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Poet and professor: Adam Simons

Honings, R.A.M.; Rutten, G. van; Kalmthout, T. van

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3 Poet and Professor

Adam Simons

Rick Honings

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Abstract

Relatively little is known about Adam Simons (1770-1834), professor of Dutch Literature and Rhetoric at the university of Utrecht since 1815. That is not so surprising, as Simons wrote no literary history or any other type of monograph. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, despite his being part of the first generation of professors of Dutch language and literature, virtually no attention has been paid him. In this chapter, Simons' work is examined, both his poetry and his treatises. Simons was known primarily as a poet. Even after becoming professor, he remained predominately a poet. It was from this perspective that, on various occasions, he articulated his thoughts about the essence of poetry, but he also declaimed various essays on literary history, which are studied in this chapter.

Keywords: Adam Simons, literary history, Dutch poetry, Vondel, romanticism

1 Introduction

In the spring of 1821, the German student August Heinrich Hoffman von Fallersleben crossed the border into the Netherlands. He intended to travel around while at the same time immersing himself in Middle Dutch literature. He went first to Utrecht, where he paid Professor Adam Simons (1770-1834) a visit. When Simons learned what the German's plans were, he responded: 'Sir, it is not the custom in our country to go on a literary journey'. After a little while, once he had determined that Hoffmann was neither an adventurer nor vagabond, he warmed to him, and wanted to show him just

how well-acquainted he was with the older Dutch literature, but Hoffman was unimpressed, claiming that what he heard were ‘things so widely known, that anyone might know them’. When Simons started about the *Rhymed Chronicle of Klaas Kolijn* and its author, Hoffmann understood that Simons was trying to catch him out. Balthazar Huydecoper had, after all, already proven in 1772 that this chronicle was a seventeenth-century hoax and therefore not a mediaeval manuscript. The visit came subsequently to a close, Hoffmann noting: ‘We parted as good friends, and never saw one another again’.¹

This is a rare eye-witness account of the Utrecht Professor Adam Simons. Who was this man? Although he is listed in a number of biographical dictionaries and reference books, we know very little about him.² Other than a handful of letters scattered over various collections, he has left us few clues. In the recent literary history of the nineteenth century, *Alles is taal geworden*, by Willem van den Berg and Piet Couttenier, his name is mentioned but once. They characterise Simons as a vicar-poet since he was not only a poet but a clergyman to boot.³ Information on Simons’ poems can be found in Jan te Winkel’s literary history *Ontwikkelingsgang der Nederlandsche letterkunde*.⁴

Adam Simons achieved some acclaim as the opponent of the Leiden librarian and professor Jacob Geel. In 1830, at the Utrecht Leesmuseum, of which Simons was a member, Geel gave a lecture entitled ‘Lof der proza’ (‘In Praise of Prose’), an appeal in defence of prose, which to his mind was being neglected, when compared to poetry. Piqued, Simons responded with the lecture ‘Over de poëzij, bijzonder in Nederland’ (‘On Poetry, Particularly in the Netherlands’) in which he defends the value of the art of poetry.⁵ This professorial duel has received some attention in literary histories.⁶

In his book *From Siegenbeek to Lodewick* (2004), which explores and charts the history of the academic study of Dutch language and literature, George Vis takes a more deliberate look at Simons, but he, too, has little to

I would like to thank Gwynne van Zonneveld for her help with the translation of this chapter.

1 Hoffmann von Fallersleben, 1868, vol. 1, p. 260: ‘Mein Herr, es ist nich Gebrauch in unserem Lande, eine litterarische Reise zu machen;’ ‘das waren aber so allgemein bekannte Dinge, die jeder wissen konnte;’ ‘Wir schieden als gute Freunde und sahen uns nie wieder’.

2 Available through: <http://www.dbnl.org/auteurs/auteur.php?id=simooo8>.

3 Van den Berg & Couttenier, 2009, p. 220.

4 Te Winkel, 1925, pp. 336-337, 573-574.

5 Geel & Simons, 1830.

6 *Het proza van Geel en de poëzie van Simons* [1899]. On this subject: Knuvelde 1964, vol. 3, pp. 263-264; van den Berg & Gebrandy in Geel, 2012, vol. 2 (‘Commentaar’), pp. 31-35.

offer: 'Compared to others, there is relatively little known about Simons'.⁷ That is not so surprising, as Simons, apart from several poetical works and treatises, wrote no literary history or other type of study. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why, despite his belonging to the first generation of professors of Dutch language and literature, virtually no attention has been paid him. In this chapter, Simons' work will be examined, both his poetry and his treatises. What were his ideas on literary history? In what measure did his being a poet influence his academic work? And what was his place within the study of Dutch literature?

2 Biographical Sketch

The facts known about his life are soon told. Adam Simons was born in Amsterdam on 25 February 1770, the son of Pieter Simons and Neeltje van der Sluis. We know practically nothing about his youth. According to him, it was his mother who introduced him to the older poetry and history:

She rested Vondel in my hand
And helped me learn his song,
And told of our dear native land,
Forgot no hero strong.⁸

After completing Latin grammar school, Simons studied theology in order to become a Reformed clergyman. This he did by first attending Athenaeum Illustre in his place of birth, then Leiden University to complete his studies. Early on he was active on the literary front. In 1790 he won honourable mention with a prize poem submitted to the poetry society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkreegen* ('Art is Attained through Labour').⁹ The Rotterdam society *Studium Scientiarum Genetrix* also published a poem from his hand.¹⁰

7 Vis, [2004], p. 12: 'Vergeleken met de anderen is van Simons nog betrekkelijk weinig bekend'.

8 Simons, 1805, p. 87: 'Zij gaf mij Vondel in de hand, / En leerde mij zijn lied; / En sprak van 't lieve vaderland, / Vergat zijn' helden niet'.

9 *Leydse courant*, 28 May 1790.

10 *Rotterdamsche courant*, 30 November 1790. This is de poem 'Israëls triumfzang', which was originally published in the first part of the third volume of the *Werken van het dicht- en letterlievende genootschap, onder de spreuk: Studium Scientiarum Genetrix* (Rotterdam 1792), pp. 66-72. Also published in Simons, 1805, pp. 13-18.

