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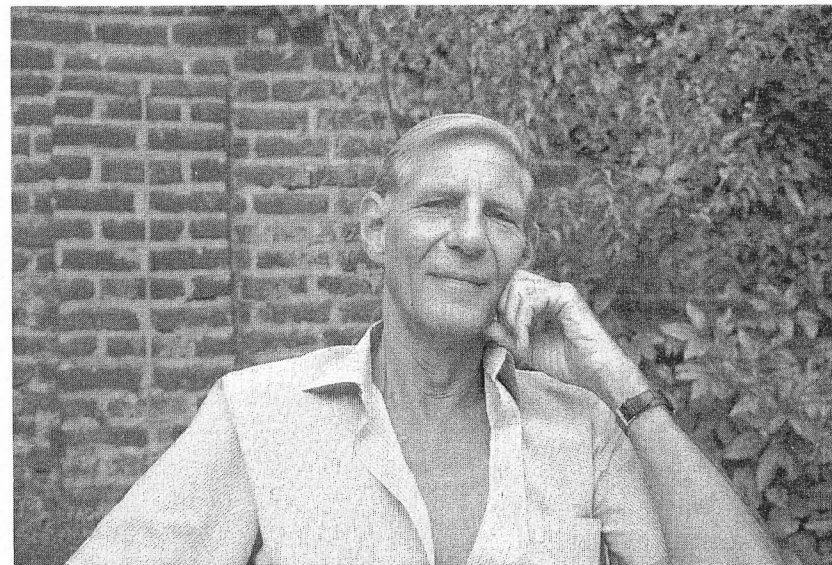
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R. P. MEIJER
in memoriam



Rein Meijer, who died on 29 September 1993, was an important influence on many people in many spheres of life and so will be remembered for many different reasons: to students he was an inspiring teacher who communicated his love of literature; to academic colleagues he was a loyal and determined head of department; to colleagues at the NRC Handelsblad a prolific contributor of book reviews. To all, he was a friend and an example of how to communicate with the utmost clarity.

Reinder Pieter Meijer was born in Zwolle, The Netherlands, in 1926. His academic life began as a student of Dutch at the University of Amsterdam just after the Second World War, although he was to spend all of his professional life abroad. He took up a post as a lecturer in Dutch at the

University of Melbourne in 1951. It was here that he worked on his doctoral thesis on the modern Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg, which was submitted in 1958, the same year that his *A Dutch Grammar and Reader*, written together with his colleague Jacob Smit, was published. While still in Australia, he worked on his best-known book *Literature of the Low Countries*, putting the finishing touches to it while making the journey, by sea, to England at the University of London. It duly appeared in 1971, the year he took up the post in London both as professor and as head of the Department of Dutch at Bedford College.

In his capable hands, the department entered a new phase with increasing student numbers and the expansion of its teaching staff from three to five members. Gradually, it also changed its teaching focus from students who were native speakers of Dutch, or at least had a good knowledge of the language, to native speakers of English wanting to acquire the Dutch language and a knowledge of its literature. In the early 1980's, when the smaller colleges of London University began to amalgamate, Rein Meijer fought hard and successfully to take the Dutch Department back to University College, its original home, which it had left in 1923, but which had maintained its Dutch connection with the Chair of Dutch History. He retired in 1989, having briefly interrupted his custodianship of the Dutch department to spend a year at the University of Djakarta.

Although it might seem that Rein Meijer had abandoned the Dutch academic scene, he had close ties with colleagues not only in the Netherlands, but also in Belgium and the rest of the world, being instrumental in founding the International Association for Dutch Studies, and helping to transform its periodical *Neerlandica extra muros* from a modest newsletter into a widely respected journal. His regular chronicles of new prose-writing in Dutch were greatly valued by association's members as a means of keeping up to date, because they knew they could rely on Rein's judgement in such matters. Nor were they the only ones to be influenced by Rein in the assessment of new fiction, for throughout his years abroad, Rein had been a regular contributor of reviews of Dutch and English fiction for the NRC Handelsblad under the pseudonym of P.M.Reinders. His output amounted to some 700 articles.

Rein Meijer always remained down-to-earth, never developed a sense of his own importance and never lost his dry sense of humour. Indeed,

though generally a very tolerant man, he had no time for pomposity. His liking for the ordinary alongside the highbrow is captured in the two pieces of verse in Dutch I remember him quoting with the most feeling: Marsman's *Vlam* and 'Zagen, zagen, wiedewiedewagen, Jan kwam thuis om een boterham te vragen'. Similarly, although he had a deep love of classical music, playing the piano daily until, cruelly, his final illness prevented him, he also loved jazz and once said that it was his ambition to be a jazz drummer. The jazz world's loss was undoubtedly the gain of students and teachers of Dutch.

All through his professional life, since his student days, Rein was supported by his wife Edith, who translated books with him after retirement, and when illness overtook him, nursed him at home until his death.

University College London