

A LIFELONG PASSION

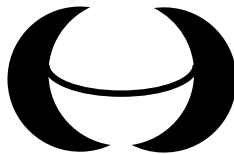
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A LIFELONG PASSION
P.J. Veth (1814-1895) and the Dutch East Indies

Translated from the Dutch by Beverley Jackson



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Introduction

Anyone who is not astonished ...

Pieter Johannes Veth is one of the first Dutch scholars to have thrown himself heart and soul into the study of the Dutch East Indies. What drove him was not just a thirst for knowledge, but also, and more importantly, a conviction that the colony was crucial to the preservation of Dutch national identity. It was in the mid-nineteenth century, after the liberal revolution, that this conviction crystallized in his mind. From then on, until the end of his life, he dedicated himself chiefly to a single object: binding together the financial and spiritual interests of the mother country and its colony, the ultimate aim being to assimilate their populations into one whole.

Few endorsed this project at the outset. But over the years, as Veth applied himself both to educating the Dutch public about the Dutch East Indies and to organizing the pro-colonial forces in Dutch society, his ideas took root and his following grew. At length he became the leading expert on the colony, whose authority was disputed by no one. Veth was thus a public figure during the second half of his life, and one of the few Dutchmen to be internationally esteemed.

He owed his reputation not just to academic prowess, but more notably to a fervent sense of social commitment, and to the speed with which he could grasp and illuminate the essence of a topical issue. Take the unexpected defeat of the Dutch colonial forces by the Acehese troops in 1873, for instance. Veth's book on the subject provided his shocked countrymen with tangible ways of obliterating their national disgrace (P.J. Veth 1873a). With this book he showed himself to be a scholar with a profound social conscience, one for whom learning and society's needs were intertwined.

How is it possible that recollections of a man 'whose fame reaches far beyond our country's borders' could have faded from the collective memory so soon (Wilken 1885:37)? In part this was attributable precisely to his prominence in public life, which obviously ceased with his death. And in part it was because his encyclopaedic approach went out of fashion during his lifetime. Instead, specialization became the norm, and the books that had showered

him in glory were soon obsolete. His name lived on among a small circle of historically-minded East Indies experts, geographers, anthropologists and colonial historians.

This had the effect of obscuring from sight those of Veth's writings – articles, addresses, and critical essays – that could easily withstand the test of time. Who knows today that it was Veth whose comments propelled Multatuli to fame (Van der Velde 1995a)? Who is familiar with his coruscating indictment of slavery in Dutch Guyana (today's Suriname), or with his emotional appeal to the British to recognize the independence of Transvaal?¹

Another, later explanation of Veth's rapid descent into oblivion is the fact that the nineteenth century was for a long time rather a neglected period in Dutch historical research. The century was broadly defined by the rise of the middle classes, the emerging of national identity, the abolition of slavery, the industrial revolution, the development of faster lines of communication, and the conquest of large colonial kingdoms by Western powers. Veth was influenced by, or disseminated propaganda about, schools of thought that were related to these issues, such as liberalism, Romanticism, positivism, social Darwinism, and imperialism. This interaction between Veth and Dutch society – and the international world too – is in itself ample justification for a biography.

I first became interested in Veth while writing my Master's thesis on the expedition that the Dutch Geographical Society, of which he was the president, conducted to Central Sumatra.² Later, when I developed a fascination for biography as a historical genre, I conceived the plan of writing a life of Pieter Johannes Veth. He himself wrote more than ten extended biographical sketches and one full-length biography. And it was his own comments on the subject that furnished the guiding principles for this study: 'The protagonist's life must be presented so that it appears to be at the centre of a series of significant events; in such a life, a specific period must be found that constitutes a self-contained whole, sufficiently so to prevent readers from immediately wanting the broken thread to be woven further; the person's private life must be rich in incidents that are worth recording, and sources must be available – such as are found very infrequently – to clarify these incidents, if a work designed as described above is to be successful' (P.J. Veth 1849e:243).

Considering this biography in retrospect, it has largely adhered to Veth's guidelines. I gradually pinpointed the 'significant events' and 'incidents', and took the 'specific periods' into which his life could be divided as the basis for the book's narrative structure. There was no lack of source material. Besides

¹ P.J. Veth 1881h and P.J. Veth 1881a. The latter is a revised and amplified version of an article previously published in *De Gids*.

² See chapter 7, note 2.

Veth's own substantial oeuvre and his correspondence – a collection of more than two thousand letters from five hundred people – this study draws primarily on the archives of the Ministry of Colonies and of the archives of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society, along with other collections of primary sources dispersed among a range of archives. Naturally enough, there is more material on some periods than on others. We have little on his boyhood years, and some parts of his adult life too are relatively poorly documented.