Simons was ordained in 1792, and a year later he was called to the small community of De Vuursche, on the Utrecht Ridge. In 1799 he took a post in the church town of Thamen, near Uithoorn, where he was to continue preaching for more than fifteen years.¹¹ He had married Johanna Maria Keer in 1793. Around this time he wrote a high-flown love poem for her in which he sings the praises of his dear 'Mie', with her friendly eyes; in her presence he was the richest man on earth.¹² She gave him three sons: Dirk, Piet, and Gerrit.¹³ Contemporary Willem de Clercq, a man of letters, characterised her as a woman whose appearance was 'Guelders, home-loving & friendly & moreover in no way uncivilised'.¹⁴

Domestic life was rather complicated. Simons informed a friend in 1801 that he had taken his parents into his home because they suffered from 'lung consumption' and were soon to die.¹⁵ His young children were continually getting fevers. This letter also makes it clear that Simons' ambitions at that time went beyond the clergy. Referring to Professor Johannes Henricus van der Palm, Minister of Education, he wrote: 'If he were to make me scholarch [headmaster] now, then I would be exultant; he has spoken of it before; would it be wrong, to remind him of it?'¹⁶

Nothing came of that initially. It was only years later, when king Willem I ascended the throne after the French occupation, that Simons took a new position. In 1815 it was determined by royal decree that three of the five universities would be kept: Groningen, Leiden, and Utrecht; those in Franeker and Harderwijk had been closed in 1811 and were not to be reopened. Furthermore, chairs in Dutch Literature and Rhetoric were to be created, following Leiden's example, where the first professor in Dutch Language and Literature, Matthijs Siegenbeek, had already been appointed professor back in 1797.¹⁷ For the position in Utrecht, the renowned grammarian and lexicographer Petrus Weiland was the preferred candidate.¹⁸ He had constructed a Dutch Grammar at the request of the Batavian government in 1805. Due to health problems, however, he was forced to decline the

11 Molhuysen & Blok (ed.), 1911-1937, vol. 5, p. 742.

12 A. Simons, 'Aen J.M.K.' [circa 1793]. University Library Amsterdam, hs. As 89.

13 *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Instituut van Ingenieurs*, 1870, p. 68.

14 *Online Dagboek van Willem de Clercq*, 1823, vol. 10, p. 34: 'Geldersch[,] huislijk & hartelijk & daarbij geenszins onbeschaafd'.

15 His parents died on 9 July and 24 August 1801, according to the poem 'Goeden nacht aan mijne ouders. Ontslapen den 9 Julij en 24 Augustus 1801', published in: Simons, 1805, pp. 58-61.

16 Letter to an unknown person, possibly Jacobus Kantelaar, 25 June 1801. University Library Leiden, LTK 1567. For van der Palm, see the chapter by Krol, this volume.

17 For Siegenbeek, see the chapter by Rutten, this volume.

18 For Weiland, see the chapter by Noordegraaf, this volume.

honour.¹⁹ Apparently the new chair was then offered to Simons, for in 1816 he delivered his inaugural lecture. By that time Simons had established his reputation as a poet, but had no academic publications to his name. Nor did he have a dissertation – the reason he received an honorary doctorate (*doctoratus honoris causa*) from Utrecht University. He would remain a professor the rest of his life.

Simons died on 6 January 1834. He was visiting one of his sons in Amsterdam, where he had a stroke. Several hours later he passed away.²⁰ Thus the professor became, as he had written more than forty years previously, 'prey for the grave with which the worms are fed'.²¹

After his death, Simons was variously commemorated. Matthijs Siegenbeek did so during the 1834 annual meeting of the *Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde* ('Society of Dutch Language and Literature'). He sketched his former colleague as a scholar who, despite his time at the Latin grammar school, had remained a stranger to classical literature, but who conversely had a great breadth of knowledge when it came to German and Dutch literature. According to Siegenbeek, Simons was popular as a professor: 'By his inherent liveliness of mind and rich ingenuity, he was able to make his teaching, as well as his interaction, extremely pleasant, and win the affection of his pupils'. He was the kind of person who bubbled over with 'banter and jest'. Lastly, Siegenbeek typified him as a good friend, husband, and father, who enjoyed domestic life, and held faith in God to be the highest good. In regard to Simons' poetry, he remarked that it did not possess much exalted intensity, but that it did have many fine metaphors and well-chosen comparisons, and was written in a pure kind of Dutch. Simons' verses may have contained a few small shortcomings, Siegenbeek nonetheless was confident that 'impartial posterity will certainly assign him an honourable place among the jewels on the Dutch mountain of poetry'.²²

Simons never became a jewel on the national Parnassus, and as a professor he has been forgotten. Even in Utrecht, no street has been named after

19 Noordegraaf, 2004.

20 Siegenbeek, 1834, p. 28.

21 A. Simons, 'Aen mijnen vriend J.A. Streso' (1792). University Library Amsterdam, hs. 20 Cb11-2: 'een prooij voor 't graf waer meê men wormen voedt'.

22 Siegenbeek, 1834, p. 28-33: 'Door de hem eigene levendigheid van geest en rijkdom van vernuft, wist hij zijn onderwijs, gelijk zijnen omgang, grootelijks te veraangenen, en de genegenheid zijner leerlingen te winnen'; 'scherts en jokkernij'; 'de onpartijdige nakomelingschap zal hem gewisselijk onder de sieraden van den Nederduitschen zangberg eene eervolle plaats toewijzen'.

him. His name only lives on in the name of a series of lecture booklets irregularly published by the Dutch Department of Utrecht University.

3 Simons as a Poet

As mentioned earlier, Adam Simons was known primarily as a poet when he took the Dutch Literature and Rhetoric chair at Utrecht's university in 1816. How had he positioned himself in the years prior to his appointment, so that he became the ideal candidate for the professorship? A survey of his works immediately reveals that he let political developments dictate what key he played in. His first verses he wrote as a student in Leiden. There in 1791 he published *Aen de Leydsche burgers, op den 3den oktober* ('*To Leiden's Citizens, on the Third of October*'), on the occasion of the celebration of the Liberation of Leiden in 1574. In it he calls on the people of Leiden to honour their valiant forefathers.²³

It was not until 1805, during his time in Thamen, that Simons published his next work: the collection *Gedichten* ('*Poems*'). Most of its works are of a religious nature and address the theme of mortality. He included a number of occasional poems in with these, as well as translations of poems by German authors, such as Ludwig Hölty, Gottfried August Bürger, and Friederich von Matthisson, that he had previously published in journals. In the preface he writes: 'And so I venture to bring a few Poems out in to the light, which step the request of my friends, and – why should I pretend otherwise? – my own vanity have for some time convinced me to take'. That he had not done so before, was linked to the sad state of the nation; the time had, in his opinion, long been inopportune for leading the nation to the peaceful domain of the Muses. He reports that many of his poems had come about by chance. He had been careful expressing political opinions and his feelings of patriotism during these turbulent times, he states. There was, however, one exception: when 'Grand Pensionary' Schimmelpenninck took office, he could not help himself and had written a poem in which he predicted that the Netherlands would rise again.²⁴ Reading between the lines, one can infer that Simons had patriotic sympathies. Referring to Stadtholder Willem V, he writes:

23 Simons, 1791.

24 Simons, 1805, pp. iii-vi: 'Ik waag het dan, eenige Gedichten in het licht te geven, waartoe het verzoek mijner vrienden, en, waarom zou ik dit ontveinzen? mijne eigenliefde mij sedert een' geruimen tijd deden besluiten'.

