taste was too conservative and therefore he never contributed to any of its now illustrious series such as the Contributions (*Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*).

The first fruits of these efforts to expand knowledge about Indonesia saw the light of day in 1854-56. This was Veth's two-volume book on the Western Division of Borneo (*Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling: Geographisch, Statistisch, Historisch*) in which

he brought together everything then known about that part of the island. The book focuses on geography, flora and fauna, the history of the Dutch colonisation, the local economy, and the customs of the native population. The book has footnotes and a list of references, neither of which was very common in those days. Veth was convinced that verifiability was one of the basic traits of a work of modern science. In the introduction to this book he also accounts for the use of his sources: "The majority of the sources which I have used for my study are flawed because the native sources are based on unverifiable stories, and the stories of European visitors are rife with misconceptions and marred by carelessness and ignorance" (Veth 1854: iv).

Borneo's Western Division was widely acclaimed and had an exemplary effect on other authors who, like Veth, devoted themselves to the dissemination of knowledge about the Netherlands East Indies. In Germany, his work was also regarded as exemplary. The famous German geographer A. Petermann wrote: "Ihnen als den Autor eines so bedeutender Werkes über Borneo" ("You are the author of such an important work on Borneo") (van der Velde 2000: 166). The reason why Veth's book was so important was given more than 150 years later by the Dutch anthropologist H.F. Vermeulen: "It is thanks to P.J. Veth that the standard of ethnography of the Netherlands East Indies was raised to an international level. His goal was to apply the theories of Carl Ritter on the interrelationship between land and people to the Indies Archipelago" (Vermeulen 1996: 37). This was also exemplified in the series *Bijdragen tot de kennis van de voornaamste voortbrengselen van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Contributions to the Most Important Crops of the Netherlands East Indies). Vestiges of Veth's vocational training shimmered through in this work (Veth 1860-66). In great detail he described rice, coffee, cotton, and sago with their potential areas of cultivation, expected yields and the like. His works of the early 1860s were already pointing more in the direction of the economic opportunities which the Netherlands East Indies offered.

Veth liked to co-operate with others. This is, for example, testified by a collaborative research project which lasted ten years (1859-69). The outcome of the project was the *Aardrijkskundig en Statistisch Woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië* (Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of the Netherlands East Indies) to which Veth contributed the parts on Timor and Sumatra (Veth et al. 1861-69). In the introduction to volume four, Veth wrote that the Dictionary was already completely outdated when it appeared and that it would have been better to wait twenty-five years, by which time the situation would have settled down, before starting work on a new edition (Veth 1869: vii-viii). This is what effectively happened because in 1895 the first volume of *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Encyclopaedia of the Netherlands Indies) was published (van der Lith et al. 1894-1905). The first volume was dedicated to Veth. These kinds of books contributed in part to enabling the Dutch Parliament to take effective control of affairs in the Netherlands East Indies

in 1865, before which time it had always been the province of the colonial ministry. It was only then that a policy of openness in colonial affairs could be consummated.

In this respect the publication of *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli (1860) was an epoch-making and timely event. It triggered a political debate in the Netherlands on the redefinition of the relationship with the Netherlands East Indies. Veth, who had to review the book in *De Gids*, must have realised its potential as fuel for the liberal opposition immediately. Veth wrote that he found the book “A powerful protest against the suppression of the Javanese by petty local rulers condoned by the colonial government” (Veth 1860: 64). Multatuli, who is generally regarded as an anti-colonialist, was in fact an advocate of the expansion of Dutch rule at the expense of the local rulers. This was exactly what Veth had in mind as well, only to be thwarted by the conservatives in the Indies and also confounded because the number of civil servants who could accomplish the civilising mission was too small to have any serious impact.

Institutionalising Anthropology

When Thorbecke returned to power in 1862, he immediately addressed two major political problems: educational reforms in the Netherlands and the redefinition of the relationship with the Netherlands East Indies. He appointed Veth secretary of the commission to reform the training programmes of civil servants in the colonial service. Its endeavours resulted in the foundation of the National Institute for Indies Civil Servants (*Rijksinstelling van Onderwijs in Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*) in Leiden (1864-77). In view of the prevailing liberal climate, it is not surprising that Veth, who had acquired a reputation as an expert on issues pertaining to the Netherlands East Indies, was appointed professor at this institute. In his inaugural lecture he summarised what in his view should be the nature and aims of education in linguistics and ethnology of the Netherlands Indies. He saw linguistics with geography and ethnography (*Land- en Volkenkunde*) being synonymous with (anthropo-) geography, which was supposed to be an encyclopaedic study of all that was known about the Netherlands East Indies. He foresaw that this ‘encyclopædia’ would quickly become outdated under the pressure of scientific specialisation. However, a new encyclopaedia could be compiled on the basis of new, specialist knowledge, and the possibilities were manifold. The aim of the training was to produce competent and humane civil servants whose duty it was, armoured with their knowledge of the native languages and cultures and their own superior Western culture, to lead the local inhabitants towards a better future inspired by the West (Veth 1864b: 21).

In this spirit Veth, as professor at this sub-university institute, trained many civil servants who were being appointed to high administrative positions and in

many instances acted as resource persons for their revered professor. The Indies Institute as such did not prosper as it turned out to be too theoretical to achieve a successful pass rate in the state examinations and Veth could not change that. In addition, a similar institute in Delft, with a more practical bent, was a serious competitor (Fasseur 1993). The National Institute for Indies Civil Servants was abolished in 1877 at the same time that Dutch higher education was reorganised. Veth's chair in anthropology at the Indies Institute was elevated to university level, along with chairs in Malay, Javanese, Islam studies, and *adat* law. This, among other things, laid the basis for the strong position of Asian Studies at the University of Leiden today. Veth's successors were influential anthropologists such as G.A. Wilken, J.J.M. de Groot, J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, and so forth.

The job at the National Institute for Indies Civil Servants left Veth ample time to devote himself to writing and to devising ways of bringing about a change in the colonial relationship. Veth was often consulted on colonial issues by politicians such as I.D. Fransen van de Putte, who was Minister of Colonial Affairs and Prime-Minister in the late 1860s. When the latter's Cultivation Law (*Cultuurstelsel*) was defeated in parliament, causing the fall of the second Thorbecke cabinet, Veth lashed out at the opponents of the Cultivation Law, a law which would have meant the end of the Cultivation System by allowing private land rights. The main tenor of Veth's article in *De Gids*, which is permeated by the universal claims of enlightened thought, was that whatever was valid for Europe also held good for the Netherlands Indies. "One has only to evade the communist concepts that we avoid here like the plague, but which we hail in Java as the highest wisdom" (Veth 1866: 317).

It was clear that something should be done to counteract the influence of the conservatives. Van Hoëvell contacted Veth to invite him to be editor-in-chief of van Hoëvell's brainchild, the *Journal for the Netherlands Indies* (*Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*). Veth helped to form an editorial staff that consisted of influential liberal politicians, captains of industry, and academics. Veth co-ordinated the attacks on the Cultivation System, with positive results because the Cultivation System was dismantled in 1870 and an Agrarian Law introduced, enabling private ownership of land in the Indies. Veth saw his long struggle rewarded, but this liberalisation was largely confined to Java. Another formidable obstacle in the way of liberalisation – one often overlooked – was the Abstention Policy (*Onthoudingspolitiek*); a policy opposing the expansion of direct colonial rule to the so-called Outer Territories (*Buitengewesten*). This policy was condoned by the British natural historian A.R. Wallace. Nevertheless, Veth popularised his works in the Netherlands. On the threshold of a new era in the relationship with the Netherlands East Indies, almost immediately after its publication in 1869, Veth began to translate Wallace's seminal *The Malay Archipelago* into Dutch (Veth 1870-71).

Wallace, who had been traveling through the Indies Archipelago for more than a decade, wrote a vivid account of his scientific explorations. The appeal of this book, of which the popularity has never waned, was recognised by Veth for whom it must have been a source of inspiration for his own *opus magnum*, *Java* on which he began work in 1872. In a review of Veth's article on Javanese landscapes that same year, an anonymous reviewer praised the scientific standard and Veth's captivating style of writing. The reviewer also remarked that Indonesia was not only economically, politically, and scientifically speaking of vital importance to the Netherlands, but Dutch art and literature also stood to gain in the Netherlands East Indies beyond the horizon: "Indonesia is a fallow soil for our arts, and even our prosaic language becomes poetical (the article of Veth is proof of this) when used to unveil the beauties of the East to touch those who have been blind for them" (Anon. 1864: 158). The vivacity of Veth's books is in part due to his contacts with colonial circles in Amsterdam. His wife's uncle had been governor of the Java Bank in Batavia and there were many persons in his immediate circle who had been in the Netherlands East Indies, including the editor of *De Gids*, Joh. C. Zimmerman, in whose obituary it is explicitly stated that he added much of the local colour to Veth's works (Quack 1888: 187).

This was by and large Veth's intellectual, cultural, and political background at the time Multatuli wrote the lines used in the introduction to this article. In 1872, Veth had not yet reached the pinnacle of his scientific expertise and social fame. He would use the enormous network he had been building since his Amsterdam days to attack the Abstention Policy with vigour. This should be seen in the wider framework of the emergence of modern imperialism (Kuitenbrouwer 1985). Only after Dutch authority had been established over the so-called Outer Territories would the economic exploitation of these areas be feasible. For this reason, Veth argued that Dutch control should be extended, especially over those regions (Borneo, Sumatra, New Guinea) in which the Dutch position was threatened by other colonial powers. Veth considered the Netherlands powerful enough to maintain itself in the competitive Darwinian world. In Darwinism he recognised precisely the instrument he needed to strengthen his arguments for the extension of Western civilisation by every possible means (Veth 1870: ix).