In spite of such gaps, I amassed enough material to be compelled to choose certain subjects rather than others. The resulting choices, which are reflected in the chapter headings, arose from themes that forced themselves on my attention in the course of my research, such as the ideological roots of Dutch imperialism and cultural nationalism, the influence of scholarship on colonial politics, and the activities and impact of the colonial lobby.³ While all these themes have been dealt with in historical studies before, considering them from the perspective of Veth's life greatly clarifies their interrelationships. Veth knits together these nineteenth-century subjects, which have scarcely been studied in conjunction with one another in the past.

Veth himself complained that there were far too few biographies of important people, while of minor figures there was an abundance. Little has changed in this respect in the Netherlands, since while some speak of a boom in biography, most can be assigned to Veth's category of 'abundance'.⁴ Had he opted for a career in the Church, his life history would probably have been written long ago.

He lumped most men of literature under the heading of minor figures. 'One need only belong to one of our multitude of learned societies for one's last breath to send some self-appointed biographer scurrying to dip his pen in ink to pay due homage to the deceased' (P.J. Veth 1860b:301). Aside from a few brief accounts of his life, the only attention paid to Veth was in the balanced obituary by his friend and colleague P.A. van der Lith (Van Bilderbeek 1911:3-7). How different was this from the death of his cousin, the artist and art critic Jan Veth, whose biography was written by Johan Huizinga not long after his death (Huizinga 1927). When I started telling people that I was writing a life of Veth, almost everyone assumed that this was the Veth I meant.

Whether the Veth who is the subject of this book would have counted himself among 'most men of literature' is impossible to say. He would not have minded the fact that little had been written about him. 'One may look in vain for light around many a person whom one assumes to have performed

³ Van der Velde 1992b, which discusses the main themes that arise in the course of this book.

⁴ Poeze and Ros 1991, Poeze and Ros 1993; Poeze and Ros 1995. In these three surveys, the authors list almost two thousand biographies. By 1996 the output had probably increased to such an extent that the series had to be discontinued.

great deeds and to have had a remarkable, or even adventurous life' (P.J. Veth 1867ad:193). Veth's life was not a succession of sensational deeds; nor was it adventurous or rich in incident. But what became very clear to me in the course of writing this book is that his ideas helped shape the Dutch view of the relationship between the Indonesian archipelago and the Netherlands, and that they have continued to do so to this day.

Reassessment

Given Veth's influence, it is not hard to see why his name has surfaced in the recent surge of interest – in books, articles, and columns – about Indonesia.⁵ Authors refer to the 'famous polymath' (Fasseur 1993:157), the 'iridescent erudition of the versatile Veth' (Klein 1995:260) or the 'multi-faceted and immensely learned scholar'.⁶ This renewed appreciation is very recent, and is linked to a more generalist approach to historiography in reaction to the excesses of specialization.⁷ But even specialists have developed a new appreciation for Veth's groundbreaking, seminal work. Was it not Veth who elevated the ethnography of the Dutch East Indies to the standard of international scholarship (Vermeulen 1996:37)? And was he not the first philologist to have studied Malay loanwords in Dutch (Sanders 1997)?

In 1997, almost exactly one hundred years after the establishment of the Veth Fund for geographers, a new fund for anthropology students was named after the scholar.⁸ The Veth medal for special achievement in geography, which had lain dormant for many years, was recently awarded again (Terwindt 1998:3). And the celebrations marking the 420th anniversary of the University of Leiden in 1995 included an exhibition on 'the Dutch East Indies on paper' in the University Library that was largely devoted to Veth's scholarly output (Van der Velde and Witkam 1995). This resuscitation is very gratifying; nothing is harder than bringing someone who has sunk into utter obscurity back to life.

In the past, those few Dutch historians who had actually heard of Veth at all would always encapsulate what they knew of him in the words 'never went to the East Indies'. The phrase carried an accusatory subtext: 'how could someone who had never been there know anything about the place?' That it is

⁵ Van der Velde 2000. This book brings together a number of statements made by and about Veth. It is intended as a souvenir.

⁶ Schefold 1995. I should like to thank Reimar Schefold for allowing me to read his notes for this lecture. I found the remark quoted here on page 5.

⁷ Agterberg 1995. Agterberg recorded this comment made by C. Fasseur.

⁸ The fund's official name is the P.J. Veth Fund for Students CA/NWS, and it is administered by the Leiden University Fund (LUF).

essential today for specialists in certain disciplines – anthropology, ethnology, and geography – to spend some time in the field is beyond dispute. But to apply this rule to the founder of all these disciplines in the Netherlands is not just anachronistic but indicative of a certain ignorance about the nineteenth-century world of science. In the hierarchical relations that prevailed at the time, worker bees flew off to gather information while the queen bee – Veth, in this case – stayed home to synthesize it into solid knowledge.⁹

Veth himself was only too well aware that never having travelled to the archipelago placed him at a disadvantage. At the same time, however, he pointed out that most of those who had visited the colony could scarcely call themselves experts: for them to do so was *'tout simplement* folly, and proof of profound naïveté' (P.J. Veth 1864c:151). They could certainly not compare themselves to someone who, like him, had devoted most of his life to studying the East Indies. For corroboration he cited other well-known authors who had struggled with the same handicap, but who had nonetheless succeeded in creating a far more cohesive picture of a period or a region than those who had inhabited it.