Nay! never again may a tyrant return here,
 Though he pompously tower like a cedar,
 I'd rather slump down dead before him,
 Than be his slave enchained in fear!²⁵

The arrival of the French and the Batavian Republic in 1795 he most likely applauded. Also of note is the last paragraph of his preface to the collection, in which Simons extensively thanks his exceptional friend 'the renowned Professor M. Siegenbeek', whose spelling he reports having followed.²⁶ Simons presumably had attended Siegenbeek's lectures; Siegenbeek was after all responsible for educating theology students in rhetoric. Their friendship will undoubtedly have helped Simons attain his appointment ten years later.

In the ensuing years, Simons the poet continued to attract attention. In 1809 the The Hague society *Kunstliefde spaart geen vlijt* ('Love of Art is not Frugal with Diligence') awarded him a gold medal for his lengthy submission *De lof der welsprekendheid* ('In Praise of Rhetoric'). The work contains an ode to the power of the spoken word, which had so often been of service to politicians and scholars. In the third canto, Simon goes into the importance of rhetoric in Dutch history. It was rhetoric which gave Herman Boerhaave the ability to proclaim his theories and findings to all of humanity. Yet it is above all the historian-poet P.C. Hooft who deserves to be recognised for his language: 'Whom, O Rhetoric! did you lend more of your flourish and grace, / Than noble Hooft, exalted by virtue and place!²⁷

From that moment on, Simons expressed himself more and more politically. King Louis Napoleon, who had been placed on the Dutch throne in 1806, was forced to relinquish it again on 1 July 1810 when his brother Napoleon Bonaparte annexed the Netherlands to France. Criticism of France was from then beyond the pale; preventive censure was practised.²⁸ It was not without risk that Simons, before the actual annexation, addressed the Dutch in the poem 'Aan mijne landgenooten' ('To My Countrymen'), starting with the line: 'Forget your origins, O Batavians!²⁹ The once so flourishing and free country of the Netherlands with its fertile ground, home of sea hero Michiel de Ruiter, was now humiliated and in shackles. The French

25 Simons, 1805, p. 94: 'Neen! nooit komt hier een' dwing'land weder, / Hij prale trotsch, gelijk een ceder, / Ik val 'er liever dood voor neder, / Dan ooit zijn bange slaaf te zijn!'

26 Simons, 1805, p. vi: 'den beroemden Hoogleeraar M. Siegenbeek'.

27 Simons, 1822, pp. 30, 34: 'Wien meêr, welsprekendheid! gaaft gij uw zwier en leven, / Dan aan den edlen Hooft, door deugd en staat verheven!'

28 Cf. Mathijssen, 2011.

29 Simons, 1815, p. 100: 'Vergeet uwe afkomst, ô Bataven!'

annexation was like the plague, which filled cities and towns with fear and spread misery everywhere:

Razed are your ramparts and your walls,
 Having now to jump when your near-neighbour calls,
 To ridicule at home you give rise!
 Used to foreign ways and accent,
 In th' unpeopled cities you may now lament,
 Your doleful remnants and demise!³⁰

The poem promptly made Simons famous and accorded him the status of resistance poet.³¹ Actual publication of the poem was not possible at first; that came only after liberation from the French. For decades thereafter it would appear in poetry collections and school books.

In 1814, Simons published a religious poem in three cantos on *De waarde van den mensch* ('*The Worth of Man*'), in which he discusses the stages of human life.³² After Napoleon was beaten at Waterloo in 1815, Simons once more took up his pen. This time he published an ode to *Alexander, keizer aller Russen* ('*Alexander, Emperor of All the Russians*'). In the preface he looks back on the annexation years, when truth, freedom, and virtue were trampled upon. Napoleon, who thought himself a deity, had since been brought down once and for all by intervention of the Omnipotent. Yet Simons also wanted to honour tsar Alexander I, who had broken Napoleon's power.³³ When in 1815 the doors of Utrecht University reopened, Simons cheerily penned: 'Rejoice, rejoice, Batavians do! / The night of horrors now is past'.³⁴

Simons' appointment as professor followed that same year. Although we no longer can reconstruct how exactly that came to be, we may assume that his renown as a poet played some part in it. Because of his opposition to Napoleon and to French domination, and his exceptional command of the Dutch language, he was – once Pieter Weiland turned out not to be available – a well-suited candidate. Simons undoubtedly had reason for remarking that the art of poetry had led him to the 'school of humanities'.³⁵

30 Simons, 1815, p. 101: Gesloopt zijn uwe vest en muren, / Afhankelijk van nageburen, / Wordt ge, in uw eigen land, bespot! / Gewend aan vreemde taal en zeden, / Beschreit ge, in uwe ontvolkte steden, / Uw' val en droevig overschot!'.
 31 Cf. Jensen, 2013.
 32 Simons, 1814.
 33 Simons, 1815, p. 82.
 34 Simons, 1822, p. 36: 'Verheugt, verheugt u, ô Bataven! / De nacht der rampen is voorbij'.
 35 Simons, 1816, p. 9: 'school der wetenschappen'.

Becoming a professor did not cause Simons to renounce poetry. In 1822 his collection *Verstrooide gedichten* ('Scattered Poems') appeared.³⁶ Worth mentioning, too, is Simons' great work *Het huisselijk leven* ('Domestic Life', 1823), in which he argues for a return to homeliness as it had existed in the seventeenth century, the Golden Age, providing husband and wife with the greatest possible happiness, and causing prosperity to increase. This was aimed against the French, who had corrupted the native language and national morals.³⁷

Contemporary politics continued to leave their impression on his poetry. In 1830, at the outbreak of the Belgian Revolution, for example, he joined the chorus of patriotic Dutch poets. For him, the happenings had a personal aspect, for he writes to a friend: 'The fear in which I, and thousands with me, now live, the fear for my youngest son, who since a little more than three weeks has been serving in the militia at Bergen op Zoom, has made me push everything aside and forget about it'.³⁸ A year later he published an ode to the 'heroic deed' of Captain Jan van Speijk and praised the 'heroic courage' of the Dutch by the siege of the citadel of Antwerp.³⁹ When he died in 1834, Simons was just about to bring out a new collection of verse. It was published later that same year by his three sons under the title: *Verzamelde poëzij van Adam Simons* ('The Collected Poetry of Adam Simons').⁴⁰

4 Simons as a Professor

Being a professor, Adam Simons was expected to give his opinion on the literature of the nation. This he did for the first time on 25 March 1816 when he held his inaugural lecture *Redevoering over den waren dichter* ('Oration on the True Poet'). Following Siegenbeek's example, he spoke in Dutch. Here he articulated not an academic vision, but rather one based on an individual's own subjective experiences. This was not so surprising, seeing as he called poetry 'an art which I have always practised more than contemplated'.⁴¹ Even in his academic gown, Simons spoke as a poet.

36 Simons, 1822.

37 Honings, 2011, p. 200; Krol, 1997, pp. 76-77.

38 Letter of A. Simons to W.P. Kluit, 19-11-1830. University Library Amsterdam, hs. Ga 24: 'De angst, waarin ik met duizenden thans verkeer, over mijn' jongsten zoon, die onder de schutterij te Bergen op Zoom ligt, sedert ruim drie weken, doet mij alles ter zijde stellen en vergeten'.

