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The Netherlands “2016 Year of the Book” Sheetlet

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Has any country issued more postage stamps with book-related themes and images than the Netherlands (Fig. 1 for example)? If you can think of one, please let me know. My hypothesis could be wrong, because sometimes my brain takes a break.

Here’s a “brain break” example. When I first read an article about the Netherlands “2016 Year of the Book” sheetlet (Fig. 2) issued on September 12 and saw the sheetlet, I immediately ordered one. It would definitely be included in the New Issues section of P-G January 2017. One problem: I forgot about the sheetlet and did not list it. To make recompense, I prepared this article.



Fig. 1 Sc1449c-d.

In 1930s Netherlands, the Dag van het Boek (Day of the Book) was organized in the face of the perceived threat that newer media, like radio and film, posed. The first Day of the Book held on November 15, 1930 also celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Nederlands Uitgeversbond (Dutch Publishers Association). And in 1932, the first Boekenweek (Book Week) was held. Book Week became an annual event, except for the war years of 1942-1945, with activities and participation increasing to the present, and that trend undoubtedly will continue.

That history led to another initiative last year, Jaar van het Boek (Year of the Book). *cont. on pg 16*



Fig. 2, “2016 Year of the Book” sheetlet issued September 12, 2016 (reproduced here at 85% of original size).

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This year-long celebration was promoted by the Royal Library, Special Collections of the University of Amsterdam, the Literary Museum, and several foundations. Special attention was given “the book” throughout the Netherlands—from bookstores to cultural institutions, and from schools to libraries.

The Design

On September 12, 2016 PostNL issued a sheetlet of 10 different stamps as part of this year-long event. Each of the 10 stamps features a different book, and together they represent the breadth and diversity of Dutch literature.

The sheetlet was designed by Niels Schrader of Mind Design (Amsterdam) as a “book landscape.” He describes the design as follows, “In this design, the books were spread out horizontally, photographed from different angles, casting shadows that run from top right to bottom left. For example, there are photographs of books which are open, or with the front or back cover showing, or only the spine of the book. Additional unidentified books are seen on the sheetlet’s tabs, extending the “book landscape” to the sheetlet’s edges. This creates a landscape of books if you view them from above.” The stamps are marked “Nederland 1,” the denomination for items weighing up to 20g mailed to destinations within the Netherlands.

Schrader says, “I was...pleased to be asked to produce these stamps. I design books, really love books, and I’m extremely aware of their value for our culture.” The “book landscape” design approach was the sole design concept he presented to PostNL, and it was accepted. “The basic idea behind my design is a tipped-over bookcase. If you tip over a bookcase, the books will fall [and] spread across a horizontal area. Looking at this from above creates a landscape of books, or bookscape, as we decided to call it. You could compare it to a satellite or aerial photo, like you see on Google Earth, except that books have taken the place of buildings. That’s why the shadows are essential to the design—these emphasize the three-dimensionality. Remember that light determines the atmosphere of a landscape. The long shadows show that the time is early morning. After all the sun rises in the east in the Netherlands. This is the atmosphere I was looking for.” Photographic tests were made to determine the exact style of shadow that would be used in the photography (Fig. 1).

Schrader spread the photos across the sheet so that the most colorful books act as a kind of landmark, giving accents

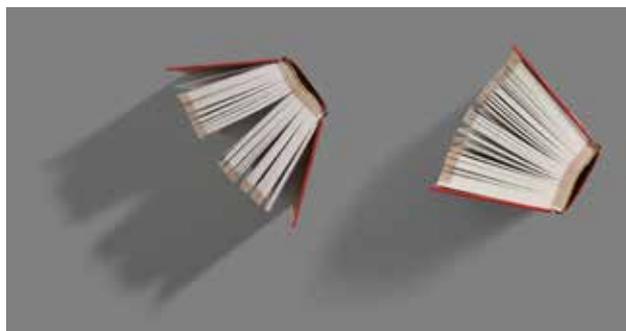


Fig. 1. Tests showed that using long, hard shadows instead of short, soft ones was crucial and gives the ‘bookscape’ a dramatic sunrise mood.

on the sheet. “Colors are crucial on a subtler level too; you can see that for some books the color of the cover is continued in the shadows....The light-grey background was also chosen on purpose. I sought a neutral setting to allow the books to emerge more strongly. White is too stark. After many attempts I selected hard effects in the shadows so that the light serves as a means for dramaturgy.”

The Books

“There was a lot of discussion about the selection criteria for the ten books that were to appear on the stamps,” Schrader said. “Of course the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library) has many crown jewels, so it’s not easy to make a choice. The final selection was based on diversity, both in genre as well as in period. For me as designer this had the advantage that I could start working with very distinct images. That’s why I was happy with this diversity. Besides: many books that were on the list but weren’t selected have still been given a place on the sheet—they are shown on the sheet edges.”