Many of Veth's contemporaries knew him as the man who had unlocked the mysteries of the distant archipelago. His knowledge of the Dutch East Indies was unrivalled. Even those who did journey to Java used his description of the island as the ultimate travel guide. This volume was part of a wide-ranging and heterogeneous oeuvre that runs to over twenty thousand pages, eighty of which are devoted to the East Indies. Most of it is written in his characteristic evocative and often witty style, with which he could make the driest of subjects digestible. Whether he was discussing the Agriculture Act or the monetary system, hashish or sambal, he never lost this sparkle. What is more, his writings often contained 'hidden' autobiographical information, of which I would have remained ignorant if I had not read his work.

I quote liberally from this work, not just because of his provocative statements and lively language, but also – or primarily – because I have never lost sight of the biographer's role as an intermediary. Veth's biography was originally to have been completed several years earlier, in time for the hundredth anniversary of his death. He would forgive me, I am sure, for failing to meet that initial deadline. After all, if there is one thing we have in common, it is an urge to write and organize many different things at once.

During the commemoration of Veth's death in April 1995, a small plaque was unveiled in his honour.¹⁰ It was aptly attached to the façade of a build-

⁹ I should like to thank M. Cohen, a fellow of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), for drawing my attention to this.

¹⁰ This work of art by Constance van Duinen, which represents an indeterminate kind of lizard on its way to Leiden's Botanical Gardens, was made of material that is proof against vandalism. That is why it looks exactly the same, five years on, as it did when it was unveiled.

ing in Nonnensteeg, Leiden that can be regarded as a breeding ground for Asian studies, with institutions such as the Kern Institute, the CNWS Research School, and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). When these institutions moved in, the idea of calling their premises the 'P.J. Veth Building' triggered a lively debate. The university paper *Mare* published an article entitled 'Who is this Veth?' (Agterberg 1995). and it became clear that some of the new residents strongly objected to the name since they had never heard of the man. I hope that this study will help, among other things, to fill this gap in their knowledge.

Beneath the plaque is an eloquent inscription: 'Anyone who is not astonished at Professor Veth's knowledge knows nothing about knowledge' (Multatuli 1951b:444). These words, by Multatuli, were my constant inspiration in the course of my research. I could not have thought of a better motto for this book.

PART I

Between enlightenment and romanticism

CHAPTER I

**'Dutchmen of an especially fine
and true alloy'
Boyhood in Dordrecht, 1814-1832**

'On all sides one could see astonishingly high windmills with turning sails, little buildings scattered along the riverside in a hundred curious shapes, cottages, pavilions, kiosks, bowers, tiny chapels and little theatres, with red roofs, black, blue or pink walls, and snowy-white door and window frames. Ditches and small canals in between the houses; clumps and rows of trees in front of the buildings and by the canals; barges passing between the houses; little boats moored before the doors; sails poking up in the distance behind the roads; a jumble of blades and pennants of ships and sail arms sticking out above the trees and behind the roofs; bridges, small jetties; all manner of little corners and shops; ponds, pools, river mouths, canal crossings; boathouses for barges; a ceaseless coming and going of men, women and children between the river and the land, between houses and canals, between boats and jetties, a multifarious, shifting spectacle; everywhere the colours of water, everywhere a twinkling freshness and a show of childlike eagerness to please, a blend of the simple and the theatrical, of the graceful and the ridiculous, a little Chinese, a little European, a little of no country in the world; but all basking in a glow of peace and innocence.'¹

This was Dordrecht in the mid-nineteenth century, seen through the eyes of an Italian traveller. Outwardly the city had not changed much since the 1820s, but the idyllic scene sketched above is very much at odds with the woeful living conditions in Holland's towns in this period. Until 1832, Dordrecht had been bounded to the south by its old ramparts. Outside these lay the burghers' pleasure retreats, beyond which the polder landscape stretched into the distance. Dordrecht had very good connections with other towns, both over land and through the inland waterway system. Home to the famous De Witt

¹ Het Utrechts Archief (HUA), Koninklijk Nederlands Aardrijkskundig Genootschap (KNAG), 544. Manuscript by P.J. Veth on the geography of Holland, fol. 19-19v.

brothers, it had a population of about 20,000 in the first half of the nineteenth century, making it a 'medium-sized' Dutch town. Most of the townspeople were Reformed Protestants, but there were also Catholic and Jewish communities. The proletariat lived in wretched conditions. Many were unable to find work and whiled their inactive lives away in damp cellars. The canals from which the drinking water was taken also served as open sewers (Van Dalen 1931-36). Dordrecht society, like other Dutch towns, was clearly divided into three sections: regents, burghers and paupers.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the economic crisis had tightened its grip on the city, and harsh poverty lay behind the 'snowy-white window frames'. Dordrecht had experienced the adverse effects of advancing protectionism, which undermined its primary economic activities – the Rhine trade and the timber sector. The Napoleonic Continental System almost put an end to transit trade and the city's traditional position as a staple market. The remaining industries focused on the hinterland. A report dating from 1812 clearly documents the languishing condition of Dordrecht's economy. On 24 November 1813 the retreating French army bombed the city, although the damage was less severe than initially feared.