39 Simons, [1831]; Simons, [1833].

40 Simons, 1834b.

41 Simons, 1816, p. 8: 'eene kunst, die ik altijd meer beoefende, dan beschouwde'.

Jan Oosterholt has pointed out that the topic of the lecture was bound up with political circumstances; during the years of French rule, the popularity of national poets, particularly resistance poets (including Adam Simons himself), had gone way up.⁴²

From Simons' words there arises an exalted, romantic view of being a poet. The true poet is someone 'bolder than an eagle', which rises to the heavens and soars through higher spheres, 'creates a new world and brings us there'. He is 'a priest of the Most High'. Simons opposes the idea that writing poetry is a skill. It is a gift from birth and can be developed through refinement, but cannot be acquired. Above all, the true poet is characterised by originality: he 'dares to take leave of his examples, when they are no longer of service to him, and he has gained a sense of his own strength. Just as a child, who has outgrown the harness, has no more need of a lead, and moves ahead unshackled; in the same way he distances himself from his guide, who previously gave him direction, and continues on his own way; he carves out a path himself, upon which others before him have never set foot'.⁴³

Critical for a poet is feeling, according to Simons. It is his task to pour out individual feelings into his public. Compared to 'normal' people, he has a more refined nervous system, causing him to feel differently. Perhaps alluding to his own activities as a resistance poet, Simons relates: 'Is the Nation in danger? His heart swells [...] he is the first to raise his voice, even if death and destruction were awaiting him; and his bard's song leads the hero into battle, to make, if necessity demands it, a bloody sacrifice for King and Country'. But the true poet must also give vent to other exalted feelings, like love and the awareness of mortality. The sensibility of the true poet has an exalted origin, according to Simons; it is as though he is stirred up by a Divinity. This makes the poet a seer, even if he be blind, capable of seeing more than regular mortals: it is 'as though he, in his rapture, has reached the top of a high mountain, which has extended his horizon'.⁴⁴ This

42 Oosterholt, 1998, p. 3.

43 Simons, 1816, pp. 5-6, 20, 43: 'stouter dan een adelaar'; 'een nieuwe wereld schept en ons daar henen voert'; 'een priester des Alleshoogsten'; '[hij] durft zijne voorbeelden verlaten, zoodra zij hem niet meer dienen, en hij zijne eigen kracht gevoelt. Gelijk het kind, den leiband ontwassen, geen' teugel meer behoeft, en ongeboeid daar henen loopt; ook alzoo verwijdt hij zich van zijn' gids, die hem voorheen geleidde, hij vervolgt zijn' eigen weg; hij baant met vasten tred zich zelve een spoor, dat anderen, voor hem, nooit betraden'.

44 Simons, 1816, pp. 20, 22: 'Is het Vaderland in gevaar, zijn hart bruist op [...] hij is de eerste, die zijne stem verheft, al zou verderf en dood hem wachten, en zijn bardenzang geleidt den held ten strijde, om, als de nood het eischt, aan Vorst en Vaderland een bloedig offer te geven'; 'als of hij, in zijne vervoering, den top heeft bereikt van een' hoogen berg, die zijn' gezigteinder verruimde'.

is somewhat reminiscent of William Wordsworth's typification of poetry as 'Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive / Objects unseen before'.⁴⁵

Not only feeling, but also the imagination, is essential for the poet. Unlike philosophers, the poet need not adhere to laws, but can open up new worlds: 'with the magic wand of the imagination he takes the most daring of flights, rushes ahead of us on the wings of eagles, and, unafraid of the depths over which he, lighter than a butterfly, glides, carries us up out of a world whose boundaries it would not be granted us, without his help, to go beyond'.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the true poet – whom Simons compared to an uncut diamond – needed to subject his ideas to the 'test of reason'. If he refuses to do so 'feeling is exaggerated, ingenuity contrived and the imagination degenerates'.⁴⁷ Feeling and imagination both are involved in the writing of true poetry, according to Simons, but at the same time, both need to be kept within bounds.⁴⁸ In the Netherlands examples could be found of authors who had in this way refined their genius, particularly those from the golden age of literature, the seventeenth century, such as Cats, Hooft, and Vondel.

With this lecture, Simons took a stand in an ongoing early nineteenth-century debate.⁴⁹ On the one side there was Willem Bilderdijk, champion of expressing feeling without any hindrance. On the other side were scholars like Siegenbeek and van der Palm, who were of the opinion that rules governing art were necessary for preserving civilised culture and morality. These rules could be obtained from the classics. Simons' lecture shows that he largely sided with Bilderdijk. It is with good reason that literary historian G. Knuvelde calls Simons a 'faithful student of Bilderdijk', and C. de Deugd notes that, other than Bilderdijk, Simons was perhaps the one to profess the romantic creed in the most passionate of terms in the Netherlands.⁵⁰ Unlike Bilderdijk, however, he ends up taking a more moderate in-between position, thinking as he did that the poet ought to let reason rein in his feelings and imagination. This stance fits in with what Jan Oosterholt terms

45 Cf. De Deugd, 1966, p. 71.

46 Simons, 1816, pp. 29-30: 'met de tooverroede der verbeelding, neemt hij de stoutste vlugt, snelt ons voor uit, op arendsvleugelen, en onbevreesd voor den afgrond, waar over hij, ligter dan een vlinder, henen zweeft, voert zijne kracht ons op, uit eene wereld, die, zonder zijne hulp, ons niet vergunt, buiten hare grenzen te treden'.

47 Simons, 1816, p. 32: 'toets der rede'; 'dan wordt het gevoel overspannen, het vernuft is valsch en de verbeelding verwildert'.

48 Johannes, 1992 calls this the 'standaardbetoog'.

49 Cf. Oosterholt, 1998.

50 Knuvelde, 1964, vol. 3, p. 264: 'een getrouwe leerling van Bilderdijk'; de Deugd 1966, p. 55: 'in Nederland naast Bilderdijk het romantische credo wellicht in de meest hartstochtelijke termen heeft beleden'.