Science and Empire

At around the same time as the abolition of the Cultivation System produced an upsurge in economic relations between the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies, the outbreak of the Aceh War in 1873 led to an intensification in political relations. The failure of the first military campaign to Aceh was seized upon by Veth

(using Multatuliian rhetoric) as an opportunity to argue for the extension of colonial authority over the Outer Territories and for the consequent economic exploitation of these areas. In a pamphlet-like booklet on Aceh he wrote: "I am convinced that we are the defenders of civilization and humanity against barbarism and cruelty [...] There can be no doubt that the war should be continued" (Veth 1873: 136). The success of the second campaign at the end of 1873 elicited a surge of nationalism in the Netherlands, the first time in Dutch history that such an outburst was caused by an event in Indonesia. Veth believed that the failure of the first expedition could be attributed to a lack of knowledge about Aceh, an omission which could be repaired by launching scientific expeditions.

The defeat in the first Aceh campaign prompted the foundation of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society (*Koninklijk Nederlands Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, KNAG), of which Veth would remain president until 1884, in July 1873. This foundation should be seen within the framework of a broader European geographical movement, which can be interpreted as the scientific forerunner of modern imperialism (van der Velde 1988). Under Veth's inspired leadership, the society quickly developed into a very influential colonial lobby, consisting of approximately a thousand members in the early 1880s. New discoveries in the field of geography were reported in the periodical, published by the Society. In view of the fact that geography at that time encompassed anthropology, ethnology, geology, botany, and archaeology, periodicals of geographical societies of the last quarter of the nineteenth century are an under-utilised source for researchers in all fields mentioned. The press also gave the activities of the Society a wide coverage, certainly when famous explorers were the speakers at its meetings. By ensuring that explorers were invited as speakers, Veth tried to link the Indies with the romantic cult that had evolved around discoveries and explorers. In 1875, he became chairman of the preparatory committee for a scientific expedition to Sumatra and a nation-wide fundraising drive was initiated.

The Central Sumatra expedition, which lasted from 1877 to 1879, was paid for by the government and by private funds (van der Velde 2000: 235-259). Veth was primarily concerned with the organisation of and the publicity surrounding the expedition. He edited the letters written by the expedition members, which were published in the main newspapers. The expedition was also covered in Italian, French, German, and English geographical periodicals as well as in Dutch popular magazines. The expedition held the Netherlands in its grip throughout its entire duration and, when the leader of the expedition, J. Schouw Santvoort, died, he was instantly elevated to the position of a martyr in the march of civilisation. Under the guise of this scientific expedition, Veth tried to torpedo the Abstention Policy because the expedition inevitably led to political incidents in the quasi-independent states, which it tried to penetrate. However, the colonial government remained

deaf to Veth's call for a military intervention to clear the way for the expedition members, because it was already suffering from imperial overstretch in Aceh.

The expedition succeeded in heightening awareness among the Dutch population for a colonial part of the Netherlands at the other end of the world, of which the destiny was intertwined with that of the motherland. The nine-volume work on the expedition, edited and supervised by Veth, still remains a major source of knowledge for anyone studying Sumatra. It is a multidisciplinary work in which we find contributions by specialists on geography, ethnography, anthropology, geology, and botany (Veth 1881-92). This work is considered to be one of the best illustrated works of nineteenth-century Dutch scientific learning. In 1883 an international colonial exhibition was organised in Amsterdam, which brought the colonies to life for the general public. The exhibition attracted 1.5 million visitors, an unheard of number in those days. The visitors were confronted with all aspects of Netherlands Indies society. The showpiece was a Sumatran village with villagers and all (Bloembergen 2002). The three-volume catalogue of the world exhibition was edited by Veth and gives a clear idea of the degree of political, economic, and cultural intertwining of the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies (Veth 1883).

One year earlier, Veth finished his three-volume magnum opus *Java: Geographisch, Ethnographisch, Historisch* (Java: Geographical, Ethnographical and Historical Aspects) consisting of over three thousand pages. It can be viewed as an encyclopaedia of all knowledge then available about Java. In the introduction Veth expressly stated that it was a clear disadvantage that he had never been in the Netherlands East Indies. Ruminating about this kind of book, Stagl has written: "A false ethnography is a holistic depiction of a foreign experienced world which claims to be objective but is not. The author either knows the world he depicts and its intrinsic order far less than he pretends, is far less competent than he makes himself appear, has been there in another capacity than he tells us, or even has not been there at all. In all these cases, the objective knowledge that is lacking is covered up by falsehood. The author behaves insincerely" (Stagl 1995: 204). In my opinion Stagl's contention does not apply to Veth's *Java*. I tend to agree more with the remark the anthropologists de Josselin de Jong and Vermeulen made in a publication on the history of cultural anthropology. "Although from our standpoint Veth's anthropology was an indiscriminate sort of science, he contributed a great deal to the study of the languages, geography, history, and ethnography of the East Indies" (de Josselin de Jong and Vermeulen 1989: 288). Later on Vermeulen added, as already mentioned, that Veth raised the standard of ethnography in the Netherlands to an international level (Vermeulen 1996: 37).

In the introduction to the third volume of *Java*, Veth wrote that his description of Java is an example of an "imaginary journey". Nevertheless, this volume of *Java* was widely used as a travel guide, partly, it has to be admitted, because of the lack

of any other guides. Many researchers have stated that it is a myth that Veth's *Java* was used as a travel guide but my own copy of *Java* clearly betrays that the previous owner did use it as a travel guide; in the margins he has indicated things which had changed since Veth's imaginary journey. Furthermore, he inserted the day of his visit in the margins. Both as a source of knowledge or as a travel guide the book has been praised, and by those who should know. The famous scholar of Islam, C. Snouck Hurgronje, for example, wrote that to him *Java* was a kind of Bible (de Bruyn 1992: 40). In 1882 Veth was laureate of the prestigious Thorbecke award, founded to stimulate studies in the field of social and political sciences (van der Velde 2000: 260).

Veth's *Java* also engendered a dialogue with the ruler of the Javanese district of Brebes, Raden Mas Adipati Ario Tjondro Negoro, who had especially praised Veth for the second volume of *Java* because for the first time Indonesian history was treated from an Indonesian perspective rather than from the perspective of the colonial rulers. Veth saw to it that the more than one hundred pages of comment by Adipati Ario Tjondro Negoro were printed as a supplement to the Geographical Journal (*TAG, Bijbladen* 9, 1881). "It appears to me that when a Javanese leader lends his assistance to Europeans in their studies of the languages, people, and natural history of his own country, this sheds a favourable light on the relationship between the Dutch rulers and the native aristocracy, and consequently native society", Veth wrote (1881b: 25). This was the forerunner of a greater Dutch identity, which would be developed in the so-called Association Policy at the beginning of the twentieth century in which it was envisaged that in the course of time the Indonesians would be on an equal footing with the Dutch.

Veth had already anticipated that other specialists would come forward to criticise his work. A second edition of his *Java* in four volumes was completed in 1907, twelve years after the project had been initiated (Snelleman & Niermeyer 1896-1907). All then known Indies specialists, practically all of whom had actually been there, including R.D.M. Verbeek, M.J. de Goeje, A.C. Vreede, E. Dubois, A.W.M. van Hasselt, Joh. F. Snelleman, J.F. Niermeyer, G.P. Rouffaer, and C. Snouck Hurgronje contributed. Although their contributions were of a more up-to-date scientific standard, they conspicuously lacked the appeal to the cultivated audience for whom Veth had written so successfully. These were articles for specialists by specialists and therefore the book as a whole lacked the compelling vision of Veth.

From Encyclopaedism to Evolutionism

Although Veth's main focus was on the Netherlands East Indies, he was also interested in Africa and can be considered as the first Africanist in Dutch universities. The holder of the first chair of geography at the University of Amsterdam, C.M.

Kan (1837-1919), speaks in this context of the third phase in Veth's career (Kan 1895: 601). This interest was driven by the nationalism and Greater Holland ideas then prevalent in the Netherlands and to which Veth subscribed. Together with Kan, Veth wrote a bibliography of Dutch literature on Africa in the Netherlands (Veth & Kan 1876). He also published a pamphlet-like work *Onze Transvaalsche broeders* (*Our Transvaal Brothers*, Veth 1881a), and a biography of his son Daniel that deals in large part with his son's expedition to Mozambique and his untimely death there (Veth & Snelleman 1887). In one of his last articles dealing with the Dutch in Africa (1893), Veth brought his bibliography up-to-date and reflected light-heartedly on ethnology. This accords with an observation that Veth's African studies article was the only nineteenth-century reflection on this field of study by a Dutch anthropologist (Hovens & Triebels 1988: 1).

A part of Veth's article on the Dutch in Africa relates to the book by Hendrik Muller, *Industrie des Cafres du Sud-est de l'Afrique*, which according to Veth was not entitled *Ethnologie des Cafres du Sud-est de l'Afrique* because it applied only to the 'exterior' ethnology (habitat, clothes, food, and the like). 'Interior' ethnology (religious and law concepts, degree of intellectual development) demands, according to Veth, a very long and intensive study *in situ*. "Mr. Muller sensing that a more thorough ethnological study, such as those of the much lamented Wilken, can only be the fruit of special education and a protracted study spanning many years. Muller understood that a general ethnography of the Kaffer's was beyond his reach" (Veth 1893: 291). At this juncture in time, ethnology had clearly developed into a separate field of study, a development which Veth had not only predicted but also had seen as a logical and necessary step (Veth 1864b: 13-14). In Veth's eyes, Muller's book lacked a comparative evolutionist perspective. It should be stressed that Veth was one of the most active protagonists of Darwinist thinking by translating the seminal article on the physical geography of Indonesia by Wallace into Dutch (Wallace 1865). Therefore we should not be surprised by the fact that at the end of his life he switched from encyclopaedic ethnology to evolutionist ethnology. One year before he died Veth published two books. The first is entitled *Het paard onder de volken van het Maleische ras* (The Horse and the Peoples of the Malay Race) and the second *De leer der signatuur* (The Science of Signature).