Let’s look at each ‘book stamp’ (shown at 145%).

1. *Chassidische legenden* (1942-43, H.N. Werkman)



Left, *Chassidische legenden* image extends onto tab above stamp.

Right, Sc874 honored H.N. Werkman.

When I first saw this sheet, the work of Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman (top left stamp and label) jumped

out at me. He's a person dear to me in the history of graphic design and printing. (See article, *P-G* Oct 2003.) Werkman is well known as a printer in the Dutch Underground during WWII who labored tirelessly to keep hope alive in the Dutch people during the occupation. He was arrested and executed by the Germans only weeks before Holland was liberated. His expressive printing, unique approach to design, and his writing are the work of an extraordinary individual. The artwork shown on this souvenir sheet is taken from Werkman's printed illustrations that accompany Martin Buber's *Chassidische legenden* (*Tales of the Hasidim*), a series of folk tales of the ultra-Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe. Though not Jewish himself, Werkman was moved by the spirituality of the stories first published by Buber in the early 1930s, and Werkman printed his edition to share the tales' message of consolation and hope, as well as solidarity, with Dutch Jews.

2. *Turks fruit* (1969, Jan Wolkers)



Top, Stamp shows front and back covers of *Turks fruit*. Bottom, The book was made into an award-winning film, *Turkish Delight*, directed by Paul Verhoeven. A stamp followed in 1995 (Sc878).



To the right of the *Chassidische legenden* stamp, the book featured is *Turks fruit* (1969) by Jan Wolkers (1925-2007), with front and back covers shown. The book is an autobiographical novel centered on a young sculptor Eric, and Olga who picks him up when he is hitchhiking. They have an intense love affair and marry two months later. The relationship is complicated by the disturbing personalities and behavior of Olga's parents. Olga's mother tries to sabotage the relationship between her daughter and Eric. During a dinner Eric witnesses Olga flirting with a friend of her parents. The couple then quarrel and separate. Both have romantic relationships with others, and Olga eventually remarries, but none of their relationships equals what they

had with each other. Years later Olga is hospitalized with inoperable brain cancer. Eric visits her almost daily during the six months preceding her death. One of Olga's fears during this time is that her teeth will fall out, so she only eats Turkish Delight (hence the book's title), a confection based on a gel of starch and sugar.

When first published, the book caused both a sensation and scandal because of graphic sex, but readers strongly identified with its realism.

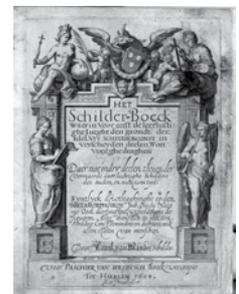
3. *Het Achterhuis* (1947, Anne Frank)



Left, *Het Achterhuis*. Right, A 1980 Dutch stamp commemorating the 35th anniversary of the liberation features photo of Anne Frank (Sc598).

Anne Frank's *Het Achterhuis* (*The Diary*), first published in 1947, is shown on the left stamp in the second row from the top of the sheetlet. Anne Frank was born in Frankfurt in 1929 into a Jewish family. In 1933 the family fled to the Netherlands. In July 1942 they went into hiding in a secret attic space, but in 1944 they were discovered and sent to concentration camps where Anne died in the spring of 1945. Her diary survived. On the advice of friends, Anne's father Otto decided to publish the diary in 1947 under the title Anne had originally chosen, *The Secret Annex*. The book has been translated into countless languages and read throughout the world.

4. *Het Schilder-Boeck* (1604, Karel van Mander)



Left, *Het Schilder-Boeck* stamp. Right, digital facsimile of the book from website of Leiden University, Department of Dutch Language and Literature.

To the right of the Anne Frank's diary is the stamp featuring Karel van Mander's *The Schilder-Boeck* (1604). In it

he describes the life and work of numerous painters from ancient times to his own. The information about his contemporaries has been particularly valuable. He also presented expanded treatises on early Northern European painters, e.g., the brothers Van Eyck and Albrecht Dürer.

5. *Mei* (1889, Herman Gorter)



Mei book stamp.

The lefthand stamp in the middle row features Herman Gorter's first book *Mei* (*May*) published in 1889. Gorter, a Dutch poet and socialist, lived from 1864–1927. *Mei* is a lyrical, epic poem of 4,000 verses and is regarded as the pinnacle of Dutch Impressionist literature. As a result of his efforts to combine lyricism and social involvement, his poetic influence was significant, and his poems are regarded by many as the starting point for modernism in Dutch poetry.

6. *De Schippers van de Kameleon* (1949, H. de Roos)



De Schippers van de Kameleon book stamp.