After the period of French rule, the city's economy gradually recovered, with a resurgence of shipping and shipbuilding. This revival was accelerated by the launch in 1824 of the Netherlands Trading Company, which subsidized the building of ships and guaranteed their use with high freight rates for the transport of goods to and from the Dutch East Indies. As the Netherlands' third largest trading city, Dordrecht received a relatively large share of these quotas in comparison to Amsterdam and Rotterdam until the mid-nineteenth century. The introduction of the Cultivation System in the Dutch East Indies in 1830 also boosted the city's economy, through the further impetus it gave to navigation. Suppliers to the shipping sector – such as the Veths' ironmongers' shop – were among those to benefit (Y. of C.???Koopmans 1992).

A city devoted to the arts and sciences

The Veths had lived in Dordrecht since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Veth's great-great-grandfather, a coppersmith and brass founder, became a burgher of the city in 1713. This Jan Veth (1682-1750) had been born in Lekkerkerk, and his family is known as the Lekkerkerk branch to distinguish it from the Veths of Zeeland. Although there are many similarities between their coats of arms, no kinship can be demonstrated between the two families. Both belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church (Veth 1964:457-70).

Veth's great-grandfather Gerrit Veth (1716-1790) became a coppersmith

like his father, and also kept an ironmonger's shop. He made the pulpit for the Great Church (Grote Kerk) in Dordrecht (Huizinga 1927:2). Pieter Veth's grandfather, Jan Veth (1743-1831), was also a coppersmith, but he is not known to have produced any works of art. Veth knew him as a boy. Some of his letters have been preserved, showing that the family belonged to literate circles by this time.² Huibert Veth (1779-1856), Pieter's father, was the only son in a family of eight children. He had a wholesaling business in hardware located on Nieuwstraat. Three of his sisters remained unmarried. We can infer from the marriages of Pieter's other aunts that the Veths had risen to the ranks of Dordrecht's established burgher class. His aunt Anna Margaretha married a cousin, Huibert Struijk, a notary in Dordrecht, and his aunt Cornelia married the Dordrecht pharmacist Benjamin Cop; his aunt Gerarda married a physician (*Veth* 1964:461).

Huibert moved his business from the end of Nieuwstraat to Voorstraat, which was already Dordrecht's main shopping street, as it is today.³ In 1803 Huibert married Cornelia Johanna Pickee (1783-1851), a daughter of the Rotterdam architect Pieter Pickee (Huizinga 1927:2). Their first son, Jan, was born in 1805 (*Veth* 1964:461-2). It would be almost ten years before their second son, Pieter Johannes, was born – at 7 o'clock in the morning on 2 December 1814, a year after the bombing of Dordrecht.⁴ On 21 December the infant was baptized in St Augustine's Church.⁵ He was to be the middle son, since a third boy was born to the family in 1817. This youngest son, Gerard Veth, went on to become a member of both Dordrecht city council and the provincial assembly for South Holland (Huizinga 1927). From the 1822 register of pews in St Augustine's, which sheds light on the city's social divisions, we discover that none of the male members of the family had fixed places in the church. Only Veth's mother had an assigned pew, in the sixth row of the nave. The 'regents' pews' at the front were reserved for the élite.⁶

The city had a number of nursery schools in this period – they were notorious for the brutality of their regimes – but Veth is unlikely to have attended one. He probably spent his early years under the supervision of his mother and a live-in maid, playing at the harbour or in the family's pleasure garden just outside the town. He never forgot this garden; as an old man he could still recall exactly what it looked like (J.P. Veth 1895:292). Little else is known about these early years. Veth's later writings contain scarcely a single

² Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam (UBA), collection (coll.) Moll, XXC 5/7. Letter from Jan Veth to W. Moll, 17-4-1830, Dordrecht.

³ Voorstraat 226, now Van Eynsbergen's bicycle shop.

⁴ Gemeentearchief Dordrecht (GAD), Burgerlijke Stand Dordrecht, no. 256 (1814), fol. 165-v.

⁵ GAD, Kerkvoogdij der Hervormde Gemeente, no. 182. Doopboeken, 1812-17.

