
PROFESSOR THEODOOR WEEVERS

Remembered

Theo Weevers, whose name was synonymous with Dutch Studies and Bedford College for forty years, died in Bristol on 11 January 1992 aged 87. He was head of Dutch Language and Literature in the University of London from 1931 to 1971.

When Weevers arrived from Holland in 1931 to take charge of the Dutch Department, comprising Dutch Language and Literature, it had been in existence for a mere seven years since being separated from the Department of Dutch History at University College and moved to Bedford College for Women, as it then was, in Regent's Park. He saw Bedford College develop from its 1930s idyllic villa setting, through war-time bomb damage and rebuilding to the admission of men in the mid-1960s, and the Dutch Department expand from a single lecturer with an average of just one Honours student per year and few others to a significant centre for Dutch Studies within the University of London with a teaching staff of five and several dozen students.

Born in Amersfoort on 3rd June 1904, Theodoor Weevers came from an academic background. He studied at the Universities of Groningen and Leiden, and gained a doctorate from Leiden with a thesis on Coornhert's sixteenth-century translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. At Leiden Weevers had come under the spellbinding influence of the philosophical poet and Professor of Dutch literature, Albert Verwey. Verwey's ideological poetry became a lifelong study for Weevers, which was crowned after his retirement with two key works: *Droom en Beeld: De Poëzie van Albert Verwey* (1978) and *Vision and Form in the Poetry of Albert Verwey* (1986). Weevers' final year at Groningen coincided with the arrival there of a new Professor of English, Pieter Harting - founder of the Dutch Department at Bedford College, where he had been Reader from 1924 - 1930. Harting was able to reassure his anxious young successor about how to cover an intimidating complete course in the language and literature of the Low Countries from the Middle Ages to the present.

Life at the secluded women's college to which Dr Weevers came in 1931 was a genteel affair, and Weevers was the perfect gentleman. He was a music-lover and played the violin. One day at a staff recital he saw a young lecturer in the Mathematics Department, Sybil Jervis, also playing the piano. Subsequently they practised together in the College Music Room. They married in 1933. Students invited to their family home in Harpenden recall with affection being entertained to duets by Sybil and Theo.

Between 1940 and 1944 Weevers worked as a language supervisor and announcer-translator for the section of the BBC European News Service broadcasting to the occupied Netherlands. In 1945 he was appointed inaugural holder of the Chair of Dutch Language and Literature at Bedford College. From this now substantial base he spread the net further by launching a series of intercollegiate lectures on Dutch in a European context at Birkbeck College. These were a success and led to recruitment of some of the Dutch Department's best students.

Theo Weevers's courtesy was legendary, but by the time of the sixties his style had become very old-fashioned and quaint. Nevertheless the ease with which he accepted the disparate manners of his students usually put them, in turn, at their ease. "There is no difference between a professor and his students," he used to say. "Neither of them knows anything, but the professor knows where to find it." Since Dutch is not a school-taught language in this country, most of his students had to learn it from scratch and became accustomed to hearing their professor speak to them in immaculate English. Many were amazed when the time came for Weevers to announce that he would lecture in Dutch, not just because it was good for them, but also because it was easier for him to speak in his native language. Prior to 1965 men had been able to attend Dutch Department lectures at the women's college as visitors registered elsewhere, but with the decision to admit men as students, Weevers took the opportunity to build up the numbers in his Department, a task which was aided by the introduction of the Joint Honours degree in 1967, enabling students to study two subjects equally. He also introduced exchange visits between his own students and students of English at Dutch universities, and set a precedent for what later became a regular custom of inviting leading Dutch men of letters over to London, where since 1983 the Dutch Department has again been housed at University College.

Weevers was himself a poet and used verse translations to illustrate his major work in English, *Poetry of the Netherlands in its European Context, 1170-1930* (1960). His final work on Verwey, *Vision and Form*, is based on an anthology accompanied by his own translations into English verse.

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REVIEWS

The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History 1780-1990, edited by Theo Hermans, co-editors Louis Vos and Lode Wils (London, Athlone Press, 1992). 476 pp. ISBN 0485 113686. £40.00.

"The main aim of this book", as stated in the Preface, "is to present, for the first time, a broad historical picture of the Flemish Movement on the basis of original documents in English translations. In offering a substantial and wide-ranging selection of primary sources bearing on the long struggle for emancipation of the Flemish population of Belgium, the book intends to provide an inside view of the nature and growth of the language conflict in this extraordinarily complex country and of the historical background to the current transformation of the once unitary Belgian state into a fully fledged federal state."

Since this is exactly what the 476 pages of this book offer, this, and the remainder of the Preface, is a valuable introduction to it. This is followed by Professor Wils's 'Brief History of the Flemish Movement' (39 pp.), a very readable yet scholarly survey of the background to the documents themselves. These start with James Shaw's notes on the Austrian Netherlands that he made in 1786 and Verlooy's early protest against the neglect of the Dutch language in 1788, a protest soon stifled by the French Revolution, and they finish with the Petition of 1990, 'More Autonomy, a Better Democracy' from the Action Committee Flanders.

The Introduction and the more than sixty documents have been nicely translated, mostly by members of the Dutch Department at University College London, and there is an extensive bibliography and an index.

Criticism of a work of such high quality would be churlish if the detail concerned were not so imbedded in the central theme of the book. The commentary and the documents themselves rightly indicate that the Movement was concerned with language as the medium of cultural, social