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# JAARBOEK

1999

VAN DE KONINKLIJKE ACADEMIE  
VOOR NEDERLANDSE  
TAAL- EN LETTERKUNDE



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Gent, Koninklijke Academie voor  
Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1999

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vertolkte die universeel herkenbaar en van alle tijden zijn. Geen wonder dan ook dat zijn leerlingen en collega's hem naar aanleiding van zijn emeritaat onder de titel *Tegendraads genot* een huldebundel wilden aanbieden, waarin aandacht voor de kwaliteit van middeleeuwse teksten weer centraal moest staan. Norbert de Paepe heeft dit boek echter nooit gezien. Twee maanden voor het hem overhandigd zou worden is hij na een kort ziekbed op 26 maart 1996 gestorven, vijfenzestig jaar oud.

## 2. L.W. FORSTER, 30 MAART 1913 - 18 APRIL 1997 door J. Ford

Leonard Wilson Forster was born in London on 30 March 1913. As a boy, he was sent by his family to Marlborough, an English public school in Wiltshire, from where he won a scholarship to read Modern and Medieval Languages at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1931. After graduation in 1934, he went to Germany as a Thomas Carlyle Student, and during this period he studied at the Universities of Leipzig, Bonn, Königsberg, and finally in Switzerland at Basel. It was during these pre-war years that he first came into contact with a number of great German scholars, including Ernst Robert Curtius, whose pioneering work in the classical tradition in Europe did not go unheeded by Forster. It was also at this time that he developed an interest in the language, literature, and culture of the Netherlands and Belgium: one of his first articles, published in *Neophilologos* in 1936, was entitled "Twee nederlandsche gedichten van Nicholas Murford, 1650".

Forster also became well acquainted with the culture of Switzerland. Whilst he was lector at Basel, he wrote a dissertation on the Swabian poet Wechkerlin, published in 1944, and also met his wife Jeanne, who as a student of English attended his classes but also, he claimed, enabled him to develop a sound knowledge of baseler Deutsch.

Forster returned to Cambridge in 1937 as University Assistant Lecturer in German and fellow of Selwyn College. However, soon after this, the War interrupted his career, and like many Cambridge academics he spent some time engaged in intelligence work at the famous code-breaking establishment at Bletchley Park. Even so, academic work continued to be published, including an article in the *Modern Language Review*, in 1941, on "The Königsberger *Zwischenspiele* of 1644 and the Dutch Comedy: a Study in Metrics". He returned to Cambridge in 1946, and in 1947 became University

Lecturer in German. However, it was not long before he was appointed to the chair of German at University College, London, which he held from 1950 to 1961. He returned to Cambridge after this period in London as Schröder Professor of German, a post which he held until his retirement in 1979.

Forster's scholarly interests were broad, chronologically, geographically, and linguistically, but it was principally to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that he devoted the major part of his time. In addition to his important contribution to German literary studies, he was also instrumental in the development of Dutch and neo-Latin studies in Britain. He did much in Cambridge to develop Dutch studies before the language was fully established as a Tripos subject, while his long-standing interests in neo-Latin literature made him an obvious person to approach to be the first president of the Cambridge Society for Neo-Latin Studies, established in 1988. These two fields were, of course, closely bound up. The work of Justus Lipsius, and neo-Stoicism in general, were abiding interests, and he edited and translated into German the important treatise *De constantia* in 1965. The two disciplines of Dutch and neo-Latin came together too in his contribution to A. T. Hatto's collection of articles on the *aubade*, *Eos* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), in which Forster contributed to the sections on both Dutch and Renaissance Latin poetry.

He wrote on other humanists from the Low Countries: Charles Utenhove, in *European Context*, a collection of studies presented to Theodoor Weevers in 1971; Janus Gruter, and Constantijn Huygens. Gruter, indeed, was the subject of a book published by the University Presses of Leiden and Oxford in 1967: *Janus Gruter's English Years: Studies in the Continuity of Dutch Literature in Exile in Elizabethan England*. In the same year he also brought out *Die Niederlande und die Anfänge der Barocklyrik in Deutschland* (Groningen, Wolters).

These last two works are typical of the excellent use to which Forster put his broad knowledge of northern European culture, establishing the cosmopolitan nature of the connections which were so current in the early modern period between scholars and writers throughout Europe, a phenomenon of which he himself was an example during his own lifetime. He clearly relished the idea of being able to communicate fluently in a range of modern European vernaculars, and was naturally attracted to a period of European history which, despite its profound religious and political conflicts, nevertheless

valued human relations, international gatherings, erudition at his firm, made by other speakers.

At the first meeting of Neo-Latin Studies, Forster spoke on Petrarchism of his works which brought together the future, but also to in the rest of Europe. amount of erudition, broad scan of European English sense of history. Similarly, *The Poet's* opened up important

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valued human relationships across national and confessional divides. At international gatherings, he was a quiet but authoritative figure, with a vast erudition at his fingertips with which to elucidate or supplement points made by other speakers.

At the first meeting of what was to become the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies, organised in 1971 by the late Jozef IJsewijn in Leuven, Forster spoke on Petrarchism in neo-Latin anthologies. A supplement to one of his works which has had the broadest appeal: *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), allowed him to bring together the fruits of his reading not just in northern European literature, but also to investigate the spread of an Italian-inspired movement to the rest of Europe. It is a quietly witty study, which belies the enormous amount of erudition necessary for a work of this kind, taking in such a broad scan of European writing in a range of languages, a mixture of a very English sense of humour with a broad understanding of European culture. Similarly, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (CUP, 1970) also opened up important new critical approaches.

It is probably the case that the majority of Leonard Forster's colleagues in Cambridge, outside his own Faculty, were unaware of the international reputation which he enjoyed. He had close ties with the University of Leiden, which made him an honorary D.Litt. in 1975. He is said to have worn the impressive gown of that degree at special dinners in Selwyn, though without the slightest element of pomposity. He was also elected in 1968 to the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, and in 1973 to the *Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, significant recognition of his scholarly talents, which preceded his election in 1975 to the *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*. Finally, recognition came in his own country, when he became a Fellow of the *British Academy* in 1976.

The final months of his life sadly cut him off from the scholarly gatherings which he so much enjoyed, since he was largely bedridden as a result of the diabetes which had afflicted him for some time. For a man who put 'foreign travel' as his principal recreation in *Who's Who*, this must have been particularly hard to bear. He died on 18 April 1997, survived by his wife, Jeanne, two daughters, and a son. His ashes were laid to rest in the gardens of Selwyn College, an institution with which he had been associated for almost 63 years.