⁶ GAD, Kerkvoogdij der Hervormde Gemeente, no. 434. Register der zitplaatsen van de Augustijnenkerk (1822), fol. 133-r.

reference to his childhood. Once he mentions the meals he ate as a boy, which evidently had elements of Asian cuisine.⁷

Veth will have started school at about six years of age. The Netherlands had introduced universal primary education nationwide by this time. Some 60% to 70% of children attended these schools (De Wolf 1983:107-16, 119), which were designed to give children the preparation appropriate to their rank in society, 'teaching only that which pupils will need in later life' (Reinsma 1965). Schools were a mirror of society. Most cities had large schools for the poor, with badly trained staff and ramshackle classrooms, and a few smaller institutions (generally boarding schools) with better teachers and facilities.

The state of education was much the same in Dordrecht as in other towns in the Netherlands. At the lower end of the scale was the Dutch Reformed parish school, with over seven hundred pupils, and at the upper end was the school run by the Society for the Promotion of the Public Good (the *Nut*), with only thirty pupils. This Society, founded in the eighteenth century, promoted the ideas of the Enlightenment and strove to improve education. The pupils at the *Nut* school in Dordrecht were lucky enough to have a first-rate teacher, a man named Geelhoed, whose didactic methods enjoyed nationwide renown.

Virtually all Veth's later classmates and school friends at the Latin school had first attended this élite school: the Struykens and Van Balens, Brandelers and Stoops. There is not a trace of the name 'Veth', however, in the archives of the *Nut*.⁸ Since there are no surviving records of any of the other primary schools that existed in this period, we shall probably never know which one he attended. Perhaps it was Berckespoort in Nieuwstraat, next to his parental home (Bilderdijk 1911:3-7). Another possibility is that since Veth came from a family of self-employed tradespeople, he was sent straight to the 'French school' – which he did in any case attend, according to his obituarist Van der Lith – to receive an education with a strong emphasis on practical skills (Van der Lith 1896a:2).⁹

⁷ P.J. Veth 1889 [UIT OOST]:373-4. Here Veth gives a recipe for sambal as made by his mother.

⁸ GAD, Archief van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, Departement Dordrecht, no. 122.

⁹ Van der Lith wrote two virtually identical obituaries: the one already mentioned and another, 'Levensbericht van Pieter Johannes Veth', which was published in *Levens-berichten van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden 1895-1896*, Van der Lith 1896a: 3-37. The former will be referred to hereafter as Van der Lith 1896a and the latter as Van der Lith 1896b.



2. De enig bewaard gebleven tekening van P.J. Veth (1831) is duidelijk geïnspireerd door Dordtse romantische schilders. Hoogst waarschijnlijk volgde Veth lessen bij het Dordtse tekengenootschap Picture, dat nog steeds bestaat.

Teachers and exemplars

'French schools' were officially classified under the heading of primary education, but they actually provided secondary education for children whose parents were merchants, craftsmen or shopkeepers. For many of them this was the final stage of their formal education (De Wolf 1983:113). After leaving school they would join their father's business as apprentices. This was the route followed by Veth's brother Jan, who would take over the ironmonger's business. He and his brother Gerard built it up into what was by the mid-nineteenth century a sizeable company primarily manufacturing agricultural tools and equipment.

The boys attending the French school in Dordrecht, better known as the Van der Pijl Institute, after its founder, were taught mathematics, bookkeeping, French, English, German, history and geography. They received a very decent schooling: Van der Pijl was known as an excellent teacher, and made a name for himself with the many books he wrote on education in foreign

languages and geography (Schotel 1857:235-7; *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* (NNBW) 1911-37??, IV:1102). Here Veth met the two years older Willem Moll, the son of a tobacco merchant, who would one day become a Church historian; the two would remain close friends until Moll's death. They also became brothers-in-law, when Jan Veth married Moll's sister Anneke.

Willem Moll would later give the following rather biased description of his home town: 'Among the small towns of our country, there is perhaps none whose burghers distinguish themselves more by their devotion to the arts and sciences than Dordrecht. This is due partly to the heritage of their forefathers and partly to the influence of talented men in their midst, men capable of conveying to others the contemplative spirit that inspired them.' (Moll 1864: 148-9.) Among the fruits of this inspiration were three cultural societies. The art society *Pictura* – which still exists today – was strongly influenced in the first half of the nineteenth century by Romanticism, as expressed, for instance, in the works of the Dordrecht-born artist Ary Scheffer. Lesser gods such as the Van Strij brothers, Schotel, the Schoumans (father and son) and Van der Koogh also belonged to *Pictura*. Veth himself made a drawing – which has been preserved – of a waterfront, displaying a marked Romantic influence, of which he made a gift to his friend Moll.