Parts of these books had been published in the leading academic journal in the field of ethnography, *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*. In Veth's enthusiastic review of this journal in the *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, it becomes clear that his view of ethnography had changed completely. "Ethnography, the description of peoples is, when considering collecting of material practically the newest of all sciences [...] Quite recently it has become conscious of its objectives and method [...] It is the task of today's and of future ethnologists to gain a general overview of the development of civilization by a comparative study of the material and spiritual

life of all peoples" (Veth 1888: 432). His book on Horses (1894a) still fitted into the encyclopaedic tradition, but this can be explained because he had already finished it in 1886. This article is innovative in another respect, namely that for the first time in Dutch anthropology a domestic animal took centre stage. This was the beginning of a modest tradition in Dutch anthropology in which animals were the main topic of study such as in the studies of J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan (1915a-b) and A.C. Kruyt (1937).

In contrast to the above-mentioned book, Veth's essay on the science of signature is completely evolutionist in nature. Just like his other learned contemporaries, Veth saw the science of signature as superstitious and unscientific. The science of signature can be summarised as follows. Healing plants can be recognised by certain signs which bear a striking resemblance to the symptoms of the disease they can heal. These signs are called the signatures. A central question in Veth's article is whether this 'science' is the outcome of the natural and universally equal powers of thinking of man. In that case, traces could be detected in less civilised societies like in the Netherlands East Indies. Therefore Veth points out that the study of the spread of this science is very important: "For ethnology, the science so diligently studied with the object of disclosing man to himself, the study of the science of signature, just as the study of all superstitious opinions and foolishnesses, of all aberrations of the human mind, is a very important topic" (Veth 1894b: 8). The German anthropologist and geographer Friedrich Ratzel, with whom Veth was corresponding, gave him the necessary ammunition: "Die Menschheit erscheint zunächst als eine Einheit, in welcher die Verschiedenheiten weit hinter dem Gemeinsamen zurücktreten. Diese Einheit ist in geschichtlicher Zeit gewachsen und strebt noch immer mehr, sie zu vollenden, so dass, wie im antropologisch-ethnographischen die Einheit des Menschengeschlechtes als letztes und höchstes Ziel der Menschheits-Entwicklung erscheint. Die Unterschieden innerhalb dieser Einheit weisen einmal auf früher getrennte Entwicklungen zurück [...]" (Ratzel 1882: 470; Buttmann 1977). ("Mankind initially appears as a unity where differences take precedence over commonalities. This unity has grown over time and has the tendency to complete itself so that, as both in the anthropological and ethnographical domain, the unity of mankind is perceived as the highest and ultimate goal of human development. The differences within this unity reveal earlier separate developments.")

In the following quote one can clearly trace the influence of his successor G.A. Wilken (1847-1891), who died prematurely in 1891: "The development of man is inherent to the striving for greater perfection. If we want to understand the still existing survivals, half-forgotten uses of most developed man, then one has to study the least civilized where one still can observe these uses and rituals in their pristine state" (Veth 1894b: 137). While Wilken had purely academic motives, Veth's colonial motives were as important, namely the assimilation of the local population. This completely permeated his thinking about the colonial relationship. Therefore his

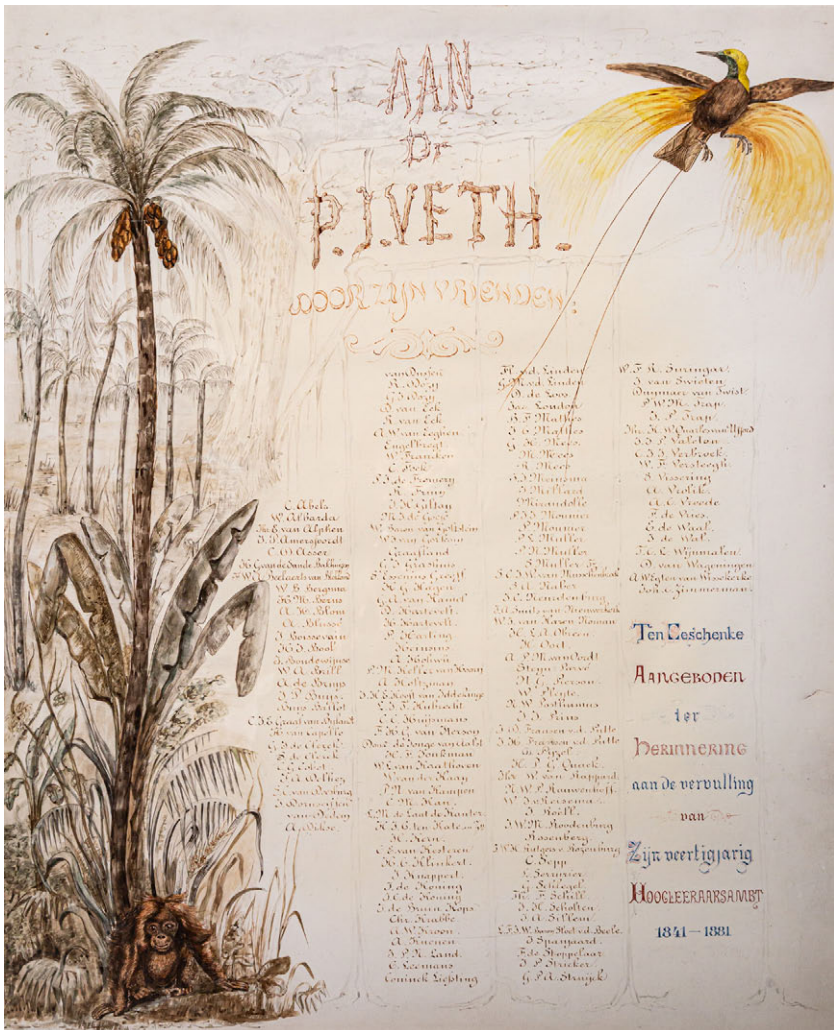


Figure 8. Jan Veth. *Orang utan and bird of paradise*. 1882. Drawing on parchment. 43 × 51cm. Collection Vortex. Photo Cindy Bakker. Gift of Veth's friends to P.J. Veth's on the occasion of his 40 years professorship in 1882.

conclusion comes as no surprise. “We can clearly see traces of the way of thinking, that has lead in the more developed Europeans to a more or less systematic science of signature, and these will probably in closer examination be confirmed” (Veth 1894b: 141). To Veth this certainly applied, never too old to learn.

125 Years of Anthropology in the Netherlands

In his inaugural lecture of 1885, Veth's successor Wilken, hailed his master with fulsome words. "Everybody knows what Veth has meant to this University and for Indology. Who has not heard of his long series of writings in which he laid down the results of his meticulous, sharply honed research. All his works have been examples of unmatched knowledge and consistent diligence and punctiliousness. Who has not read his masterpiece on Java, so vast in its learning, so attractive because of the clarity and liveliness of what he describes, exceedingly enthralling because of the love for his topic, which permeates the author. Not only have the contents of his writings enriched knowledge of the Netherlands East Indies, but his exemplary behaviour has also done a great deal for the dissemination and stimulation of this knowledge. How much has been inspired by his encouragement? How many people enthused by his works have taken up research on the Far East? He has been a true jewel in the crown of the University of Leiden. He held high its prestige, he whose name is known far beyond the borders of the Netherlands" (Wilken 1885: 36-37).

It was understandable that Wilken praised his master, because the latter had worked assiduously to promote his career. In 1884, when Veth was ill and retired to a country retreat, he saw to it that Wilken, a man born in the Netherlands East Indies and with much fieldwork experience, took over his lectures. Furthermore, he saw to it that Wilken received an honorary doctorate, so that nothing stood in the way of him becoming his successor. Nevertheless, there was strong competition for the coveted chair between Wilken and L. Serrurier, the director of the National Museum of Ethnology at Leiden, who had no fieldwork experience whatsoever but plenty of clout. Veth clearly wanted someone with fieldwork experience to succeed him because he had always seen it as a major disadvantage that he never had the opportunity to visit the Netherlands East Indies himself because of ill-health.

Veth retired in 1885 and his advice concerning his successor was honoured because he was succeeded in 1885 by Wilken who died prematurely six years later, but who in the meantime had made a lasting impression on his colleagues. Whereas Veth was largely forgotten by anthropologists and his name faded away into the background, Wilken was incorrectly seen as the founding father of Dutch anthropology instead. It is shameful to admit, but it was the British anthropologist Adam Kuper who had to point out to one of Veth's successors, P.E. Josselin de Jong, that in 1977 it was just a century ago that Veth had founded the first chair of anthropology in the Netherlands. De Josselin de Jong alarmed his senior colleague G.W. Locher in 1978 saying: "As you are probably aware, it was a century ago last year, that P.J. Veth was appointed to the chair of Land-en Volkenkunde van den Indischen Archipel" (Locher 1978: 1). Subsequently, the lecture to commemorate the founding of the chair a hundred years previously was held one year too late.

