Doris Jedamski and Rick Honings (eds), ***Travelling the Dutch East Indies: Historical Perspectives and Literary Representations*** (Hilversum: Verloren, 2023, 229 pp, ISBN 9789464550450).

The last decade has witnessed a sustained academic interest in the Dutch East Indies as a travel destination and locus of colonial exploration. One of the driving forces behind the study of the Dutch colonial past within the disciplinary framework of travel writing studies is Rick Honings. Together with Doris Jedamski, he has now edited a collection of essays entitled *Travelling the Dutch East Indies: Historical Perspectives and Literary Representations* in which some of this recent research has been made available in English. Incidentally, when used as a transitive verb, 'to travel' means to journey *through* or *inside* a country or region. Strictly speaking, the volume's title, therefore, can only refer to travelling *within* the Dutch East Indies, though most of the contributions focus on the trip *to* and *from* the archipelago by boat or plane.

The book consists of two parts: the first deals with the material aspects of the voyage, the second with the journey as subject matter for travel writing and literary prose. Erik Odegard opens the first section with a meticulous description of the various commercial initiatives and undertakings in Amsterdam towards the end of the sixteenth century that would culminate in the first ships setting sail from the Dutch Republic to Indonesia in 1595. Geke Burger's contribution centres on the lavish culinary experiences on board the ocean liners in the period 1871-1964. Marc Dierikx concludes the first section by tracing the origins and development of air travel from Schiphol to the colony until the Japanese invasion in 1942. Replete with historical data and factual information often derived from unpublished archival sources, these three articles will provide rich pickings for (cultural) historians working in the field.

The second half of the volume is primarily concerned with a postcolonial reading of travel texts. Coen van 't Veer takes a closer look at the ideological tropes in Dutch stories about the sea crossings to the colony in the period 1850-1940. The next two contributions are noteworthy in that they attempt to throw light on the way Indonesians portrayed their own country in an act of 'autoethnographic expression' (144). Rick Honings focuses on the writings of Purwalelana (pseudonym of Candranegara V) and Suparta, both belonging to the Javanese aristocracy. Purwalelana published a two-volume account of his Javanese travels in the 1860s, while Suparta wrote about his visit to the Netherlands in 1913. Honings is right in stressing that in the colonial history of the Dutch East Indies, these texts are a rare, and hence precious, instance of the Empire writing back. Purwalelana also makes an

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appearance in the article by Judith E. Bosnak, who examines the (in)famous Great Post Road on Java, constructed with forced labour under Governor-General Daendels in 1808, as a site of colonial travel and empire building. Nick Tomberge concludes the volume by zooming in on the car journeys undertaken by the famous man of letters Louis Couperus during his visit to Sumatra, Java and Bali in 1921.

The editors and authors are to be applauded for their efforts in making this material accessible to a non-Dutch readership. However, there are several moments in the book where the international reader may be yearning for a little more guidance while trying to navigate the potentially unfamiliar terrain of Dutch history and (literary) culture. To give just one example: how many readers outside the Netherlands will readily interpret the phrase 'court-capital' – mentioned in passing and without comment – as a reference to the city of The Hague (203)? Even Dutch readers are likely to lose their bearings from time to time, as in Van 't Veer's analysis of twenty Dutch novels and travel stories, which are discussed without much contextualisation, literary or otherwise. The authors' upbringing and ethnic background, as well as their position and status as writers, are all passed over in silence. Will these have had no impact on the representation of colonial matters in their work? Most texts are referred to by title only without the author's name, forcing the reader to scan the entire bibliography each time a new title is mentioned. Since many first names have been reduced to initials, it is impossible to determine whether the writer is male or female. In view of Van 't Veer's entirely sensible observation that, next to ethnicity, 'class, status, and gender were of great significance' in colonial society (111), these methodological choices seem less than ideal.

In his contribution on Couperus, Tomberge understandably limits himself to the author's writings related to his journeys to Africa and Indonesia. With his aestheticising gaze, describing Indonesian people and vistas as statues or paintings, Couperus, so Tomberge argues, 'exercised power over "the East"' (222). This raises the question as to how the writer's gaze in the colony, which is interpreted as a manifestation of 'imperial rhetoric' (211), differs from his painterly gaze elsewhere. Thirty-one years before his car journeys in the Dutch East Indies, Couperus published the novel *Noodlot*, translated in English by Clara Bell as *Footsteps of Fate* (1891). I choose a fairly random passage from the work in question, from an episode set *not* in the exotic East but in Scheveningen, the Dutch seaside resort near The Hague. The protagonist spots on the shore 'two figures, […] like finely drawn silhouettes in Indian ink against the silver sea' (*Footsteps of Fate*, 196). Nearby can be seen 'a throng of summer visitors like a great stain of pale water-colour, in gay but delicate tints' (*Footsteps of Fate*, 197). In short, whether Couperus is observing life in foreign climes or depicting scenery much closer to home, he objectifies the people he describes and turns them into works of art, just as can be expected of the aesthete he was.

Special mention should be made of the numerous (colour) illustrations that accompany the text, many from the South and South-East Asian Manuscripts and Rare Books collections at Leiden University Library. In one particular instance, this material enables the reader to correct a few textual slips. Burger's well-researched article demonstrates how life on board the ocean liners could take on a distinctly cosmopolitan aura. Menus were written in French, suggesting an atmosphere of luxury and sophistication. One of these elaborate menus, dating from 1906, is described in detail. According to Burger, the 'main dish was served with rosé wine' (63). However, a picture of the hand-written menu in question shows that the passengers dined on '[filet de] Dinde rôti' (64), i.e. roast turkey, which Burger seems to have misread as 'Vin de rosé'. Likewise, 'Coquilles aux huîtres' has been misinterpreted as 'Coquilles *et* huîtres' and translated as 'coquilles and oysters' (63), but as contemporary recipe books make clear, this was a dish of (breaded) oysters served in scallop shells. Remarking on the '[t]ypically French terms' found on the menus, Burger cites the word 'luncheon' as an example (71). In actual fact, 'luncheon' is entirely English in origin. Granted, these are details that do not invalidate the author's narrative but it is regrettable that it is precisely those elements underlining the international dimension of the travelling experience that have been treated with a certain carelessness.

Now and then, the English wording and syntax will leave the international reader wondering, especially when the language stays too close to a Dutch turn of phrase (Dierikx's text is a laudable exception). An obvious example can be found on page 13, where reference is made to a 'young woman leaving to marry a glove on board the ship'. This is a calque of the phrase used for the phenomenon known in Dutch as 'trouwen met de handschoen', i.e. marrying by proxy, in which the official marriage ceremony took place while the groom, who was already living in the colony, was physically absent. Since the phrase is used without any explanation, the non-Dutch reader will struggle to make sense of it.

In sum, *Travelling the Dutch East Indies* is a treasure trove of historical facts, and the scholarship and various narratives it presents provide stimulating insights into a significant part of the colonial past of the Netherlands. Copiously illustrated, the book is also a showcase of the rich archival collections related to the Dutch East Indies held at Leiden University and, as such, serves as an invitation to researchers worldwide to explore them to the full. If this fascinating and rewarding volume can be faulted, it is mainly in matters of language and in its occasional disregard for the international reader.

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