In the realm of music there was a society calling itself *The Concert*, which was rooted in the psalm and organ culture of Reformed burghers. The young men attended musical soirées at the parental homes of Van Brakel and Moll. Unlike Moll, who wrote his own compositions and had a good singing voice, Veth was poorly endowed in this area, although he was a great music lover (Van der Lith 1896a:4). The opening of a theatre in a large mansion on *Wijnstraat* in 1823 provided Dordrecht with a new cultural centre. On the same premises, above the theatre, were the rooms of the literary society *Diversa sed Una*, of which the Protestant minister A.P. van Groningen and the classics teacher J.W. Grim had been active members since 1824. Both had a marked influence on Veth and Moll.¹⁰

Moll had already succeeded in enrolling at the Latin school, with Van Groningen's help.¹¹ This was a noteworthy achievement, since it was rare for someone to move from French to Latin school (DeWolf 1983:113). Veth's parents probably needed little encouragement from the minister to send their clever son Pieter to Latin school as well. This would bring the worthy profession of Church minister within his reach – a big relief, since the family business could hardly be expected to provide a decent living for all three sons. At the end of 1827, Veth was admitted to the Latin school by its board of guardians, the body responsible for appointing staff, deciding when pupils

¹⁰ GAD, Archives of the literary society *Diversa sed Una*, 1816-1947, no. 99.

¹¹ Moll 1932:148. Hereafter abbreviated to *NAK*, which refers to the *NAK: nieuwe serie*.

could advance to the next class, and awarding the certificates needed for university entrance (Schotel 1857).

Only a small proportion of boys who were destined to hold key positions in society attended Latin school, where they received a classical education. In spite of the reform of the education system in 1816, adding to the curriculum new subjects such as history, geography, mathematics and mythology, these were still seen as adjuncts to the serious business of the classical languages – especially Latin, which was the written and spoken language of communication and instruction at university until the 1850s. Training the memory was paramount in classical education. Veth loathed this mode of teaching, which he thought 'little more than unadulterated rote learning' and complained that 'the textbooks were written completely in accordance with this soulless form of scholarship' (P.J. Veth 1852c:2, 531).

Of the pupils' thirty hours of instruction every week, they spent twenty on the classics and the rest on 'subsidiary' subjects. The programme at Dordrecht's Latin school could be completed in a little over four years. The twice-yearly prize-giving ceremonies (with books as prizes) that accompanied assessments of pupils' progress prompted ritual outpourings of envy and malicious gossip. School fees amounted to 24 guilders per semester plus another three guilders for coal (Fortgens 1948:178-82). In Veth's first year, the school had a total of 28 pupils. In his four and a half years at the school, he shared his class with only two other boys, Jan Stoop and Kees van Balen. The certificates admitting him to each successive year have all been preserved.¹² Assisting the headmaster G. Fennema and J.W. Grim were three other teachers. The then inspector of education, W. Wijnbeek, described Grim as an excellent teacher and the other two as mediocre.¹³

In 1829, after a series of fierce disputes with the board of governors, Fennema was compelled to relinquish his senior Greek classes to Grim.¹⁴ The latter, an acquaintance and distant relative of the fairy-tale Grimm brothers, had studied medicine in Leiden before setting up practice as a physician in Dordrecht.¹⁵ He soon found that he was constitutionally unsuited to the constant visits to houses of mourning that went with this profession, however, and became a classics teacher instead (*NNBW IV:675-6*). Moll gave the following description of his former teacher, with whom Veth too would have frequent dealings: 'He was a remarkable man with a clear head, a bent for scholarship, fastidious taste, and an extensive knowledge of later as well as classical literature. An

¹² Academisch Historisch Museum Leiden (AHM), coll. Veth, no. 34382, document (doc.) 1a-i.

¹³ National Archives (NA), Verzamelde rapporten van H. Wijnbeek, 392.

¹⁴ GAD, Archief van de curatoren van het gymnasium, no. 98. Notulen van curatoren 4, fol. 247-295.

¹⁵ Pijper 1914:1-12. In his autobiography, Moll remarks that Grim was a distant relative of the Grimm brothers. I have been unable to ascertain whether this is correct.

outstanding philologist with wide-ranging mental faculties, and a generous teacher. Under the warm leadership of this good man I applied myself, I dare say diligently, to the classics.' (Acquoy 1879:69.) Grim was the archetype of the secondary school teacher who profoundly influences his pupils, a figure frequently described well into the twentieth century.

In 1829 Veth received his first private lessons in the classics from Grim, who also introduced him to Romantic writers such as Scott, Lamartine, Goethe and Byron. After the French school, Veth no longer had classes in English, French or German – much to his regret. In the 1840s he would write articles urging that these languages be taught at grammar school (*gymnasium*): 'May the day soon come on which all prejudice against the teaching of modern languages and literature at grammar schools will have vanished; on which it will be understood that the new languages are not learned only for the purpose of speaking them or corresponding in them, but that masterpieces of modern literature also exercise a certain influence on the forming of taste; that modern languages are not just useful to merchants but also essential to scholars'.¹⁶

From Grim Veth also acquired a thorough knowledge of Shakespeare, and he became one of the few academics in the Netherlands to possess a thorough knowledge of English grammar (Van der Lith 1896a:3). His love of English would later inspire him to compile an anthology of English literature. From the following fragment of a letter, it appears that their relations were occasionally strained: 'It may perhaps happen at times that I [Grim] appear to be rather eccentric in this or that way [...] it is hence natural that, if the will is strong, it chooses the shortest route, and sometimes does something that makes clear that it has failed to pass through its natural seat (the faculty of reason).'¹⁷

