

which is often so concerned about freedom and democracy, would really find it easy to present itself in its Sunday best in the Chinese capital. The Dutch Foundation for Literature parried this criticism by pointing out that during the long preparations for hosting the fair a great many contacts had been established between Dutch and Chinese writers and publishers. This had given rise to an intellectual climate based on the mutual exchange of ideas. The fact that Chinese writers were able to share thoughts with their Dutch colleagues during the period of the fair was also extremely important and could well lead to lasting contacts. Actually, it is possible to draw a parallel with the Olympic Games held in Beijing in 2008, and the World Exposition organised in Shanghai in 2010. Very much the same discussion took place on both occasions. As to whether the Land of the Dragon has shown greater openness since these events – the answer to that depends on who you ask.

But let us return to the literature. Now that the spotlights and microphones have long since been switched off, it will be interesting to see if the Chinese publishers retain their interest in Dutch books. If they do, which genres will they prefer, and will they invest appropriately in promoting their translations from the Dutch? Will the contacts established before and during the fair result in long-lasting cooperation? In any case, if Dutch literature wishes to keep a foot in the door in China, some form of permanent follow-up is essential. In short, the work is only just beginning.

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Why Hella S. Haasse's Work Does Not Need Introduction Abroad

The sad news of the death of H  l  ne Serafia Haasse in September 2011 is – once more – an occasion to underline Haasse's literary significance, not only as a nationally and internationally recognised literary writer, but also as an author who has always embedded her work in a global context. This article aims to give a short overview of the reception of Haasse's work outside the Netherlands.

Most records of Hella S. Haasse's work emphasize her historical work, but Haasse wrote *across* genres: besides creatively "assembling" historical novels, she wrote experimental (auto) biographies, plays, essays, literary criticism, travel writing, contemporary novels and short stories. This is not an exhaustive list. Her work is diverse, it discusses a wide range of topics and is often hard to capture in traditional genre categories.

Haasse was a productive author who wrote throughout her life with a remarkable consistency: her oeuvre consists of around 30 titles that were published in the Netherlands with timely intervals of two to three years in between – from her literary debut, the short novel *Oeroeg* (1948, translated into English as *Forever a Stranger*), until her last novel *Sleuteloog* in 2002 (*The Eye of the Key*). The latter mirrors and expands on *Oeroeg's* theme in its description of an interracial friendship in the Dutch East Indies affected by colonial hierarchy. Born in 1918 in what is now Jakarta (then Batavia, capital of the former Dutch East Indies), Indonesia became a thread throughout Haasse's work. However, the author herself never referred to Indonesia as a "theme", for her the country simply meant "fertile soil for my imagination".

Ten years of Haasse's life were spent in France. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands once described her as a writer with three countries of origin: the Netherlands, Indonesia and France. These three origins are thematically represented in Haasse's

Hella Haasse.
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work: fictional returns to colonial and postcolonial Indonesia, French settings, characters and historical figures of several (double) nationalities. Yet the global background of Haasse also shows in the acceptance of her work by readers around the world. One of many examples is that the Chilean government awarded her work the Gabriela Mistral prize in 1996. Haasse's oeuvre is, indeed, widespread and widely read. The translations database of the Dutch Foundation for Literature mentions 136 translations of circa 28 individual titles into more than 20 languages, not taking into account the numerous reprints of her books abroad. As a result Vietnamese can read *The Tea Lords* in their mother tongue (published in 2002), and there are two Haasse novels in Welsh.

Haasse's popularity in France particularly deserves mentioning. Compared to, for example, the small selection translated into Indonesian (four titles), the French embraced Haasse's

novels with 32 translations. The author received several French honours and awards, of which the title of *Officier de la Légion d'honneur* in 2000 is probably the most important. Where literary critic Margot Dijkgraaf indicates that a more intellectual French reading climate is the reason for this popularity, we might also consider factors such as Haasse's extended stay in France, which enabled her to build strong relations with publishers and two outstanding translators, Annie Kroon and Anne-Marie de Both-Diez.

At the start of Haasse's career, in 1954, *The Scarlet City* was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The critic Alfred Duggan also mentions in passing the positive effect of an "excellent translation". He further describes the novel's main character, Giovanni Borgia, as "cultivated and observant", and the storyline as simply "moving". By framing Haasse's novel with three Anglo-Saxon historical novels and without explicitly introducing the young author, this early

reviewer elegantly accepted Haasse as an actor to watch on the global literary stage. Haasse's broad cultural interests, her insightful yet subtle psychological and political awareness travelled easily from the very start.

Haasse's poetical essay titled 'Parang Sawat' – meaning "elaborate, stylised pattern on a traditional Indonesian *batik* fabric" – starts with: "Sometimes I wander in thoughts through all the houses, the gardens, I have lived in on Java. I relive situations and events; I re-imagine landscapes." I believe that it is mostly Haasse's capacity to transgress temporal and national boundaries in her imagination that explains why her novels have always found international readership, without need for introduction. Maybe now is the time to open up the online Hella S. Haasse museum to the international reader? Not as a necessary introduction, but as an optional afterword to an impressive universal and diverse oeuvre.

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See also: JANE FENOULHET, "Hella S. Haasse and the Historical Novel or: The Triumph of Fact over Fiction", *The Low Countries* no 4 (1996), pp. 110-120.

www.hellahaasse.nl

www.hellahaassemuseum.nl

Hella Haasse in English

- *The Black Lake* (Original title: *Oeroeg*), translation by Ina Rilke, Portobello Books, in preparation since 2010.
- *The Tea Lords* (Original title: *Heren van de thee*), translated from the Dutch by Ina Rilke, Portobello Books, 2011.
- *In a Dark Wood Wandering* (Original title: *Het woud der verwachting*), translated by Lewis C. Kaplan, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1997.
- *The Scarlet City* (Original title: *De scharlaken stad*), translated by Anita Miller, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1997 / Allison & Busby, London, 1997. First published by McGraw Hill Publishing Company Limited, 1954.
- *Threshold of Fire* (Original title: *Een nieuwer testament*), translated by Nini Blinstrub - Anita Miller, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1996 / Allison & Busby, London, 1997.
- *Forever a Stranger and Other Stories* (Original title: *Oeroeg*), translated by Margaret M. Alibasah, Oxford University Press, 1996. (Contains stories by other authors too).