That Wilken was more famous among anthropologists was because he was the first specialist in the anthropology of Indonesia, while Veth worked for the most part of his life in the encyclopaedic tradition and had never been in the Netherlands East Indies. Veth's broader vision was based on a great variety of Netherlands East Indies and Dutch source material, literature and an extended network of informants. Many people have been to the Netherlands East Indies on behalf of Veth and he used the material they collected to create a compelling vision of the Netherlands East Indies, which stimulated a great many people to take an interest in that part of the world. Nevertheless, he was what we call nowadays "Orientalist" in outlook. The last decade of the twentieth century saw a re-appreciation of his ground-breaking work, and this did not apply in anthropology alone because Veth had a much broader scope.

Although there were other persons who started to build bridges to the Netherlands East Indies at the same time as Veth did, they were far less successful. Veth was regarded as the leading Dutch authority in the field of the Netherlands East Indies. The proof would seem to be that he was not dethroned during his lifetime and, in fact, there was nobody capable of following in his footsteps. He was replaced by specialist demi-gods whose authority was much more narrowly confined. By the time Veth died in 1895, aged eighty, everyone had recognised that nobody could cover the whole field and therefore it was parcelled out.

As a reminder for anthropologists who have spent too much time in the field, I want to conclude this article by remarking that this year (2002) marks the fact that 125 years ago P.J. Veth became the first professor of anthropology at Leiden University!

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The World According to Jacob Haafner (1754-1809): Travel Writer and Anti-colonialist

Jacob Gotfried Haafner (1754-1809) lived in South Africa, Sri Lanka, India and Mauritius for more than 20 years. He wrote five travel accounts about his stay there, in which the colonial environment was not spared his strong criticism. He wrote a comparative essay on the havoc wrought by missionaries and missionary societies worldwide, from which he inferred that missionaries were not needed overseas as “the locals were happy as they were” and, in most cases, were more cultured than these promoters of the so-called “Western civilisation”. Haafner was ostracised by his fellow citizens after the publication of this essay because he had dared to consider non-Western people not only as their equals but even as their superiors.

Original source: Velde, Paul van der, ‘De wereld volgens Jacob Haafner (1754-1809). Reisverhalen-schrijver en antikolonialist.’ Originally a lecture re-worked into the current article.

In love with India

However, there was certainly another (lighter) side to his writings. Indeed, his direct, gripping style of writing and his adventurous life made him one of the most popular Dutch writers of the early 19th century. His books remain of interest to this very day. The vivid descriptions of everyday life in the tropics bear testimony to his sharp powers of observation. Haafner was deeply in love with Indian culture. He studied the languages and cultures of the Subcontinent and was delighted when mistaken for an Indian. He is said to have been the first Dutchman with a genuine interest in India and its people and as a result turned into a diehard Anglophobe. “Had I to write the history of the English and their deeds in Asia”, Haafner once wrote, “it would be the spitting image of hell”. Corruption, plunder, murder, everything seemed to be acceptable in the eyes of that nation. The English did not even hesitate to cause famine in their Asian colonies for love of gain, as will be illustrated later on.

Exiled from his heart’s desire and living under the grey skies of Amsterdam around the turn of the 19th century, India’s reality became even more present in his writings. He tried to sell his treatises on Indian gods, rites and dancers to an erudite Dutch society; but Dutch scholars were neither interested in them, nor in the drawings of Mamia, his Indian lover, which they regarded as provocative. Fortunately, they have survived the passage of time as gaily coloured and detailed engravings in his books.

The degree to which Haafner was in love with India is also betrayed by the fact that he wanted to publish a journal devoted solely to India! In the Amsterdam of

his day, however, nobody was interested in India; except that is, for the German philosopher A.W. Schlegel who was a teacher in the employ of a rich banking family whom Haafner most probably ran into in the then popular coffee shop “De Paradijsvogel” (Bird of Paradise). Although there is no proof to be found of their encounters I consider it highly likely that Haafner must have inspired Schlegel because there was no other source of knowledge about India available in Amsterdam at that time. Schlegel was to become a leading advocate of Romanticism and the study of India in German-speaking countries.

The Dutch clearly had other things on their minds. The French had conquered the Low Countries and would remain in control until 1813. By that time, Haafner was dead, having published two travel books solely on India, of which his *Travels in a Palanquin* is his keywork. This book, but also his other works, won much acclaim in the early days of Romanticism and were immediately translated into German, French, Danish, Swedish, and English. Haafner wrote his literary work, five extensive travelogues, constituting a sort of autobiography in five parts, in the period between 1795 and 1809, a time in which the Netherlands was a loyal ally to the French and a kingdom under the rule of the French king, Louis Napoleon, brother of the Emperor.

During those years, Haafner lived in poverty; in fact, he was completely down and out, and did everything he possibly could to find work, or to attract the attention of the authorities. Being anti-English could be a useful tool to achieve that aim. He deplored the easy way in which the English had succeeded in capturing the factories of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and territories in Sri Lanka, India and South Africa.

In 1796, aged 42, Haafner applied for a job with the directors of the VOC. He was thinking of a job on the Board of Directors. Wasn't this asking too much? Given his many skills such a high function would do him justice, so he felt. In his letter to the directors he recommended himself as follows: “Diligence, zeal, an intimate knowledge of Dutch, French, German, Portuguese, Hindi, Tamil and English (yes, indeed!) and of bookkeeping; an excellent style of writing, a thorough knowledge of the religions, and trade of India.”

These were no insignificant qualities, and what is more, it was true! The directors were less convinced, and his requests were turned down without much ado, leaving him, as he wrote in an angry letter to them, facing “a sad and desperate prospect”. And it was a sad and desperate prospect. After many wonderful years spent in Asia as a servant of the VOC, as a private trader and traveller, he now had to live in Amsterdam, a gloomy and miserable city afflicted with a severe economic crisis, and covered by an everlasting, thick, and depressing layer of clouds! A horrible city: “No, in Europe and especially in its northern climes, no one enjoys their life. It is safe to say that their life withers away. In a word, they die without

having ever truly lived". Haafner – this much is clear – suffered from an acute and incurable nostalgia for Asia while living in the northern part of Europe.

Thirty years before, in 1766, as a 12 year old boy, he had departed to Asia for the first time. After a short stay in Amsterdam, he again left for Asia in 1771, now 17 years old, to stay in India almost without interruption until 1787. From 1790, 36 years old, he lived in Amsterdam till his death in 1809; difficult and probably unsatisfactory years, which were spent dreaming of India and writing on his life and adventures there. At first he must have lived in relative prosperity. In India he had collected – in good colonial fashion – a modest fortune by participating in the flourishing diamond trade. After his return to Europe he had, however, made a big mistake (apart from returning of course): he invested his money in French state certificates. After the French Revolution these bonds depreciated with lightning speed, so that Haafner, soon after 1790, had to eke out a meagre livelihood as a shopkeeper selling pipes.

In the next years he moved a number of times from one address to another and life did not get any better. He felt frustrated and misunderstood; he missed having a job, a social position, and he lacked the social status necessary to be included as a member of the scholarly or literary societies in the city, to which he felt himself entitled. Apart from that, he suffered from deteriorating health and was increasingly tormented by angina pectoris, which would ultimately lead to his death. From 1791 onwards, he was responsible for a family with three children. Shortly before his death he married his wife officially; they had been together since 1790.

He probably filled his days visiting coffee houses (does anything ever change in Amsterdam?), meeting people from abroad in the harbour city, and with writing and coming up with new plots for books and journals. He worked on a translation of the Sanskrit Ramayana epic, which was published posthumously by his eldest son in the 1820s, and he prepared the publication of a treatise on the harmful consequences of the Christian missions in the overseas world, which was published in 1807.

Haafner's interest in India, its culture and literature, and his knowledge of the Indian languages, were rather unique; at least in the Netherlands where, at that time, virtually no one shared his concerns. However, his five entertaining travel stories published between 1806 and 1821 – partly during his life, partly posthumously – were what made him truly unique. They describe his many exciting adventures and colourful encounters, situated in India in the declining years of the VOC, in a lively and sparkling style and manner. They belong to the best written Dutch travel stories of the whole emporial era.

The publication of these travelogues made him instantly famous. Now he finally got deserved recognition as an author. The books were translated into German, French, English, Danish and Swedish. In Germany he was praised for giving such good information on the culture and people of India; he was described as "Einen

feinfühlenden Menschenfreund und unparteiischer Beobachter”[“A sympathetic philanthropist and an impartial observer”]. The French considered him a real intellectual: “Un penseur original et profond, qui a rendu ses idées dans un style aussi brillant que énergique” [“An original and profound thinker, who presented his ideas in a brilliant and energetic style”]. But the nicest comment undoubtedly came from an English reviewer. In a rare combination of generosity and insult he wrote: “There is an air of sprightliness about Mr. Haafner, which certainly belies the place of his nativity”. It had probably escaped the notice of the reviewer that Haafner was not born in Holland, but in Halle in Germany.

Travel Fever

From his early youth, he tells us, he had been deeply affected by a foolish travel fever. “O! the desire for travel is an unhappy, incurable longing that ends not except with life, which is often shortened when one finds it impossible to satisfy this longing owing to age, want, or domestic circumstances. I have been troubled with this desire from my childhood: it torments me even now, and embitters my life. This insatiable curiosity to investigate everything for oneself, and this romantic passion for strange meetings and adventure; in how many dangers have they not plunged me, and what inconveniences and misfortunes have they not caused me; how often have they not brought me unhappiness or deprived me of the happiness I already enjoyed?”