Veth and Moll frequently visited Van Groningen, who introduced the young men to the writings of Hooft, Vondel and not least Bilderdijk. Van Groningen had studied theology in Leiden, where he had founded the Rhetoricians, a famous debating club whose members included the Church minister Isaac da Costa, with whom Veth would later have a fierce clash. Moll describes one of Van Groningen's readings to the society known as Unity in Diversity: 'The evenings on which he mounted the rostrum at Unity in Diversity were regarded by the cultivated citizens of Dordrecht as social evenings, to which people looked forward. And not only the undersigned but many others too [...] still recall with pleasure, after the passage of thirty years, how the poet played on their imagination and feelings, tossing them about

¹⁶ Veth made this comment in his review of S. Susan's edition of *Macbeth* prepared for grammar school pupils, in *De Gids* 8 (1844) 1, 340.

¹⁷ Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden (UBL), Bibliotheca Publica Latina (BPL) 1756. Letter from J.W. Grim to P.J. Veth, 3-2-1833, Dordrecht.

as turbulently as the billows as he related with his masculine language the peregrinations and heroic deeds of the children of the sea.' (Moll 1864:153.)

'The torn fabric of the land'

In 1830 the people of Dordrecht were startled by the proclamation that they were to be mobilized as a consequence of the troubles in the Southern Netherlands. Moll enlisted and left as a volunteer for the encampment at Woudrichem at the end of October. Veth was too young to enlist, at sixteen, and had to remain behind. It is the Belgian Revolt to which we owe the first letter written by Veth that has been preserved, since his friendship with Moll was now sustained through correspondence. Veth wrote to Moll on 10 October 1830.¹⁸ His letter largely discussed the Belgian Revolt, drawing on reports in the daily newspapers *Dordrechtsche Courant*, *Bredasche Courant* and *Staatscourant*, all of which Veth evidently read with some regularity.

The rest of the letter deals with matters relating to family and school, about which Veth remarks: 'I am top of the class again, but that doesn't mean much to me. The exam went quite well, although Fennema again groped for words several times. It will not surprise you that the revision of the past few days has been accompanied by the usual disputes and arguments.'¹⁹ Veth conveyed to his friend the best wishes of J.G. Ooms, an older friend of Willem's who had sailed to the East Indies.²⁰ Ooms was a regular guest at the Moll family home from 1828 onwards (Moll 1932:151). He probably told Veth stories about the archipelago, and perhaps this was what kindled the boy's interest in the Netherlands' overseas empire.

Moll, who had been transferred to the fortifications of Breda at the beginning of February, would never see action. He became a clerk at the army office and spent most of his time reading Homer and Lamartine. He wrote to Veth, 'That poetry, how sweet and endearing it is. It has become the soul of my soul.'²¹ A letter written by Veth in mid- 1831 gives us an idea of his own reading: *De Geuzen* by Van Haren, the *Mengelpoëzie* by Bilderdijk, works by Vondel, Goldsmith's *History of Greece* and Lamartine's *Harmonies*. Veth had scoured the bookshelves at home and in the family's house at their pleasure garden and collected books for Moll to read. This suggests that Veth either

¹⁸ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 10-12-1830, Dordrecht. Veth dated the letter 10-10-1830. This must be incorrect, since it is clear from other sources that Moll had not yet left then.

¹⁹ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 10-12-1830, Dordrecht.

²⁰ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 9/14-3-1831, Dordrecht.

²¹ UBL, BPL 1756. Letter from W. Moll to P.J. Veth, 6-3-1831, Woudrichem.



L. S.

AMPLISSIMI GYMNASII
DORDRACENI CURATORES
ORNATISSIMUM JUVENEM

Petrum Johannem Veth,

CUM

IN CLASSE *Quarta*

SINGULAREM IN *Coep. Lat. Mus. 1831. April 20. Aulis.*

STUDIO ADHIBUISSET
INDUSTRIAM.

HOC BENEVOLENTIAE SUAE TESTIMONIO
PUBLICÉ ORNANDUM CENSUERUNT.

MDCCCXXXII. Anno. CCCCXXXII.

H. M. Meerman
H. M. Meerman

M. J. van der Meer
M. J. van der Meer

RECTOR
J. Scam

3. Veth bezocht van 1828 tot 1832 de Latijnse School in Dordrecht. Het hierbij afgebeelde einddiploma gaf hem toegang tot het academisch onderwijs. De meeste Dordtaren gingen in Leiden studeren.

purchased books or received them as gifts.²² He was also reading *Hamlet*, which he thought contained 'a wealth of superb passages, but also a great deal of popular and vulgar language that is quite unworthy of such a great poet. This makes me so uncomfortable that I find it easier to read Homer'.²³ On 15 August 1831, Veth wrote, 'Today we find succour for our hopes of a swift resolution of the problems that currently oppress us in relation to our divided country.'²⁴ Veth was probably referring to the Dutch offensive that would later become known as the Ten-Day Campaign, which was launched on 2 August 1831.

