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Een geschiedenis van de Compagniesliteratuur en een overzicht van de Compagniesdichters in Batavia

Zuiderweg, A.M.

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Summary

Rhymed Batavia; a history of literature and a survey of poets of the Dutch East India Company in Batavia

In their office in the Castle of Batavia clerks of the Dutch East India Company (1602-1799) noted proclaimed resolutions and regulations in folios. They wrote letters to the Board of the Dutch East India Company in the Netherlands, the Heren Zeventien. Yearly they made notes on the sailors of the ships of the Dutch East India Company. This was their daily job all year round, no matter the conditions of temperature and monsoon. Because of the climate the Castle hardly seemed appropriate as headquarters of the Dutch East Indies. Clerks kept their archives up to date meticulously, later generations however dealt with these archives rather carelessly. In 1809 governor Daendels decided to build a new government office in Weltevreden, a suburb of Batavia.

Part of the archives was moved to the new office. Other archives were stored on ceilings of the buildings in the so-called old Batavia or *kota lama*. In the second part of the 19th century there was a renewed interest in these archives. But they were incomplete due to termites or ink-glutton. Sometimes paper was used to fabric bullets, folios got moulded.

In the sixties of the 19th century Jacob Anne van der Chijs (1831-1905) took care of the paperwork as heritage the Dutch East India Company in Batavia. Together with F. de Haan (1863-1938) he sorted out the archives systematically. De Haan brought back to life the Dutch East India Company by assembling information in his book *Priangan* (1911-1912).

The first part of *Rhymed Batavia* describes how not only archivists were interested in the VOC records. Publicists and literary men also took interest in the material. It got clear that the Dutch East India Company was more than a trading-firm. Some clerks did not only note figures in the folios, in their leisure time they wrote prose and poetry. Staff members like lawyers, surgeons and churchmen did the same.

In retrospective F. de Haan started with his 'Excurs II. Indische verzenmakers' the interest in the history of the literature of the Dutch East India Company. In the first part of *Rhymed Batavia* we tag archivists and literary men.

In fact it was not De Haan but Samuel Kalff (1851-1932) who asked for attention for the literary men of the Dutch East India Company. He composed the anthology *Oost-Indisch landjuweel* (1902) but he disposed of only a few texts. Thanks to De Haans 'Excurs II. Indische verzenmakers' Kalff could introduce many authors in his books and articles in newspapers and magazines.

E. du Perron (1899-1940) was also interested in the literature written by personnel of the Dutch East India Company. As explained in the first part of *Rhymed Batavia* Du Perrons quests resulted in articles dealing with their prose and poetry. This kept him busy for many years, it was the cause of his life. This part in *Rhymed Batavia* tags his interests in the literature of the East India Company, from his articles in the Indian magazine *De Revue* (1921) and publications in journals and newspapers all the way to his anthology *De muze van Jan Companjie* (1939). That was not enough. It made him hungry for more literature of the East India Company. He planned a second part of *De muze van Jan Companjie* with 17th and 18th century texts, called 'Van Kraspoekol tot Saïdja'. He already signed the contract with his publisher. Unfortunately death overtook. Du Perrons job in the library of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, his ability to make friends in a very easy way,

his drive or nearly fanaticism to collect texts for his anthologies are focused upon in the first part of *Rhymed Batavia*.

Du Perron met the young teacher Rob Nieuwenhuys (1908-1999). Rob was a so-called 'Indische jongen' as well and he was interested in the Dutch-Indian literature too. They became a fitting team. During his leave in Holland Du Perron had met Fred Batten. Fred became his assistant in Holland. He appointed Fred Batten and Rob Nieuwenhuys as the compilers of the second print of *De muze van Jan Companjie* (1948). Obviously Rob Nieuwenhuys would be the first in line of literati interested in Indisch-Dutch literature. Thanks to Du Perrons endeavours Nieuwenhuys could publish *Oost-Indische spiegel* (1972).

Nieuwenhuys encouraged sympathizers for the Indisch-Dutch literature in the same way as Du Perron had done. Wide interest for this literature revived. Teachers and students of Dutch studies in universities met each other in the so-called Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde (founded 1985). Many Dutch people have family members who have lived in the Dutch Indies. They own Dutch-Indian objects telling particular Indian stories.

Within the Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde many showed special interest in topics from the 19th century and from the times of the Dutch East India Company. Bert Paasman published a paper 'De Indisch-Nederlandse literatuur in de VOC-tijd'. Neither Van der Chijs, nor De Haan, Kalff or Du Perron could have imagined this specialism ever to spring up.

The first part of *Rhymed Batavia* tries to fit in Indisch-Dutch literature within existing histories of literature, in a descriptive-analytical and historical way.

The second part of *Rhymed Batavia* further examines the literary men of the Dutch East India Company. Over the past there has already been given attention to prose and travelogues, therefore the choice is now for poetry.

De Haans 'Excurs II. Indische verzenmakers' and *De muze van Jan Companjie* of Du Perron produced an interesting collection of poetry. My investigations in libraries, archives and museums were fruitful. It brought me new 17th and 18th poems and objects. I shall restrict myself to refer to the literary aspects of the poetry.

The poems written by sailors, personnel or staff of the Dutch East India Company varies from simple rhymed verse to classicist alexandrines. Poems intersperse widely. Some poets were better educated than others. But all poets lose themselves to fine words. Their subjects were diverse: rhymed travelogues, rhymed drama, poems in praise of the Dutch East India Company, Batavia, a governor, or occasional poems. Because there was a lack of entertainment – every day in Batavia was like another – memorable events as birthday, marriage or funeral were occasions to put the quill pen in ink, East Indian ink, *Indische* ink.

Rhymed Batavia offers an overview of interests and studies of the documents of the Dutch East India Company by Batavian archivists and poetry written by personnel of the Dutch East India Company. *Rhymed Batavia* depicts biographies of archivists and literary men in a broad cultural and literature-historical study, the aim of which is to shed new light on the historiography of the literature of the Dutch East India Company.