This sounds very serious. But again, he was right. From his early youth he was constantly moving. Born in Halle in Germany in 1754 he soon moved with his parents to Embden in Northern Germany, and a few years later, in 1765, to Amsterdam. His father, Matthias Haafner, enlisted as a ship’s surgeon in the service of the VOC. When he departed for Asia in June 1766, he took along his 12 year old son Jacob, who performed all sorts of menial tasks on board. Thus, Jacob undertook the long voyage from Europe to Asia when he was still just a child, leaving his mother and younger siblings behind. “A special coincidence tore me from the arms of my beloved parents and I was thrown into the wider world.” It took the ship 6 months to reach South Africa; however, his father fell ill and died shortly before their arrival in Cape Town, which was a fairly large and equally lively VOC settlement, with no less than 19,000 inhabitants. As a semi-orphan Jacob disembarked, not knowing what to do. But soon he was adopted into a family of a high ranking Company servant. He learned a lot, became acquainted with sailing and other navigational skills, and often went out shooting with friends.

But to say that his life was entirely pleasant would be wrong. He became acquainted with the dark side of colonialism and company rule overseas. The

slave population of the Cape was treated mercilessly by the white masters. Slaves were killed and mistreated for even the slightest offence or error. In 1767, Jacob witnessed the public burning of a young slave girl, accused of arson. It deeply impressed him; he could never forget it and time and again he returned to the theme of colonial cruelty in his later work.

But there were also better experiences. On one of his trips in the mountains just outside Cape Town, he met a beautiful Khoikhoi girl. Admittedly, she was rubbed entirely from head-to-toe with fat and soot, which was customary among the Khoikhoi, but that did not diminish her overwhelming beauty. "Instead of the flat nose and pronounced jaws, she had a full face, with charming features, a row of shining white teeth, an open and fiery eye, and her fine properties and well-shaped breasts made her into one of those rare beauties among the Khoikhoi".

Haafner returned to Amsterdam and became a painter's apprentice. His talent for drawing and painting is evident from the engravings in his books. But life in Amsterdam, or for that matter in Europe, had become oppressive to him. He longed for the adventurous life overseas and without delay he again enlisted as a VOC servant. In June 1771, 17 years old, he departed for the second time. Two years later – after a disastrous voyage, a shipwreck, and barbaric treatment by a sadistic captain – he arrived in Negapatnam, the main VOC factory on the Coromandel coast of India. Tired of the sailor's life, he decided to settle in the city and accept a job in the factory. He became an assistant bookkeeper, which he remained until 1779. After a quarrel with his superiors, he resigned and was left to fend for himself.

He later remained remarkably silent about his years as a bookkeeper of the Company in Negapatnam. They were probably boring years, in which he kept the books and endlessly copied letters and other documents for the Company administration. Yet, he took the opportunity to learn as much about India as he could; about the Tamil language in this part of the country, about the trade, the products and prices, and so on. Like almost all Company servants, he too conducted some private trade to supplement his meagre wage. And of course, he became extremely experienced in bookkeeping, a quality that would be useful to him later on when he was living as a free burgher in India.

The years between 1779 and 1786 were the years of adventure. We should remember that Haafner lived in India during a period of disruption, rebellion and war. The VOC was in poor shape and faced fierce competition by the English and French East India Companies. England had started to conquer Indian territories from its base in Bengal and the factories of the VOC would be among its first victims. In 1780, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War broke out, with disastrous consequences for the Dutch factories in Asia. Moreover, the Indian monarch Haidar Ali, from the central Indian town of Mysore, was extending his power and influence to the Coromandel coast, which led to a large-scale war with the English and widespread

plunder and disruption. All this happened exactly during the years Haafner was living and travelling in India. He witnessed the horrors of the war, was a victim himself, and lamented the suffering of, especially, the common people.

“Mangos! Ripe Mangos!”

To give an impression of how passionate Haafner was about India, it is best to hear his own voice for which purpose a longer passage from his *Adventures on a Journey from Madras via Tranquebar to Ceylon* is selected. It is an exceptional portrayal of life around 1780 in Sadraspatnam, a small factory on the Coromandel Coast. It was situated far from the centre of Dutch colonial power, and people of diverse nationalities, ethnicities and religious creeds coexisted here peacefully. He was a private bookkeeper and trader. Haafner's writings suggest a lively culture steeped in education, religion and trade. “A dozen young men are memorizing poems. Sitting beside them is a group of boys reciting the alphabet and, next to them, a group of thirty toddlers calling out the first letters of the alphabet. Others are saying their time-tables out loud and a couple of advanced students are reading *puranas* in a lilting voice. One listens to the other and, in betwixt their chants, you can hear the soft feminine voices of a couple of young *devdasis* or temple dancers. The pavement swarms with beginners in the art of writing. They are seated with crossed legs and practice writing characters in the sand while shouting them out loud. In short, everybody is screaming and yelling.

My morning stroll would always include a visit to the bazaar. Jugglers, sooth-sayers, basket-makers, tattooists and women selling coloured glazed bangles and extremely tasty rice pancakes congregate here. The stalls are open for business. The merchants arrive with their touchstones, gold scales and bags full of cash and rupees. They display their linen or other goods while mendicants take up their usual position near a temple devoted to the god Ganesh. A couple of naked fakirs move about, trying to draw people's attention. It is around nine in the morning. Buyers and those who are just curious arrive. The market and the streets are bustling and thronging with people. Not before long the whole street is filled with a thousand voices: Mangos! Ripe Mangos! Tamarind Yellow and ripe bananas! Creamy milk! Who wants creamy milk? Buffalo milk! Fresh and clarified butter! Pickled fruits! Vegetables! Areca and betel! Ripe and fresh coconuts! Fresh palm fruit!

The screaming and yelling is beyond compare. The crying of the little children, the singing of the *sannyasins* with their clanging cymbals, the drums of the yogis, the hobo snake charmers and much more of that ilk. The proud temple bull clears a way through these streets teeming with people. He grabs a mouthful of vegetables at several stalls. The merchants not only let him be, but offer him their best

selections. They try to lure him because everybody feels honoured when he pays them a visit.”

However, all this came to an abrupt end when the English suddenly attacked at the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war. “Heavens, how we startled at hearing this unexpected message; as if we had been struck by thunder. Suddenly snatched away from peace and pleasure, to experience the humiliations and abuse of being a prisoner of war. We exploded with curses against the English and detested their disloyalty and shameful surprise attack.”

Sadraspatnam was destroyed and Haafner was taken to Madras. Deprived of his possessions and money, he arrived in the city, which was already overcrowded with refugees who had attempted to escape the ravages of war in the countryside. Soon a terrible famine broke out, largely, according to Haafner, because of the British authorities and merchants who deliberately withheld food supplies from the city and even let a fleet of 80 ships carrying food be wrecked in a storm off the coast, all in order to screw up the prices. A British author, William Hickey, living in the city during the famine, described the conditions as follows: “A truly melancholy spectacle, the whole road being strewed on both sides with the skulls and bones of innumerable poor creatures who had there laid themselves down and miserably perished from a lack of food.” His subsequent description is even more hellish than Goya’s war drawings.

In the meantime the Dutch prisoners of war had been evacuated to Batavia (Jakarta), but Haafner had decided to stay behind in India, though he certainly wanted to leave Madras. With his mestizo girlfriend, Anna Widder, he managed to get away from the besieged city, in a small Indian rowing boat. After a perilous voyage along the coast, they finally arrived safely in Ceylon in early 1783. Here he met old friends from Negapatnam and Sadras, and enjoyed a very happy time with Anna. But, of course, the travel bug, that incurable desire, struck again. So, he and some friends undertook a hike across the island, from Jaffnapatnam to Colombo and back. They faced all kinds of dangers, came across ferocious bears and poisonous snakes, heard aggressive and ghastly voices of unseen jungle creatures in a blood-curdling succession of unexpected incidents. But when travelling, Haafner had an unprejudiced eye for the beauty of nature.

Travels in a Palanquin

“The sun now rose in full majesty: the heaven was blue and clear, and the scarcely-opened dawn gave all objects around me a youthful enchanting appearance; the finely wending shores of the gulf, bordered with high trees, the overhanging branches of which were reflected on the blue surface of the water; the gentle

breath of the cool morning wind; the monotonous splashing of the light waves; the screaming of the seagulls, that skimmed in circles, the surface of the water; the melodious pipe of the red-legged snipes, calling to each other; the innumerable water-fowl, rising from the thick groves of reeds, produced in me the most delightful sensations, and, at that moment, all the dangers, all the difficulties of our journey were forgotten.”

Haafner not only had an eye for nature, but he also gives us a lot of hilarious descriptions of people who went overseas, such as that of a particular deaf baker. “As he spoke with the Strasbourg accent, a mixed dialect of bad Dutch and German, thickly interspersed with oaths, and at the same time accompanied the relation of his adventures with ridiculous gestures, and a distorted countenance, it was impossible for us to refrain from occasionally bursting out into loud laughter. He had married four wives in different cities in Europe, who, as far as he knew, when he went to India, were all living, and unknown to one another. They had caused him all the evils that wicked women can possibly bring upon man. His domestic history, which he related in full length, was truly strange and humorous.

He was forced to leave his first wife, for fear of his life; she was a devil in human shape. The second had sold him to a Prussian recruiting party, and he had the misfortune to lose his hearing at the Battle of Rosbach. The third, who was a spendthrift tippler, soon reduced him from the comfortable situation he was in when he had the misfortune to marry her, to a state of beggary. The fourth, whom he espoused at Hamburg, betrayed him into the hands of the Dutch recruiters for the VOC and he was sent by them as a soldier to Negapatnam. He there married his fifth wife.”

