

LAUDATIO DOUWE WESSEL FOKKEMA

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Today, Prof. Douwe Fokkema is awarded the Sarton medal for his prominent role in the field of general and comparative literature. Contrary to many other theorists of literature, he never lost sight of the historical perspective in his scientific analyses. He even gained international renown by making an assessment of the historical evolution of the theories of literature in the twentieth century.

Prof. Fokkema was born on May 4, 1931 in Utrecht. After his secondary studies at the Gymnasium in Haarlem, he studied Dutch Language and Literature at the University of Amsterdam (1949-56) and Modern Chinese at the University of Leyden (1957-61). In 1963-64 he received a Harkness Fellowship which enabled him to study Chinese at the University of California in Berkeley, and at Columbia University in New York. He received his Ph.D. degree in Leyden in 1965.

In 1966 he became a diplomat in the Netherlands' diplomatic mission in Peking, P.R. of China, where he served most of the time as Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.

Upon his retirement in 1968 he joined Utrecht University, from 1971 as associate professor, from 1981 as Professor and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature. For almost thirty years he has served the Utrecht Department of Comparative Literature, which he developed into one of the leading institutes in the field. During that period he published numerous books and scholarly articles, gave innumerable lectures and conference papers, and fulfilled an impressive number of duties in academic and scientific organizations both nationally and internationally. He was invited to teach for shorter periods at the universities of Harvard (Spring semester 1983), Göttingen (1987),

Princeton (1988), Peking University (1993), University of Alberta, Edmonton (1995), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1998) and the University of Wrocław, Poland (1998).

Prof. Fokkema was elected Secretary of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) in 1973, a title which he fulfilled for six years. In 1985 he was elected President of the ICLA for a period of three years, and today, he is still an Honorary President. He is also an honorary member of the Portuguese and the South African Associations of Comparative Literature. He holds an honorary doctor's degree from the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland (1995). Since 1989 he is member of the Academia Europaea. He went into retirement in 1996.

At present, he is the director of the research programme "The Culture of the Netherlands in its European Context" of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. He is a member of the editorial board of the Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature, the Journal of Literary Studies, Dedalus, and Literary Research/-Recherche littéraire, a member of the advisory board of the CUHK Journal of the Humanities (Hong Kong), and a member of the Comité d'honneur of the Revue de littérature comparée. Recently he published mainly in Comparative Criticism, the Canadian Review of Comparative Literature, European Review, Tijdschrift voor Literatuurwetenschap, as well as in Chinese journals.

His articles and books have been translated into twenty languages.

As a Sinologist he devoted many articles and books to the study of the evolution of Chinese culture and literature. I would like to mention, in this respect, books such as Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence (1965), Report from Peking (1972, original Dutch version in 1970), Het Chinese alternatief in literatuur en ideologie (1972) and Chinees dagboek (1981). He was one of the editors of the volumes China nu: Balans van de Culturele Revolutie (1973, with E. Zürcher) and China op het breukvlak (1981, with Bart Tromp). He integrated his knowledge and interest in Chinese culture in his comparative studies by his

sustained efforts to move non-Western literatures into the focal point of the discipline.

As a comparatist and theorist of literature, he has contributed significantly to a wide range of issues in the study of literature and culture: problems of literary historiography, cultural relativism, identity, convention and innovation, canon formation, the problem of values, the distinction between scientific literary analysis and critical intervention, the mechanisms of cultural participation, the empirical study of literature, and systems theory. All these topics are at the very heart of the current discussions in our discipline. I would like to recall, in this respect, publications such as Cultureel relativisme en vergelijkende literatuurwetenschap (1971), General problems of Literary History (editor, 1985), Issues in General and Comparative Literature (1987), Théorie littéraire: Problèmes et Perspectives (with Marc Angenot, Jean Bessière, and Eva Kushner, 1989), Innovatie (1990, editor with Frans Ruiter), Literatuurwetenschap en cultuuroverdracht (1992, coauthored with his wife, Prof. Elrud Ibsch), Cultural Participation: Trends since the Middle Ages (1993, editor with Ann Rigney), Culturele identiteit en literaire innovatie (1996), Knowledge and Commitment: A Problem-Oriented Approach to Literary Studies (2000, coauthored with Elrud Ibsch).

In his applied studies, Douwe Fokkema became one of the outstanding historians of both the literary movements and the literary theories in the twentieth century. This research also resulted in an extensive academic output with publications such as Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century (1977, 4th printing 1995, coauthored with Elrud Ibsch), which offers an overview of four main literary theories: structuralism, Marxism, aesthetics of reception and semiotics. The two main literary currents in world literature in the twentieth century, Modernism and Postmodernism, were thoroughly described and analyzed in a series of books. In cooperation with Prof. Elrud Ibsch, he published Het modernisme in de Europese letterkunde in 1984, of which a revised and extended English version was published under the title Modernist Conjectures: A Mainstream in European Literature 1910-40. Douwe Fokkema took the initiative to organize a series of workshops and conferences devoted to the study of Postmodernism. The contributions

were collected in the volumes Approaching Postmodernism (1986, editor with Hans Bertens), Exploring Postmodernism (1987, editor with Matei Calinescu), Postmodernism in the Literature and Culture of Central and Eastern Europe (1996, editor with Halina Janaszek-Ivanickova) and International Postmodernism: Theory and Practice (1997, editor with Hans Bertens).

From the introduction to his Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century, we can get a clear insight into Fokkema's high-minded view on the scientific study of literature, as well as on the role of the historical perspective in it:

" This book is based on the assumption that we need theories of literature in our attempts to interpret literary texts and to explain literature as a specific mode of communication. The scientific study of literature is inconceivable without relying on a particular theory of literature. Before we review the main contemporary theories of literature, it is necessary to identify and refute certain trends which are incompatible with a systematic study of literary theory. Therefore, this introductory chapter will have a somewhat negative character. However, the criticism of a number of views which in our opinion are mistaken provides us at the same time with an opportunity to emphasize the historical perspective. Recent developments in literary theory are the outcome of research by several generations of scholars. Present reactions to past ideas can be clarified by a study of the latter. "

I am very glad to be able to honour Douwe Fokkema today for his substantial contribution to the establishment of a solid scientific foundation for literary and comparative studies. The meticulously precise work of taking stock of the main theories of literature has been of great help to all students of literature by enabling them to judge the foundations of their discipline for themselves. I am also glad to get the opportunity to express my feelings of gratitude for the working relationship I have enjoyed with Douwe Fokkema over the past twenty years. To a large extent, the Ghent Department of General and Comparative Literature owes its place on the international scene to his generous cooperation. The international workshop on Cultural Participation, which Douwe Fokkema organized in March 1991 as the head of the Research Institute for History and Culture at the University

of Utrecht, still remains the intellectually most stimulating experience I ever had in my thirty years' academic career. I assume that today's lecture on "Knowledge, Imagination, and the Notion of Culture" will be an equally stimulating experience for the audience.