'common sense-poetics'.⁵¹ Simons would continue to defend this position for the remainder of his career. In 1830, fourteen years after his inaugural lecture, he read aloud an essay on poetry in which he declared: 'What I said at the time was as I thought and felt, and since that time my thoughts and feelings have not altered in the least'.⁵²

What is known about Simons the professor? We know that, in contrast to most of his colleagues, he gave his lectures in Dutch. In addition to Dutch language and literature, he taught aesthetics and Nordic mythology. In this latter topic there was much interest at the time; it fit in with a shift in emphasis from classical to Germanic culture. It is not unthinkable that anti-French sentiment played a role here. Simons put it like this:

It is better to consider the importance of this mythology for all the peoples of Germanic descent and of the Teutonic tribe, for the study of history and language – and for poetry. Russians, Danes, Swedes, Brits, Germans, and Dutchmen have in it a unifying factor, one common inheritance from their forefathers, a thing that ought – in language and form, in ideas and morals – to distinguish them more from Latin Europe.⁵³

In his opinion, this mythology could further serve as a source of information for Germanic history: it 'fills in the gap which would otherwise remain between unwritten and written history'.⁵⁴ That this topic was considered important, is apparent from the fact that the Society of Dutch Language and Literature held a competition asking for a 'concise lecture on Nordic Mythology, taken from the original sources, indicating the use which may be made of these in Dutch poetry'.⁵⁵ This was certainly right up Simons' alley, for in 1824 he was to read a treatise aloud for the Society of Dutch Language

51 Cf. Oosterholt, 1998, chapter 3; Vis, [2004], p. 79.

52 Geel & Simons, 1830, p. 64: 'Wat ik toen zeide, was, zoo als ik dacht en voelde, en sedert zijn mijne denkbeelden en mijn gevoel niet in allerminste veranderd'.

53 Simons, 1834a, pp. 118-119: 'Beter is het, de belangrijkheid dezer fabelleer voor alle volkeren van Germaansche afkomst en van den Teutonischen stam te beschouwen, voor geschied- en taalkunde, – voor poëzie. Russen, Deenen, Zweden, Britten, Duitschers en Nederlanders hebben in deze leer een punt van vereeniging, één gemeen erfgoed van hunne vaderen, een goed, dat hen door spraak en gedaante, door denkbeelden en zeden van het Latijnsch Europa meer behoorde te doen onderscheiden'.

54 Simons, 1834a, p. 119: '[zij] vult de gaping aan, die er anders over blijft tusschen de onbeschreven en beschreven geschiedenis'.

55 Honings, 2011, p. 197: '[een] beknopte voordragt van de Noordsche Mythologie, ontleend uit de oorspronkelijke gedenkstukken, en met aanwijzing van het gebruik, dat hiervan in de Nederlandsche Dichtkunde zou kunnen gemaakt worden'.

and Literature in Leiden 'on the nature and chief characteristics of Nordic mythology', but unfortunately he did not venture to enter the competition.⁵⁶

Four sets of students' lecture notes have been preserved in Utrecht for Simons' lectures on aesthetics, folk tales and the history of Dutch poetry.⁵⁷ In the Dutch Royal Library there are Simons own lecture notes on style and rhetoric.⁵⁸ That he also gave lectures on national history, is apparent from what one student wrote upon Simons' death:

He lit in every breast a spark,
When he of the first *Willem* spoke;
How, deep in the abyss, our land,
With him did break the Spanish yoke;
When he of *Fred'rik Hendrik* told,
Of *Maurits'* deeds, great and bold,
In battle or in government.
How the country lost its truest friends,
When the *De Wits* met their mournful ends,
Likewise *Barneveld*, to all's detriment.⁵⁹

Simons must have been a well-liked teacher.⁶⁰ The later-to-be national archivist L.P.C. van den Bergh, who had attended Simons' lectures, remembered: 'One needs to have belonged to the circle of his trusted pupils to be able to form a clear idea of how he managed to reach all with the study of Dutch history and letters at the University, but above all, how he, at his beloved debate class and in his personal interaction with his pupils, was entirely their friend, was – in alternating between earnestness and jest – able to win their trust, and use his influence to further Dutch letters and history'.⁶¹

56 *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde* (Leiden s.n. 1825), p. 62: 'over den aard en de hoofdtrekken der Noordsche mythologie'.

57 Van der Horst, 1994, p. 82.

58 *Lessen over de Nederlandsche stijl en welsprekendheid*. Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, 74 F 28.

59 D.M., 1834, p. 2: 'Hij, hij wist aller borst te ontvonken, / Als hij van d'eersten *Willem* sprak; / Hoe Nêerland, schier in 't niet gezonken, / Met Hem, het Spaansche juk verbrak; / Als hij ons *Fred'rik Hend'rik* maalde, / Van grooten *Maurits* daân verhaalde, / In 't staatsbestuur of oorlogsveld; / Hoe 't land zijn' hechtsten steun moest derven, / Bij der *de Witten* droevig sterven, / En bij den dood van *Barneveld*'.

60 Vis, [2004], p. 12.

61 Van den Bergh, 1837, pp. 46-47: 'Men moet zelve tot den kring zijner vertrouwde leerlingen behoord hebben, om zich een regt denkbeeld te kunnen vormen hoe hij de beoefening der Vaderlandsche geschiedenis en letteren aan de Hoogeschool algemeen wist te maken, maar

Simons' former student Barend Glasius also stated: 'In his interaction, as well as in his classes and writings, he was characterised by his broad and sound knowledge, by ingenuity and taste, by merry light-heartedness and a cheerful humour. His affability and friendliness won the love of many, and his good heart the true respect of many'.⁶²

Others were not so unequivocal in their judgement. In 1823 Willem de Clercq went to stay with Simons in Utrecht. He was warmly welcomed in Simons' home in Ambachtstraat. From his account we know that the professor had two students living in rooms at his residence. In the afternoon de Clercq attended one of Simons' lectures that dealt with the second act of Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*. De Clercq was astonished that one could fill a lecture with so little material.⁶³

As a professor, Simons had a number of honours conferred on him. He was made a member of various societies: the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, for which he regularly was asked as a speaker, the Hollandse Maatschappij van Wetenschappen ('Dutch Society of Sciences') in Haarlem, the Gezelschap ter Beoeffening der proefondervindelijke Wijsbegeerte ('Society for the Practise of Experimental Philosophy') in the Hague, and societies for arts and humanities in Utrecht and Zeeland. He was moreover Correspondent, Second Class, of the Royal Dutch Institute, member of the Provincial Education Commission in Utrecht, and he filled the office of School Inspector. In the year 1832-1833 he served as Rector at Utrecht University. Even though he had been honourably discharged from active preaching duties upon his appointment as a professor, he kept on preaching now and again for special occasions, or to fill in for colleagues.⁶⁴

Together with fellow professors Matthijs Siegenbeek from Leiden and Johannes Pieter van Cappelle from Amsterdam, he edited and annotated the eight-volume, standard edition of P. C. Hooft's *Nederlandsche historien* ('*Dutch History*', 1820-1824). They considered that work to be of great importance after the liberation from the French, seeing that now 'the spirit of the people has been awakened from its sleep and begins once more to live'.

vooral hoe hij op zijn geliefkoosd dispuutcollegie en in den vertrouwelijken omgang met zijne leerlingen geheel hun vriend was, onder scherts en ernst vertrouwen wist te winnen, en dien invloed ter bevordering van vaderlandsche leterteren en geschiedenis aanwendde'.

62 Glasius, 1851-1856, vol. 1, p. 359: 'Zoowel in zijne lessen en geschriften, als in zijnen omgang kenmerkte hij zich door veel en degelijk weten, door vernuft en smaak, door blijmoedige opgeruimdheid en vrolijken luim. Zijne minzaamheid en vriendelijkheid wonnen veler liefde en zijn goed hart veler wezenlijke achting'.