After the travels across the island, and upon his return to Jaffna, he found that Anna had eloped to Ceylon with a rich businessman. So much for fidelity. Haafner also left Ceylon and proceeded to Calcutta in Bengal, the centre of British administration. He found a job as a bookkeeper to the former Governor of Benares, Joseph Fowke, and was active in the international trade that connected Bengal with the rest of Asia. He does not write much on his activities in Calcutta, but from the correspondence with Fowke in the archives of the British East India Company we have been able to more or less reconstruct his life. In early 1786, he suddenly left Calcutta for a journey in a palanquin along the coast southwards.

This journey is entertainingly described in the magnificent 2 volume *Reize in eenen Palanquin* (Travels in a palanquin), his best book. It contains fascinating descriptions of the Indian landscape, people, religious customs and ancient architecture. The piece de resistance, however, is the love affair with the Indian dancer, Mamia. After her tragic death, Haafner decided to return to Europe. He did so via Mauritius where he ended up in a terrible cyclone. I will quote from his description to give you another example of how he painted nature. “On the night of January 14th 1787, at long last after a deadly and eerie silence of several hours, the cyclone hits the



Figure 9. Engraving by Reinier Vinkeles executed on the basis of the drawing by Jacob Haafner of his girlfriend, the devdasi Mamia. 1809. 20 × 15 cm. Photo Cindy Bakker.

island with so much force and creating such an incredible noise that it is impossible to give even the slightest idea of it. You cannot compare it to anything else. Heaven and earth vanished from sight. The roaring and howling of the cyclone would have filled the heart of the bravest person with fear. Occasionally the persistent rumbling of thunder, and the sound of houses collapsing in the neighbourhood, drowned out its tumult. The wind seemed to come from all directions and after it abated a little, it seemed as if it gathered fresh strength from all the corners of the world.”

He departed shortly afterwards; travelling via South Africa, France and Germany he finally returned to Amsterdam, where he settled permanently in 1790. It is difficult to believe that he was only 36 years at the time of his return.

Indian among Indians

The central theme of his travel stories is his life in India, his travels in that country, his contacts with the inhabitants, the customs of the people and the landscape. What image does he present of it? He quite simply adored it; he idealised the country and its people. By way of contrast, he criticised the Europeans, the English mostly, for causing havoc and suffering among the population. The Europeans invariably are the bad guys of the play. They turned Asia into a European penal colony: “Rascals, squanderers, criminals, bankrupts, and other bad people, every one runs to the Indies, to oppress the poor Indians, to plunder them, and to kill them.” No other contemporary writer ever criticised colonialism more adamantly and more vehemently than Jacob Haafner did. The Indians, in turn, are praised for their noble and humanitarian way of life. Haafner read Rousseau, praised the ideal of vegetarianism and severely disliked hunting and the killing of animals, which he saw as characteristic of the Indian way of life. He immediately converted to vegetarianism himself and did not want to hunt anymore, although he always had been – until the moment of his conversion – an ardent hunter.

Haafner also admired the Indian princes, especially the monarch of Mysore, Haidar Ali. It was he who was wrecking the power of the English in India. He was depicted by Haafner as a freedom fighter, almost in the same manner as twentieth century intellectuals once admired Fidel Castro as the lonely, heroic fighter against US imperialism. Haafner was proud of almost being an Indian among the Indians. He saw himself as blended in with his Indian environment; fused with India and its inhabitants. Not being recognised as a European or a white man, that is what he liked most. “I had to laugh that this man mistook me for a mestizo. It is true, I entirely had the attitude and appearance of a mestizo. Not only was I without socks and shoes, but my face was burnt by the sun and I spoke the Tamil language fluently and properly.”

What Haafner describes in his stories are the mixed, international communities of Indians, other Asians, Europeans of various nationalities and mestizos, inhabiting the coastal regions of India, in which he himself lived with such ease and pleasure. Particularly the small city of Sadraspatnam, where he worked for two years until the English conquest put an end to it, is depicted in all its colourful aspects. What he liked was the absence of any form of pretentiousness, ceremonialism and conventionalism, so typical of Dutch society, where everything was organised according to hierarchy and status. In Sadraspatnam he lived in a socially mixed society, with parties and picnics at night, in an exuberant and elated atmosphere.

While travelling, Haafner divided his attention equally between nature and culture. He visited old temples and other shrines and sanctuaries, often ruins, and depicted them himself. Both in his love of the pluriform culture of the people, and in his fascination with nature and ancient history, he appears to us as a romanticist. In addition to the people, the landscape and nature of India evoked vehement emotions in Haafner. In his *Travels in a Palanquin* his description of the Indian nature is almost religious in fervour and emotion, with the literary description of an overwhelming sunrise serving as a climax. It reads as an ode to nature, to the sun, and the message is: how insignificant and trivial human life is, and how majestic and sublime nature is.

Another strong point of Haafner as a writer is his sense of humour. He might idealise the Indians and the Indian society, but his sense of humour guaranteed that he never went too far in this. He had a good feel for the bizarre and grotesque, and he described people and events with a sense of irony. His language is expressive and evocative, his style the unparalleled result of a mixture of common sense and melodrama, and hyperbole is probably his most favourite trope. His world is populated with odd characters who constantly run into the most peculiar situations. That undoubtedly must be the reason that his work has sometimes been considered to be pure fantasy.

Travel Writing

Fifty years ago Percy Adams wrote a little, but influential, book that is still a classic: *Travelers and Travel Liars 1600-1800*. It discusses the historical reliability of the travelogue and discerns three categories. The first one is that of the true travel story, written by a traveller who has visited the places he describes. The second one is that of the imaginative travelogue, in which an author brings us to an invented world, e.g., Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The third one is that of the armchair traveller; he is the travel liar, who describes a journey or a foreign country without ever having visited it personally. Instead of making a journey himself, he stays safely at

home, consulting other travel stories and geographical descriptions and borrowing from them freely. The market for travel stories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was undoubtedly as great as it is today and many travelogues appeared that were wholly or partly invented, or copied from other ones. Often artists added illustrations to the travel stories that were wholly artificial and showed only what Asia looked like in the imagination of the artist himself.

In Haafner's case it is quite clear that he was anything but an armchair traveller. During the preparation of the new edition of Haafner's works at the end of the previous century my colleague Jaap de Moor and I conducted as much archival research as possible, in order to verify what Haafner wrote about life, ships he was on, places he lived, jobs he had, friends he made. This research confirmed – even to our own surprise – much of what he tells in his stories. Documents of the National Archive in the Hague, but also the India Office Library in London and the Ceylonese archives in Colombo, show that all, or almost all, people he described, did in fact live in Asia and that they indeed held the jobs he attributed to them. We could successfully reconstruct his career as a VOC servant, and even found a receipt of the monthly rent for his house in Calcutta, where he lived as a free burgher.

In other respects, however, his work is certainly more literary, and closely follows the conventions and themes of his time. So we might conclude that Haafner described his own life and experiences with a certain accuracy, but that he did not hesitate, like many other writers, to borrow themes and stories from other books without mentioning his sources. Haafner was a writer who idolised India and its inhabitants. But this qualification doesn't really do him justice as, despite his fervent fascination with India, he nevertheless remained an independent and critical observer with an open mind and observant eye for the ridiculous aspects of life in that country. The mumbo-jumbo of all kinds of priests and religious functionaries, ascetics and denouncers of worldly matters, who tried to shake money out of the people's pockets through mysterious and obscure ceremonies, made him laugh. The servants of the Almighty were usually thoroughly disliked by him, whether they were Hindu, Catholic or Protestant.

Criminal Missionaries

That became obvious in 1807, when he published a treatise which caused consternation in ecclesial circles in the Netherlands. It is illustrative of Haafner's thinking and reflects what books he was studying and reading during his years in Amsterdam. It is called *Onderzoek naar het nut der Zendelingen en Zendelings-genootschappen* (Examination of the usefulness of missionaries and missionary societies). It was Haafner's submission for the essay contest organised by one of the oldest Dutch

scholarly societies, Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap (Teylers Theological Society) in Haarlem. The Society had asked for essays answering the question: what has been the use of missionary work in the overseas world in the past and what could possibly be done to improve this work in the future?

Who could have been better equipped to answer the question than Jacob Haafner? In barely 100 pages he made mincemeat of the missionaries. According to him the world has never seen a more criminal and hypocritical group of people than the European missionaries. He points to all kinds of crimes and misbehaviour, quotes extensively from other authors who were just as critical on Christianity and the missions, such as Voltaire, and has only one good piece of advice for the future: if anywhere in Asia one particular group of people needs the beneficial effects of the Gospel, it certainly is the Europeans themselves, and them alone. But he issues a warning to the Society; if it were ever to send missionaries to evangelise the Europeans in Asia, these men should be fearless, because they would live in constant peril and fear of death. Haafner won the prize in 1805, but it took the cautious gentlemen of the Society two years before they had the book published in the prestigious series *Verhandeligen* (Transactions).

Haafner's way of thinking shocked his contemporaries. This can best be illustrated by the reactions to Haafner's treatise. This work, which can be viewed as his intellectual testament, was the topic of heated debates in missionary circles in the Netherlands, and four essays were written to refute his assertions. The authors tried to undermine Haafner's scientific and moral reputation and accused him of a lack of faith and of being opposed to missionary endeavours. They wrote that his historical knowledge of the mission was inadequate, that he had not used the politically correct sources and literature, but that when he did so, he quoted out of context, and that his way of thinking was based on false conceptions. Haafner's starting point was a respect for nature, and for the way of thinking and customs of indigenous populations. He invoked these aspects in order to show that attempts to convert these people would be fruitless.

