

DOUWE WESSEL FOKKEMA (1931-2011):

AN HOMAGE

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224 Douwe Wessel Fokkema, President of AILC/ICLA 1985 to 1988, died on 23 August 2011 in Amstelveen, the Netherlands. Fokkema was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1931. He studied Dutch Language and Literature at the University of Amsterdam and Modern Chinese in Leiden. In 1963-64 he was awarded a Harkness Fellowship and prepared the manuscript of his dissertation at the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, and at Columbia University, New York. He received his PhD degree at Leiden University in 1965. In 1966-68 he was Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Netherlands diplomatic mission in Beijing, P.R. China. Upon his return to the Netherlands he joined Utrecht University, from 1971 as Associate Professor, from 1981 to 1996 as Professor and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature. In the latter capacity he taught and formed many hundreds of students, a number of which went on to hold important positions at Dutch universities. Upon his retirement from the Chair of Comparative Literature he received the Festschrift *The Search for a New Alphabet: Literary Studies in a Changing World* (1996, edited by Harald Hendrix, Joost Kloek, Sophie Levie, and Will van Peer).

Douwe served as Director of the Research Institute for History and Culture, Utrecht University (1987-94), Chair of the research programme 'Dutch Culture in a European Context' of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (1990-2004), and as Chair of the Board of the Netherlands Graduate School for Literary Studies (1995-96). He taught at Harvard (Spring semester 1983) and was invited to teach for shorter periods at Göttingen (1987), Princeton (1988), Peking University (1993), University of Alberta, Edmonton (1995), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (1998), University of Wrocław, Poland (1998), Sichuan University, Chengdu (2007), and other universities. He was President of the Netherlands Association of Comparative and General Literature (1975-81), and Secretary (1973-79) and President (1985-88) of the

International Comparative Literature Association. Those who knew him during his Presidency will remember him as a principled, but also diplomatic, guide, invariably courteous, but also invariably dedicated to achieving results. Douwe was gifted with incredible patience, and he could easily outlast any opponent or dissident in a meeting. In 1988 he was nominated Honorary President of the ICLA, and in this capacity he continued to faithfully attend all subsequent ICLA Conferences, and to offer sound advice to the ICLA Board. His input was crucial to the success of the 1997 Leiden ICLA Conference, which I had the pleasure to organize, but for which Douwe was instrumental in securing the necessary financial support. Underneath a stern and sometimes even somewhat severe exterior Douwe hid a great capacity for humor and for truly felt empathy with his fellow human beings.

Douwe's service to the international community of scholars was widely recognized. He was elected a Member of the Academia Europaea in 1989, and for many years thereafter served as the Academy's Chair of the Literary and Theatrical Studies Section. He held an Honorary Doctor's degree from the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland, and was Honorary Professor at Sichuan, Chengdu, Yunnan, Kunming and Shenzhen Universities. He also served as Visiting Professor at Beijing Language and Culture University (1998), Shandong University, Jinan (2000), Beijing Normal University (2001), and was a Visiting researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (1998). He was awarded the Sarton medal, University of Ghent, Belgium (2001). For his public service, and as a diplomat, Douwe received the Dutch Royal honors of Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau (1968) and Officer of the Order of Orange Nassau (2006).

Douwe was a prolific author, publishing in several languages, and in a number of fields. Outside of the Netherlands he is undoubtedly best known for his works on general and comparative literature. These comprise *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1977, 4th printing 1995, co-authored with Elrud Ibsch, and translated into Italian, Spanish, Greek, Chinese [both in Hong Kong and in Beijing], Korean, and Indonesian), *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism* (1984, translated into Portuguese and Polish), *Issues in General and Comparative Literature* (1987), *Modernist Conjectures: A Mainstream in European Literature 1910-1940* (1988, co-authored with Elrud Ibsch, Dutch edition: *Het Modernisme in de Europese letterkunde* [1984]), *Knowledge and Commitment: A Problem-Oriented Approach to Literary Studies* (2000, co-authored with Elrud Ibsch, with earlier editions in Dutch [*Literatuurwetenschap en cultuuroverdracht*, 1992] and Chinese [*Wenxue yanjiu yu wenhua canyu*, 1996], and translated into Brazilian-Portuguese under the title *Conhecimento e Compromisso* [2006]). He also edited or co-edited several books in this field, amongst which are *Comparative Poetics* (1976), *Tekstboek algemene literatuurwetenschap* (1977), *General Problems of Literary History, Proceedings of the 10th Congress of the ICLA*, vol. 1 (1985), *Théorie littéraire: Problèmes et perspectives* (1989, translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, and Chinese), and *Proceedings of the 12th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, 5 vols. (1990).

Douwe was one of the earliest scholars in Europe to work on postmodernism, and next to his own monograph on the subject listed earlier, the various books he edited or co-edited in this field have all become landmarks: *Approaching Postmodernism* (1986, translated into Chinese), *Exploring Postmodernism* (1987), *Postmodernism in the Literature and Culture of Central and Eastern Europe* (1996, also published in Polish), and especially *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice* (1997, co-edited with Hans Bertens), published in the ICLA series *A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*. Douwe also was co-editor of the 'Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature' (1985-2002), published by John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

In the Netherlands Douwe was well-known as a specialist on Chinese affairs. In this area he published a.o. *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence, 1956-60* (1965, his PhD dissertation), *Report from Peking* (1972, Dutch edition, *Standplaats Peking*, 1970), *Het Chinese alternatief in literatuur en ideologie* (1972), *Chinees dagboek* (1981), and co-edited *China nu: Balans van de Culturele Revolutie* (1973) and *China op het breukvlak* (1981). He was co-editor of the 'Chinese Bibliotheek' (1973-83, Chinese Library), 14 volumes (in Dutch) published by De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam. He also edited 'Focus: China' for the *European Review* 11.2 (2003).

In the context of the major research program on "Dutch Culture in a European Perspective" Douwe supervised the co-ordination and publication, in Dutch and in English, of five massive volumes detailing Dutch culture at a number of seminal points in history, from 1650 to 2000. He himself co-wrote *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective, vol. 5: Accounting for the Past, 1650-2000* (2004, Royal Van Gorcum [Assen] and Palgrave-Macmillan [Basingstoke and New York], Dutch edition, *Rekenschap 1650-2000* [2001], Chinese translation: *Ouzhou shiye zhong de helan wenhua, 1650-2000 nian: chanshi lishi* [2007]).

Douwe was also active as a creative writer, with a volume of poetry, *Rivieren* (1957) and two novels, *Zichtbare steden* (1993) and *Marco's Missie* (1999), both published with major Dutch publisher De Arbeiderspers in Amsterdam. The latter was translated into Chinese as *Maerke de shiming* and appeared in the journal *Dangdai waiguo wenxue (Contemporary foreign literature)* 83.1 (2001), reprinted in: *2001 nian zhongguo zuijia fanyi wenxue (The best translated literature in China in 2001)*, ed. Xie Tianzhen (2002).

Finally, special mention should be made of *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West* (2011, Amsterdam University Press), in which he succeeded in combining his many interests. He had been at work on this volume almost to the time of his death, and fortunately he was still able to see it in print a week before he died.

In the ten essays that follow erstwhile colleagues of Douwe Fokkema pay homage to his memory by discussing his publications and activities as a leading scholar of comparative literature, theory of literature, modernism, and postmodernism, or by picking up on some of his interests in these fields.