Probably under the influence of Van Groningen, who was an authority on *Bilderdijk*, Veth also wrote poetry. In eager anticipation of Moll's return, he wrote in August 1831,

Not for aye will battle trumpets blare
 And booming cannons fill the air.
 Not for aye will war rage on.
 One day sweet peace we'll know once more,
 Thriving on our tranquil shore;
 Such joy our eyes will look upon.

God grant that day be soon at hand
 to mend the fabric of this land.²⁵

The war was in fact soon over, but it would be a long time before Veth's other wishes were fulfilled; the 'fabric of the land' was permanently torn into a northern and a southern part.

Veth soon had to bid farewell to his friend Moll again, as the latter went to Leiden in September 1831 to study theology. The two young men continued to correspond, however and Moll wrote, 'I am greatly looking forward to your arrival in our venerable city.'²⁶ In May 1832 Veth wrote proudly that

²² Veth's library contained a number of editions of works by classical and modern writers dating from this period. *Catalogue de la bibliothèque* 1899:127-35.

²³ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C 1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 15-7-1831, Dordrecht.

²⁴ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C 1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 15/17-8-1831, Dordrecht.

²⁵ *Niet steeds ook schalt de krijgsblazoen*
 Niet immer duurt het oorlogs woen
 En 't bulderen der kartouwen
 Eens daalt de lieve vrede neer
 En brengt ons rust en welvaart weer
 En doet ons vreugd aanschouwen

Geeft God dat ras de tijd genaakt
 En 't zeil des vaderlands volmaakt.

UBA, coll. Moll, XX C 1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, 15/17-8-1831, Dordrecht.

²⁶ UBL, BPL 1756. Letter from W. Moll to P.J. Veth, 28-2-1832, Leiden.

he would be graduating from Latin school with the highest distinction; on delivering their verdict, the governors had set the date for his school-leaving ceremony as 13 June 1832.²⁷ He was to take his leave of the school by delivering an address in Latin.²⁸

This ceremony, which was held in the French church, was not just a momentous occasion for the young man concerned, but also a major event for Dordrecht's burghers. Veth was the only recipient that year of the testimonial certifying fitness for university. The *Dordrechtsche Courant* newspaper covered the ceremony as follows: 'A substantial crowd graced this event with their presence, which was punctuated by fine orchestral music, adding lustre to the occasion and bearing witness to the great importance they attach to everything that is good, useful and noble [...] the highly creditable young man P.J. Veth made a speech on a subject he had chosen and elaborated himself, in which he demonstrated with examples the outstanding merit of Theocritus' pastoral poetry, and was rewarded with a substantial prize and a testimonial full of the highest praise certifying his suitability to be promoted to an academic institution.'²⁹

It was the first time in his life that Veth had addressed a crowd from the rostrum. He will have seen it as his first step on the way to the fulfilment of the wish that he had confided to Moll a few months before: 'I must say that it is also my ardent desire to be a righteous and devout man, since I have such a strong feeling that only Christian virtue and sincere piety yield true happiness, and every other thing in which one may seek it is but an idle shadow, that those who reach for it at length lament, but – alas! – too late. Let us hope that we both pursue the same career [...] You go before, and I shall try to follow [...]'.³⁰ This cautious 'try' was not added, as it later transpired, from modesty alone.

There was nothing random about Veth's choice of university. Virtually every young man from Dordrecht who was embarking on an academic education headed for Leiden (Otterspeer 1992:23). The Veth family belonged to the tiny elite that could afford to send a son to university. Although they already belonged to the established burgher class of Dordrecht by this time, it must have been a strain to raise Pieter's tuition fees, about a thousand guilders a year. Offsetting the strain, however, was the prospect of a career in the Church, a highly prestigious profession at this time. Veth bid his parental home farewell, returning only for special occasions, such as his brother Jan's

²⁷ UBA, coll. Moll, XX C 1 3. Letter from P.J. Veth to W. Moll, May 1832, Dordrecht.

²⁸ GAD, Archief Gymnasium. Reglement van orde en tucht voor de Latijnse school, no. 14.

²⁹ *Dordrechtsche Courant* 16-6-1832. The address was entitled 'De Theocriti, bucolicorum poetarum longe principes, merites'.

³⁰ UBA, co

wedding to Anneke Moll (*Veth* 1964:462). In his new milieu, student life in the city of Leiden, he would be thrust into a very different atmosphere than Dordrecht. Here it was that he crossed the threshold to independence. The foundations laid in his early life had made of Pieter Veth a man worthy of Johan Huizinga's comment: 'I have sometimes noticed that Dordrecht creates Dutchmen of an especially fine and true alloy' (*Huizinga* 1950:486).