The righthand stamp in the middle row shows Hotze de Ross' *De Schippers van de Kameleon* (*The Skippers of the Chameleon*) published in 1949. The author (1909–1991) was born in Langezwaag. He and his brother were mischievous village boys and also explored the surrounding natural environment that was filled with marshy meadows and canals. As an unemployed young carpenter, Roos wrote short newspaper pieces. He also wrote the children's book, *The Skippers of the Chameleon*. The book was the first in a series of some 60 that became some of the most popular children's

books in the Netherlands.

The main characters of Roos' series of books are the 12-year-old twins Hielke and Sietse Klinkhamer who embark on numerous adventures on their brightly painted boat, the Chameleon, whose colors change throughout their adventures.

7. *Zomer* (1907, Jac.P. Thijsse)



Left, Zomer book stamp. Right, cover of Thijsse's book.

The stamp on the left in the second row from the bottom of the sheetlet features Jac. P. Thijsse's 1907 book *Zomer* (*Summer*). The book describes nature in summer and includes spaces for 144 color advertising stamps picturing birds, butterflies, insects, plants and flowers. The stamps are accompanied by descriptions of the landscape and other facts.

From 1903–1940, 35 albums were issued by the Verkade Bakery, with 19 written by Thijsse (1865–1945). The colored stamps that were to fill these books were packaged with products from the Verkade's bread, cake and biscuit factory. Many of the pictures were prints of watercolors by various artists. The print run of these albums at times exceeded more than 100,000 copies.

8. *Opera posthuma* (*Ethics*) (1677, Spinoza)



Left, Opera posthuma/Ethics book stamp. Right, 1977 Dutch stamp (Sc567) commemorating the 300th death anniversary of Spinoza.

The stamp to the right of the *Zomer* stamp features philosopher Baruch Spinoza's *Opera posthuma*, which was published posthumously. The book is open to the "Ethics" section. In this treatise Spinoza postulates that

nature is a symbol of divine truth, and that nature and the divine do not exist side-by-side, but each comprises the other, and each are eternal and infinite.

Spinoza (1632–1677) was born in Amsterdam to a Portuguese Jewish family. After his education at the Talmud-Torah School, Spinoza pursued his interest in the newer natural sciences and philosophy. These studies caused him to become alienated from the Jewish faith. He was eventually expelled from the Jewish community and banished from Amsterdam.

9. Oom Jan leert zijn neefje schaken (1935, Max Euwe/Albert Loon)



Left, Oom Jan leert zijn neefje schaken book stamp. Right, One of two stamps from the 2001 souvenir sheet commemorating Max Euwe (Sc1068b).

The lefthand stamp on the bottom row features *Oom Jan leert zijn neefje schaken* (*Uncle John Teaches His Nephew Chess*) by Max Euwe and Albert Loon. This simple and accessible chess handbook was first published in 1935 and was aimed at young, aspiring chess players. The book has been reprinted 25 times with updates.

Machgielis “Max” Euwe, PhD (1901–1981) was a Dutch chess Grandmaster, mathematician, author, and President of FIDE, the World Chess Federation, from 1970 to 1978. He was the fifth player to become World Chess Champion (1935–37), and he won every Dutch chess championship in which he competed from 1921 until 1952, and additionally won the title in 1955. His 12 titles are still a record. Euwe wrote over 70 chess books, far more than any other World Champion.

10. Der naturen bloeme (1266 approx, Jacob van Maerlant)

Der naturen bloeme (very loosely translated, “*The Best of Nature*”) was written by Jacob van Maerlant (approx. 1235–1300). He was a great Flemish poet of the 13th century and one of the most important Middle



Above, *Der naturen bloeme* book stamp. Left, Belgium semipostal stamp, ScB378, honoring Jacob van Maerlant, issued May 31, 1944.

Dutch authors during the Middle Ages.

The manuscript shown on the stamp, *Der naturen bloeme* is an adaptation of *Opus de natura rerum* by the philosopher and theologian Thomas of Cantimpré (c.1200–c.1272).

Der naturen bloeme is one of the first books written in the Dutch language. It was commissioned to record all available knowledge about nature.

The Unidentified Books

The books shown in the sheetlet’s tabs were all considered masterpieces of Dutch literature, and Schrader says they, “were part of the initial selection but ultimately did not make it into the top 10.” He identified some of them to me as follows, “The book in the right margin with the [orange] circle is the *SHV Think Book 1896–1996*, designed by Irma Boom and Johan Pijnappel [book also shown in left margin]. Other books in the margins are...the first Dutch constitution (Grondwet Nederland, right bottom corner), *Eline Vere* by Louis Couperus (red covers), Willem Bartjens’ arithmetic book *De Cijfferinghe* (bottom left next to [above] the PostNL logo) and Herman Gorter’s 4,000 verse poem *Mei* (top left next to the Jaar van het Boek logo).” This last image is a photo of the top edge of the book shown in stamp Five.

I hope this article of recompense is acceptable!

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