Haafner, affirming other civilisations and putting them on equal footing with Christianity, rather than putting Western civilisation first, was utterly unacceptable to his contemporaries. When Haafner praised the Vedas as an original Hindu work, for instance, one of his critics stated that they had surely been borrowed from the Christian Scriptures. The critic maintained that the Vedas were a corruption of the Holy Scriptures, and that it was time to re-introduce the real Vedas, as this was what the Hindus were waiting for! It was difficult indeed for many of Haafner's contemporaries to appreciate or even understand the intercultural perspective of this original and profound thinker.

Haafner's work fell into oblivion over the course of the nineteenth century. Travel stories, in a way the precursors to the novel, were surpassed by the new

genre of novel during that century. There were periods, though, in which Haafner's work showed a revival, such as when the Germans during the Second World War discovered Haafner's dislike of the English, and decided to publish new editions of Haafner's work as a means of anti-English propaganda. The second revival was after the republication of his complete works and the publication of his biography in Dutch at the beginning of this century. A third revival could come when his biography is published in English, under the title: *Living under Palm Trees. The Sublime World of Jacob Haafner*. This would be ironic, but the Anglophobe Haafner would have been utterly amused.

The Painter Willem Imandt Revisited: A European Painter in Indonesia

The so-called Mooi Indië (Beautiful Indies) genre of painting has been both wrongfully neglected and scorned. The paintings were mostly dismissed as the inadequate products of artists lacking in classical training. Willem Imandt (1882-1967), about whom little was known until recently, was one of the artists unjustly relegated to this poorly defined and unappreciated genre, which was most unfortunate as only a few years of his artistic development could in fact be categorised as Beautiful Indies. Just a handful of his paintings found their way into museums, yet many of his pieces have fortunately been preserved in private collections.

Original source: Velde, Paul van der. 2013 "The Painter Willem Imandt Revisited: A Dutch Painter in Indonesia". *The Newsletter* 64, Summer. 6-7.

Increasing Interest

The number of publications on Dutch East Indies art reflects the increased interest in foreign painters working in Indonesia. This interest comes mostly from well-to-do Indonesians who have started to appreciate the colonial period paintings by western artists. Add to that number the more than half-a-million strong "Indo" population of Dutch-Indonesians who fled Indonesia after it became independent in 1949. Auction houses took notice and now conduct auctions for "Indonesian" art, whilst galleries in the Malay world organise exhibitions of colonial paintings on a regular basis. Dutch museums also became actively involved; their approaches noticeably changed from "colonial" to "mutually culturally influential". The contours of this shift towards a mutual appreciation started appearing at the beginning of the 1960s.

Renewed Appreciation

Said appreciation became clear in the monumental five-volume *Paintings and Statues from the Collection of President Sukarno of the Republic of Indonesia* (1964) edited by one of the most famous Indies painters, Lee Man Fong. The focus of the book was on the work of Indonesian painters, but western artists are very much present. With five paintings Imandt is well-represented. This publication is likely the reason for the revaluation of paintings made in/of Indonesia, and the increased interest in them. In 1967, J.H. Maronier published *Pictures of the Tropics*, which mainly deals with pictorial art in the Dutch Indies. One year later the ground-breaking work

by J. de Loos-Haaxman, *Veraat Rapport Indië*, appeared. She was a curator of the Bataviasche Kunstkring (Batavian Art Group) and knew Imandt personally. Imandt sits at the top of her list of Dutch artists in Indonesia because his contemporaries considered him to be the most famous artist on Java in the 1920s. J. Bastin and B. Brommer published their classic, *Nineteenth century prints and illustrated books of Indonesia*, in 1979. Then in 1995, the art dealers L. Haks and G. Maris published the quite handy *Lexicon of foreign artists who visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)*, which lists more than 3,000 foreign artists active in Indonesia during that period, and holds about 600 illustrations. The publication gives a varied impression of 350 years of painting and illustrating in the archipelago.

The Canon

Three years thereafter *Indië omlijst* (1998) appeared, containing an inventory of the 400-plus oil paintings in the Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics, Amsterdam). In the past twenty years a number of monographs, of varying quality, have been published about artists active in The Indies. None of them were Beautiful Indies painters. All subjects belong to the group of classically trained artists, who in the course of time were considered by art historians to belong to the canon; these included Walter Spies, Rudolf Bonnet, Adolf Breetvelt, Pieter Ouburg, Charles Sayers and Isaac Israëls. According to the art historian Koos van Brakel, “They transcended the general conservatism in East Indies painting” (Van Brakel 2004). Jokingly I refer to them as the “Not Beautiful Indies painters”, to differentiate from the “Beautiful Indies painters”. Belonging to this latter group – according to Van Brakel – were Ernest Dezentjé, Carel Dake and Leonard Eland (Zweers 2012: 8-9). He made no mention of Imandt at that time, nor did he question whether these painters were aware of developments in the European art world, but he suggested they were not.

Cursed Beautiful Indies

The art critic J. Tielrooy wrote an article in 1930 that is still quoted today: “The Indies in the art of drawing and painting”. He aimed his venomous arrow at the painter Dezentjé: “Who would not know Dezentjé? [...] He paints paddy-fields, the water is silvery, the little dikes are green and in the background he paints mountains which invariably have a dark blue hue. The coconut tree is omnipresent and on the horizon yearning yellows melt together with poetic reds” (Tielrooy 1930: 1-10). Tielrooy’s acerbic criticism on the Beautiful Indies painters influences art historians to this

very day. However, that criticism did not diminish the demand for the Beautiful Indies paintings. On the contrary; tourists, expats, wealthy Javanese and Chinese bought their work in vast quantities. In contrast to the academic painters, who only briefly stayed in the Indies, Beautiful Indies painters were much more rooted in the country, either by birth (Eland and Dezentjé) or through their work, such as Imandt. It seems as if the “Not Beautiful Indies painters” remained in a Western frame of mind, painting their cubist or surrealist paintings in The Indies, while the Beautiful Indies painters worked with an Indies frame of mind, taking pleasure from the Javanese subject matter.

Subject Matter

Mostly they painted locals, in particular Javanese and Balinese women with bare breasts, or scantily dressed males. During the first half of the twentieth century nudity was considered “not done” in bourgeois circles, except when it was set against an exotic background; this namby-pamby kitsch adorned many a Dutch sitting room! Imandt’s paintings are completely devoted to the Indonesian landscape. This landscape not only fascinated the Europeans; both in Buddhism and Hinduism, mountains are considered to be spiritual places enabling contact between the world of the gods and men, mediating between this world and the heavens. Perhaps the Beautiful Indies painters (un)intentionally reflected their spiritual ties with Indonesia in their illustrations. Imandt made it perfectly clear that he produced the ridiculed paintings purely for practical reasons, although he also admittedly liked to produce works that did not conform to public taste. He was the only painter in Indonesia to ever write a short treatise on painting in Indonesia: “An Indies painting should have paddy-fields and coconut trees. How we are reproached if we do not include them!! I for my part prefer to paint one giant tree instead of all those coconut trees and paddy-fields. For sure, I have painted a tremendous amount of paddy-fields and coconut trees because a painter has to earn money in order to support one’s family” (Imandt 1926: 338-339).

Imandt Signs up for the East

Imandt was born the eldest son of a primary school headmaster in the catholic village St. Jansteen, which was notorious for its malaria-infested wetlands and woods. His father played an important role in the budding cultural and sportive life of the village. He was the founder of the theatre and brass band, and the ice skating and bicycle societies. At an early age Willem was already showing artistic talents,

but it was after his uncle returned from The Indies (where he had been employed as a carpenter), full of stories about “the Netherlands beyond the horizon”, that Willem must have started to dream about volcanoes, mountains and banyan trees, which he would later depict in his paintings. In 1901 he moved to Amsterdam where he fulfilled his military service, and followed lessons at the Municipal College of Education. He moved in artistic circles, influenced by the so-called Amsterdam School of painting, with famous representatives such as Willem Breitner.

In 1904 he returned home and taught at various primary schools, whilst in his spare time managed to obtain his drawing diploma at the State College of Education in The Hague. At this time he painted his first oil paintings of lakes and woods, which were influenced by the so-called The Hague school – an influence that is evident in his first Indies paintings. After falling in love with singer Eliza Robijns he returned to Amsterdam. In 1908 he applied for a job as a primary school teacher for the colonial services, and after getting married, he and Eliza soon departed to the Indies on an ocean liner. The colony provided a favourable economic climate, which offered artists increasing possibilities, further facilitated by an expanding network of art circles (Van der Velde 2015: 4-17 / Van der Velde 2009: 7-10).

De Reflector as Beautiful Indies Platform

Imandt started painting his first Indies work during his first appointment in the colony (at a public primary school in Sulawesi). Their eldest of five children was born in Makassar in 1910; in the same year he was appointed to the Dutch-Chinese school in Yogyakarta on Java. He left the colonial service in 1916 and from then until he was pensioned in 1929 (aged 47), he was headmaster and drawing teacher at several catholic schools on Java. In 1916 his paintings depicting lakes, mountains, volcanoes, gorges and ancient structures such as the Borobudur, were on view at the Yogyakarta Art Circle. His working method involved making sketches in situ, which he later developed into paintings in his atelier. At that time his paintings lacked both mastery of composition and colouring; the first review (1917) I was able to trace was by no means laudatory: “The painter Imandt, notorious because of his evening airs and mountains, can be ignored” (*De Taak*: 2017) In 1919 an article was published in the popular magazine *De Reflector*, in its series Mooi Indië (*De Reflector* 1919: 754). From it we cannot only conclude that his work had ripened, but also that he had become a talked-about painter. He was labelled a hard and talented worker who had thoroughly studied the Indies landscape.