63 *Online Dagboek van Willem de Clercq*, 1823, vol. 10, pp. 34-35.

64 *Algemeene Konst en Letterbode*, 1834, pp. 17-18.

In the preface they write: 'We desire to bring this book from the writing desk of scholars into the hands of many, so that its superb content may become more generally known, and provide food for the growing appetite for reflections on the nation'.⁶⁵ So there was more of a nationalistic motive behind the publication of this work than an aesthetic-literary one. In that same period Simons remarks: 'Nay, the high House at Muiden, aged by time, may soon be torn down and no trace of the Bailiff's former residence remain there, yet his works, more enduring than blue stone, will continue to speak right down to the last Progeny in the Netherlands'.⁶⁶ Simons also contributed to the *Uitlegkundig woordenboek op de werken van Pieter Korneliszon Hooft* ('*Explanatory Dictionary of the Works of Pieter Korneliszon Hooft*'), which was published in 1825 under the auspices of the Royal Dutch Institute of Sciences.

For the rest, with the exception of a few essays, Simons did not add any academic publications to his name. He was, however, an active figure in the literary societies of his day, and there he rarely minced his words. Furthermore, we know him to be strongly opposed to the reactionary views of Willem Bilderdijk and Isaäc da Costa, while at the same time admiring their work as poets.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, he was not the type to air his views as publicly as others did.

5 Simons and Literary History

In the course of time, Simons published various essays which he had read aloud for literary societies.⁶⁸ A collection of some of these, relating to literature and history, was published posthumously in 1834 under the title *Verhandelingen* ('*Treatises*').⁶⁹ He wrote, for example, on the topics of lyrical and dramatic poetry, Nordic mythology, Hooft's literary style, the

65 'Voorrede', in: Siegenbeek, Simons & Cappelle (ed.) 1820-1824, vol. 1, pp. iii-iv: 'de geest des volks, uit zijne sluimering opgewekt, op nieuws begint te herleven'; 'Wij verlangen het boek, van de schrijftafel der geleerden, te brengen in veler handen, ten einde zijn voortreffelijke inhoud meer algemeen bekend worde, en tot voedsel verstrekke voor den toenemenden lust tot vaderlandsche overdenkingen'.

66 Simons, 1834a, p. 180: 'Neen, het hooge Huis van *Muiden* moge, door den tijd verouderd, worden gesloopt en geen spoor van 's Drossaards voormalig verblijf aldaar achterblijven, maar zijne werken, duurzamer dan arduin, zullen blijven spreken tot de laatste Nakomelingschap in Nederland'.

67 Cf. *Online Dagboek van Willem de Clercq*, 1823, vol. 10, p. 28.

68 Cf. Honings, 2011, pp. 201-203; Honings, 2012, pp. 187-190.

69 Simons, 1834a.

character of king Philip II, and Johan de Witt's time in power. These essays are significant in determining which viewpoints Simons propagated; we may assume that they correspond with what he taught his students. Is it possible to tell from these what his vision was on Dutch literary history?

In the winter of 1818, Simons read a treatise aloud at the Society of Dutch Literature and Language in Leiden, entitled 'Herinnering aan het tijdvak van Frederik Hendrik, bijzonder met betrekking tot de Nederduitsche poëzij' ('Recollection of the Time Period of Frederik Hendrik, Particularly in Relationship to Dutch Poetry'). Frederik Hendrik succeeded his half-brother Maurice in 1625. He was Stadtholder during what Simons considered the 'Golden Age' of Dutch literature: the first half of the seventeenth century. In his inaugural lecture he had already characterised this as the most glorious period, 'when everything in this land was magnificent and excellent'.⁷⁰

In his treatise, Simons emphasised that a nation's happiness is bound up with the practise of letters. In other words, literature could contribute to the prosperity of the country. The seventeenth century, the time of Rembrandt, was, according to Simons, preceded by a barren period in which the poetry mounted to no more than 'the croaking of ravens'. An appreciation of the Middle Ages and the literature of that time is not to be found with Simons: 'What a difference between that jolting song of the olden days, and the melodious tones in the celebrated age of Frederik Hendrik!' In the seventeenth century, true poetry arrived and replaced the earlier poetry, as though spring had come, full of spirit and life. Poets succeeded in attaining a measure of excellence never before seen in the nation; what is more, they were all well-versed in the classics. Their goal was mainly to teach and to inspire piety through their own pious ideas.⁷¹ Their works encouraged readers to emulate them in language and virtue. The greatest poet in Simons' estimation was not Jacob Cats, P.C. Hooft, or Constantijn Huygens, but Vondel.⁷²

In 1820, he devoted a separate treatise to that last author, 'Over de aanleg van *Vondel* en zijne poëzij' ('On the Aptitude of Vondel and his Poetry'), in which he explicitly goes into the differences setting him apart from Cats and Hooft. Once more Simons makes it clear that he considers the seventeenth century an age when art flowered; the 'night of the Middle Ages and barbarism' had given way to a 'happy sunrise, that wakened the arts and letters from their deep sleep'. And once more he points to Vondel

70 Simons, 1816, p. 36: 'toen alles, in dit land, reusachtig en voortreffelijk was'.

71 Simons, 1834a, pp. 128, 156: 'gekras der raven'; 'Welk een verschil tusschen dat stroef gezang van den ouden tijd, en die welluidende toonen in het beroemde tijdvak van Frederik Hendrik!'.

72 Cf. Honings, 2012.

as the greatest poet in the history of the land. He is comparable to the evening star, which, through its clear light, 'dims the lustre of all the stars, that twinkle in the heavens'. Hooft and Cats came from well-to-do families and held distinguished positions of societal importance. Vondel did not have this good fortune, yet he rose up 'higher in his eagle's flight, than either of those poets'.⁷³ Jacob Cats, who in his day was praised for having expressed the nation's virtues in his work, was seen by Simons as a not very original poet.⁷⁴ His poetry pleased the reader by providing him with wise lessons, but lacked true exaltedness. Cats did not write lyrical poetry – the measure of true poetry. Though his work was capable of moving the soul, it could not enchant it. He was no eagle, but sooner 'a stately swan, which, on a tranquil stream, drifts calmly to the bank'.⁷⁵ This image he had borrowed from the eighteenth-century poet Jacobus Bellamy.⁷⁶ Cats' work was like a quiet brook; that of the true poet a turbulent river, 'that with a ferocious rush crashes down into the valley'. Cats was, moreover, a poet who could work easily and at any time. Contrary to the true poet, he was not dependent upon 'divine impulse' or inspiration.⁷⁷ So the slow destruction of Cats reputation (a process that the famous critic Conrad Busken Huet would later complete) began at this time with Simons.

P.C. Hooft was, in Simons' opinion, no more a true poet than Cats; his poems are 'more the products of art, than a pouring out of the feelings of the heart'. He wrote elaborate rather than simple poetry, and used archaic language and affected metres.⁷⁸ On the whole, however, Hooft had not had much opportunity to refine his poetry, due to his sizeable *Nederlandsche Historien* ('Dutch History'). That important work, in a superior style, was his greatest accomplishment.

Vondel on the other hand was a true poet; his poetry is not characterised by imitation of nature or his predecessors, but by originality. Affected poetry degrades the writer from poet to rhymer, in Simons' estimation: 'Nay! the true poet pours out his initial impression, before he has considered a certain

73 Simons, 1834a, pp. 145, 147, 155: 'nacht der middeleeuwen en barbaarschheid'; 'blijden dageraad, die letteren en kunsten uit haren vasten slaap deed ontwaken'; 'hooger in zijne arendsvlugt, dan die beide dichters'.

74 Cf. Oosterholt, 1998, pp. 70-72.

75 Simons, 1834a, p. 156: 'eene zwaan, die op den vlakken stroom statelijk drijft naar den oever'.

76 Bellamy, 1790, p. 167.

77 Simons, 1834a, pp. 157, 160: 'die met woest gedruisch in het dal nederstort'; 'goddelijke aandrift'.

78 Simons, 1834a, p. 162: 'meer gewrochten der kunst, dan wel eene uitstorting van 't gevoel des harte'.

metre, and his first surge of feeling tunes his song to the only tone that is true music, which touches us to the core, and which no art, but Nature alone, can give it.⁷⁹ In short, the true poet, had only to follow Vondel's example and pour out his feelings in simple poems. Artifice and wise lessons, as found in Hooft and Cats, did not belong to the essence of true poetry. The poetics of the Utrecht professor prove to champion the literary ideal of authenticity, which he associated with seventeenth-century literature.⁸⁰

This take on Vondel was not unique, though; as early as 1807, Siegenbeek had, in an essay, labelled him a true poet, who gave evidence of an innate exaltedness of spirit, that was not gained by practice. Vondel had Providence to thank for his gift, according to Siegenbeek. He belonged to those 'rare mortals' who had been formed by nature 'into something exalted, something excellent'. Both Vondel as a writer and his work were defined by 'boldness', 'originality of genius', 'liveliness', 'strength of feeling, fire', and 'agility of the power of the imagination'.⁸¹

On 9 November 1821, Simons came to a similar conclusion when he compared the poet Anthony van der Woordt, who had met an early death, with the German author Johann Gottfried Seume. Both he designated as true poets. Van der Woordt had typified poetry societies as 'poetic hospitals'. The essence of poetry was to be found, according to Simons, in 'a strong drive to represent bold thoughts arrestingly, with a deep sense of what is good and beautiful, and to pour out for others the most intense sensations of joy and sadness'. He praised van der Woordt for his 'originality, feeling, genius, imagination, sagacity'. At the same time he held him in high esteem for propagating national virtues such as love of truth, freedom, independence, and strength.⁸² The true poet, therefore, needed to be both an original genius and a poet for the nation. He valued Seume for meeting these same criteria.

In 1829, Simons read aloud a treatise 'Over de laatste helft der vorige eeuw, met betrekking tot den staat der Nederduitsche poëzij' ('On the Second

79 Simons, 1834a, p. 163: 'Neen! de echte dichter stort zijne eerste gewaarwording uit, eer hij aan een bepaalde maat gedacht heeft, en de eerste opwelling van zijn gevoel stemt ook zijn lied in dien eenigen toon, die ware muziek is, welke ons door merg en beenderen dringt, en die geene kunst, maar alleen de Natuur hem moet geven'.

80 Cf. Oosterholt, 1998, p. 62.

81 Siegenbeek, 1807, pp. 57-58: 'zeldzame stervelingen, welke, door de natuur tot iets verhevens, iets uitstekends'; 'stoutheid', 'oorspronkelijkheid van vernuft', 'levendigheid', 'sterkte van gevoel, vuur' en 'snelheid van verbeeldingskracht'.

82 Simons, 1834a, pp. 218, 222: 'dichterlijke gasthuizen'; 'eene hooge aandrift, om stoute gedachten, in diep gevoel van het goede en schoone treffend voor te stellen en de hevigste gewaarwordingen van vreugde en droefheid voor anderen uit te storten'; 'oorspronkelijkheid, gevoel, vernuft, verbeelding, wijsheid'.

Half of the Last Century, Regarding the State of Dutch Poetry'). He believed that there was a connection between the decline of the economy in the eighteenth century and the quality of the literature. From the end of the seventeenth century and through the course of the eighteenth, constructing poetry took over from writing poetry, just as the intellect took over from feeling: 'That daring representation and those original images, that powerful language and lilting tone, that sweet reverie and noble flourish, that rich abundance and pleasing abandon, in a word, that feeling, genius and that imagination which distinguished the earlier ones so very well: these qualities were more rarely found in the later ones, and continued gradually to wane until they all but disappeared'.⁸³

The mid-eighteenth century marked the appearance of a new phenomenon in the Republic: that of poetry societies. Simons looked down contemptuously on these literary societies, where poetry was endlessly refined by art judges until nothing of the original remained: 'So every stillborn child was brought forth, and, year upon year, every society, rightly called a poetic hospital, delivered its collection, containing the winning *prize poems* and so-called *miscellanies*, which had undergone the necessary refinement and been improved upon by the Aristarchs'. This was of little benefit to poetry. After all, 'who dared to diverge from the orthodoxy of the acclaimed brothers-in-art and question their dogmas'? When someone became a member, he no longer could pour out his feelings. Imitation had become law: 'his originality disappeared in the generality of the whole poetic-prosaic body, what he *thought* and *felt* was in service to the same, was itself again *thought about* and *felt*, and so he never learned to go his own way, so, woefully, his independence was lost'.⁸⁴ With good reason he refers to Willem Bilderdijk, who, in his acclaimed poem, *De kunst der poëzy* ('*The Art of Poetry*'), had already in 1809 criticised the poetry societies,

83 Simons, 1834a, pp. 235-236: 'Die stoute voorstelling en oorspronkelijke beelden, die krachtige taal en zangerige toon, die zoete mijmering en edele zwier, die rijke weelde en behagelijke losheid, in één woord, dat gevoel, vernuft en die verbeelding, welke de vroegeren zoo uitstekend onderscheidde, werden bij de lateren zeldzamer gevonden, tot dat zij, hoe verder, hoe minder, bijna geheel verdwenen'.