Imandt himself later confirmed that it indeed required intensive study before one could portray an Indies landscape: “If you want to paint The Indies, you have to live there for a long time” (Imandt 1926: 338). With its series “Mooi Indië” the editors

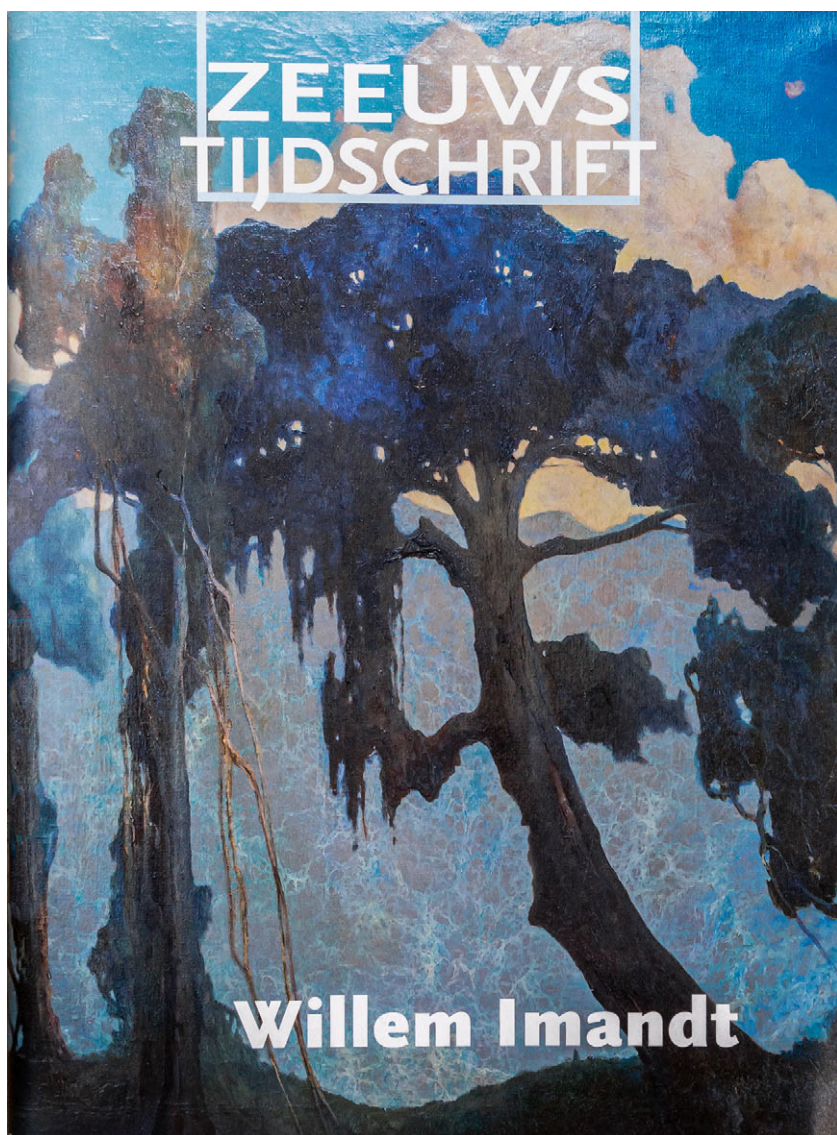


Figure 10. Willem Imandt, *Trees in the Preanger*. 1933. Oil on canvas, 90 × 110 cm. Collection Vortex. Cover *Zeeuws Tijdschrift* 65-6/7. Cover design: Pharos, Monique van Hootegem. Photo Cindy Bakker.

of *De Reflector* wanted to increase interest for art produced in The Indies itself. The series can be viewed both as a platform and name-giver of the Beautiful Indies painters such as Dake, Dezentjé, Eland, and Imandt, whose works were frequently published in the volumes appearing between 1916 and 1920. Their work showed many resemblances; and though they did not form a school, they were linked through the readers of *De Reflector*. Unfortunately, the positive appreciation of the Beautiful Indies did not last for very long, as mentioned earlier. In the literature these artists are always haphazardly grouped and negatively valued. Seemingly, painters who did not fit the “criteria” of the canon were muddled together onto the Beautiful Indies heap. Yet, his early work that already saw him labelled, turned out to be just the start of Imandt’s rich development.

Imandt the Great Painter Here!

A week after the above quoted article appeared in *De Reflector* the art critic who had written the first traceable review of Imandt completely readjusted his opinion about the artist: “Imandt, whose work I reviewed earlier, has tremendously improved. Before his paintings were devoid of strength and pluck, which is now completely the opposite” (*Weekblad voor Indië* 1919). From this we can conclude that in a very short period he had become an esteemed artist. The height of recognition for an Indies painter was to be invited to the yearly August exhibition of the Art Circle of Batavia, which was founded in 1902. Imandt made his debut at the 1920 exhibition, at which 20 artists exhibited. In addition, his paintings were sold for impressive amounts – a small painting went for 150 guilders and the bigger formats for as much as 450 guilders (a year’s income for a labourer at that time).

In 1922 Imandt met and frequently socialised with famous Dutch impressionist Isaac Israëls, who visited The Indies on and off. In a letter to the painter Willem Witsen, written by Israëls, it was clear that the interactions could occasionally be too much: “Otherwise nobody is here. Sometimes you long to see someone else than “Imandt the Great Painter here!” (Witsen: 1922). Besides the playful pun (Imandt sounds like the word “somebody” in Dutch), Israëls’ remark also lays bare a certain occupational jealousy; in contrast to Imandt, he was a nobody in The Indies. Imandt was at the height of his fame. The brother-in-law of Queen Wilhelmina, the Duke of Mecklenburg, and the Captain of the Chinese in Surabaya, Han, all paid a visit to his atelier in 1923 and all commissioned paintings. “We had the opportunity to view and appreciate his highly artistic and colourful work depicting the beautiful nature of the Preanger and elsewhere” (*Java Bode*: 12 April 1923). In the respected art gallery H. Bos in The Hague, Imandt found an outlet for his work in Europe. Upon his return to patria in 1929, Bos organised a solo exhibition of his work; the

show lasted four months and was sold out (*Het Vaderland*: 1 June 1929). By the time Imandt settled with his family in Sint-Gillis-Waas – near his birthplace – he was considered a nabob and one of the most famous painters of The Indies.

Final Years

He could now fully concentrate on his painterly work. The Indies remained his most preferred topic, but following his later travels around the Mediterranean his work took on an Orientalist aspect. When not travelling he led a secluded life, working on his oeuvre in his glass-domed atelier. Here he reached full maturity and the works he painted during this period are considered his best. He sold his paintings mostly to relatives, but after being “discovered” by a local journalist, he started selling outside his closest circle of acquaintances. His paintings at this time depicted mostly seascapes of the Mediterranean Sea or the North Sea. These works are overpowering because of their sheer size, but also because of the solitude emanating from them, reminiscent of Casper David Friedrich. With the impending threat of a new world war, and with his sons already working in The Indies, Imandt decided to return in 1938. He continued to paint and his works still sold, but not at the rate he was used to. The new-found idyll was rudely disturbed by the Japanese invasion in 1942. He was interned in a Japanese camp, where he could not work, while his archive of sketches and notes was destroyed. He returned penniless to the Netherlands in 1946. He kept on painting, but interest in Indies paintings had almost completely dried up.

In 1954 however, aged 72, Imandt was honoured with an exhibition in the rooms of Hoogovens (a blast-furnace company, presently Tata Steel) in the city of IJmuiden. The main part of the exhibition was devoted to his Indies paintings, and as a painter of volcanoes he could not have wished for a better décor. The reviewer wrote: “It is difficult not to wax poetic when seeing this part of the world, as Imandt depicted it. The typical atmosphere of the tropics and the bright light that brings out a special depth in all colours: the deep blue of the tropical skies, the lively green of the sea. Imandt painted it with great mastery. The East comes alive when we see it through the painterly eyes of Imandt” (Anon. 1954).

Imandt died in 1967, when appreciation for paintings originating in the former colony was at its lowest. But the revaluation of those paintings has again shown a spectacular rise in the past twenty years. That unfortunately does not necessarily apply to the Beautiful Indies painters, or those relegated to the miscellaneous heap of leftovers, constructed by art historians. Surprisingly though, van Brakel in his article on Beautiful Indies painting (in the catalogue of the exhibition “Beyond the Dutch” in the Central Museum in Utrecht) writes: “The Indies art of painting has

been neglected for a long time and when something was written about it, it was primarily in a negative way. The Indies art of painting deserves, as part of the colonial history and as shared cultural heritage of the Netherlands and Indonesia, a place in the art of painting in both countries" (Van Brakel 2009: 50-59). But perhaps Indies painting deserves even more than that. As Imandt pointed out: "The Indies palette derives its own cachet from shades and shifts in colour, which simply do not exist in the West" (Imandt 1926: 338-339). In a future monograph I hope to show how Imandt developed from a Beautiful Indies painter into one with a recognisable signature, not only unsurpassed in the rendering of the magic nature and landscape of Indonesia, but also as a seascape painter in the best Dutch tradition (Van der Velde 2015).

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