84 Simons, 1834a, pp. 237-238: 'Zoo kwam elk misgeboorte ter wereld, en jaar op jaar, gaf ieder genootschap, met regt een dichterlijk gasthuis geheeten, zijn bundel uit, waar in bekroonde *prijsvaarzen* en zoo genaamde *mengelingen*, die de noodige beschaving hadden ondergaan en van de Aristarchen verbeterd waren'; 'wie waagde het, van de regtzinnigheid dier toegejuichte kunstbroeders te verschillen en hunne leerstellingen in twijfel te trekken'; 'zijne oorspronkelijkheid ging over in de algemeenheid van het geheele dichterlijk-prozaïsch ligchaam, wat hij *dacht en gevoelde* was in dienst van hetzelfde, werd dáár weêr *overgedacht* en *overgevoeld*, en zoo leerde hij nooit zijn' eigen weg bewandelen, zoo ging zijne zelfstandigheid jammerlijk verloren'.

where uninspired 'delusional poets' in their role as judges of art had taken up 'burnisher, plane, and file' and ruined all true poetry.⁸⁵ They were but guilds in Simons' opinion, with originality and authenticity hard to find. The poetry of those years contrasted sharply with that of the previous century.

Simons was not alone in his appreciation of the seventeenth century. A number of scholars in his day unanimously pointed out the seventeenth century as a period of flowering, whereby they initiated the formation of a canon.⁸⁶ That age served 'as a nostalgic reminder of previous greatness and as a possible pointer to a new future'.⁸⁷ As mentioned previously, Simons never wrote a literary history himself. Others did. Matthijs Siegenbeek, for example, published his *Beknopte geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* ('*Short History of Dutch Literature*') in 1825, which later served as the basis for teacher Nicolaas Anslin's publication for schoolchildren: *Schets van de Beknopte geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* ('*Sketch of the Short History of Dutch Literature*', 1828). N.G. van Kampen published the three-volume *Beknopte geschiedenis der letteren en wetenschappen in de Nederlanden, van de vroegste tijden af, tot op het begin der negentiende eeuw* ('*Short History of Literature and Humanities in the Netherlands, from the Earliest Ages, to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*', 1821-1826). Based on his research of various nineteenth-century literary histories, Gert-Jan Johannes has isolated six common 'assumptions and deductions':

- 1) History can be divided into periods of decay and flowering; 2) The Golden Age was a period of flowering; 3) That Golden Age is more or less the same period as the seventeenth century; 4) After that Golden Age, there followed a century of decay, in which Frenchification and participation in societies went hand in hand. In the objections to Frenchification and participation in societies we can then identify moreover: 5) The 'national' language and culture have an intrinsic worth, which can be damaged by 'foreign' influences; and 6) The talent of the individual practitioner of art can be impeded by the formally organised, collective practise of art.⁸⁸

85 Bilderdijk, 1995, p. 80: 'waanpoëeten'; 'met liksteen, schaaft, en vijlen'.

86 Wiskerke, 1995.

87 Johannes, 2002, p. 28: 'als nostalgische herinnering aan vroegere grootheid en als mogelijke wegwijzer naar een nieuwe toekomst'.

88 Johannes, 2002, p. 50: '1) De geschiedenis is te verdelen in perioden van verval en bloei; 2) De Gouden Eeuw was een bloeiperiode; 3) Die gouden 'eeuw' valt globaal samen met de 17de eeuw; 4) Na die Gouden Eeuw trad een eeuw van verval op, waarin verfransing en genootschappelijkheid hand in hand gingen. In die bezwaren tegen verfransing en genootschappelijkheid herkennen

From studying Simons' treatises it can be surmised that his vision corresponds with the standard argumentation of the period formulated by Johannes. Simons also regarded the seventeenth century as a period of literary flowering, after which a period of decay ensued which was partly related to the way people organised into societies. This hampered the originality of poetic genius. Only the fifth point is less clearly evident in Simons' case, although he did highlight the importance that Cats, Hooft and Vondel had for the nation.

6 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on Adam Simons, the first professor of Dutch Literature and Rhetoric at Utrecht University. A great scholar he was not. When he gave his inaugural lecture in 1816, he had not yet accomplished anything academically. He was first and foremost a nationally recognised poet. Even after becoming a professor, Simons remained predominately a poet. It was from that perspective that, on various occasions, he articulated his thoughts on the essence of poetry – a genre that he passionately defended as being the highest art form.

After his death, Simons was soon forgotten, until W.A.P. Smit drew attention to him. On 25 March 1946, 130 years after Simons had expounded on the true poet, Smit gave his inaugural lecture, *Reprise na 130 jaar: 'over den waren dichter'* ('*Reprise after 130 Years: 'On the True Poet'*').⁸⁹ This was no coincidence. Just as Simons had talked of the importance of writing poetry in the years following the French occupation, Smit commented: 'Once again our country has groaned and suffered under foreign domination. Again our love of our nation's past has been deepened and we have become more profoundly aware of pride in our national culture'. Smit had, parenthetically, little sympathy for the poet Simons; his work he found to lack 'passionate inspiration'.⁹⁰ That was precisely the criterion that Simons himself had set for true poetry.

Drawing up the balance, what was Simons' position within the field of Dutch language and literature? Though he never published a comprehensive

we dan bovendien: 5) De 'nationale' taal en cultuur hebben een intrinsieke waarde, die geschaad kan worden door 'vreemde' invloeden; en 6) Het talent van de individuele kunstbeoefenaar kan gehinderd worden door formeel georganiseerde, collectieve kunstbeoefening'.

89 Smit, 1946.

90 Oosterholt, 1998, p. 3: 'Weer heeft ons land jarenlang gezucht en geleden onder vreemde overheersing. Weer is daardoor de liefde voor ons nationale verleden verdiept en de trots op onze nationale cultuur ons inniger bewust geworden'; 'hartstochtelijke bezieling'.

work, we may conclude that his views corresponded with those of his contemporaries: nationalism, appreciation of the seventeenth century (Vondel being the greatest poet), the representation of the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century as periods of decay, the notion that literary societies were responsible for a loss of creativity, and so on. One could disrespectfully say that Simons' vision attests to little originality. Formulating it more positively, one may state that he was jointly responsible for the early nineteenth-century discourse on literature; for nearly twenty years he propagated the above views to his students.

The one exceptional thing about him, when compared to fellow professors of the time, such as Siegenbeek, is that he added an aesthetic principle to this discourse; poetry was to him above all a matter of beauty, imagination, and the pouring out of feeling.⁹¹ This notion may well have stemmed from his experience as a poet. It makes his poetics fit in closely with the poetics of Willem Bilderdijk, for whom he had much admiration, though Simons also pointed out the dangers of writing without rules. The poet Adam Simons and the professor Adam Simons were inextricably woven together.

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About the Author

Rick Honings (1984) is Assistant Professor in Dutch Studies at Leiden University. With Peter van Zonneveld he wrote a rewarded biography of the Dutch poet Willem Bilderdijk: *De gefnuikte arend* (2013). In 2016 he published his monograph on Dutch literary celebrity in the nineteenth century: *De dichter als idool. Literaire roem in de negentiende eeuw* (2016). With Gaston Franssen he is co-editor of *Celebrity Authorship and Afterlives in English and American Literature* (2016) and *Idolizing Authorship. Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity 1800-Present* (2017).