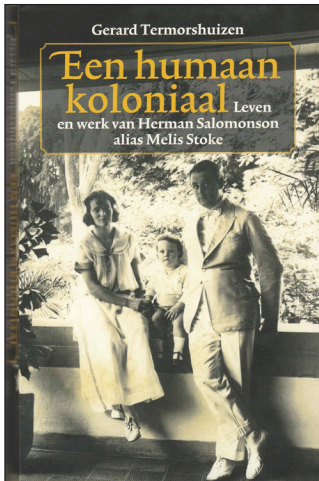


Gerard Termorshuizen, *Een humaan koloniaal; Leven en werk van Herman Salomonson alias Melis Stoke*, Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 2015, 328 pp., illustrations. ISBN 978-9038800714. Price: EUR 24.99.



Kees Snoek

Université de Paris-Sorbonne
kees.snoek@yahoo.fr

Gerard Termorshuizen (born 1935), between January 1970 and January 1975 lecturer at the Dutch Department (*Jurusan Belanda*) of University of Indonesia, has devoted his scholarly life to the cultural heritage of the Dutch presence in the Indonesian archipelago, with special emphasis on the Dutch exchange with the Indonesian people. He was instrumental in the publication, in 1974, of H.B. Jassin's translation of Multatuli's novel *Max Havelaar* (1860). After his return to the Netherlands, Termorshuizen wrote a biography of Dutch author-journalist P.A. Daum (1850–1898), whose ten novels were inspired by his stay in the Dutch East Indies, as founder and editor-in-chief of the daily *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*. In 1988, Termorshuizen obtained his PhD on this biography, which was followed by a definitive edition in three volumes of Daum's collected novels. Hereafter, he began the time-consuming work for his major academic achievement: a history of the Dutch daily press in the Dutch East Indies, which saw the light in two sizeable volumes, published in 2001 and 2011. Besides, he has published numerous articles about Dutch writings pertaining to the Dutch East Indies, as well as, in 2013, a little book about an infamous Eurasian swindler with a difficult family background: Marietje van Oordt. In all these publications, the historical context is of the utmost importance for the understanding of the behaviour and the opinions of the people portrayed. Termorshuizen's work thus occupies a unique position from the point of view of cultural studies, where literature, press, society, and politics constitute a heterogeneous mixture.

Termorshuizen's latest contribution to the history of colonial literature is his biography of Herman Salomonson (1892–1942), who published his novels under the pseudonym of Melis Stoke, borrowing the name from a Dutch medieval writer of chronicles. Nearly a quarter of a century separates the periods in which Daum and Salomonson were productive, while both were writers as well as journalists, even editors-in-chief of major Indies newspapers. Both were dynamic personalities who tried to make their newspapers more attractive to their readers by spicing them up with literary contributions, written under a pseudonym: P.A. Daum published his serialized novels under the guise of Maurits, which masquerade wasn't revealed until much later.

It was however common knowledge that Melis Stoke was the pen-name of Herman Salomonson. Both writers died relatively young: Daum at the age of 48 of the consequences of malaria, while Salomonson, a Jew, was murdered at the age of 50 by the Germans. Daum spent most of his professional life in the Dutch East Indies and all his novels draw their inspiration from colonial life, Salomonson stayed for three years (1923–1926) in Batavia, as editor-in-chief of the daily *Java-Bode*, and only his novel *De razende berg* (The furious mountain, 1939) can be said to have true Indies contents. In the final analysis, from a literary point-of-view, Daum was the greater writer of the two, but Salomonson had a more diverse talent, as he didn't only write novels and short stories, but also so-called "rhyming chronicles". It was because of these narrative poems that he quickly became a household name in the Dutch East Indies. Both the rhyming chronicles and the serialized novels of Melis Stoke helped boost the subscriptions to the *Java-Bode*, which before Salomonson's arrival as its editor-in-chief had dropped to dismal figures.

In 2005, Termorshuizen composed an anthology of fifty rhyming chronicles of Melis Stoke (*Ik kijk de kat uit de klapperboom*), published by the now defunct KITLV Press and preceded by a probing introduction which was a promise of more to follow. It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the publication of Salomonson's biography by Nijgh and Van Ditmar. Termorshuizen pictures Salomonson as a man with moderate opinions, averse to the often nasty bickering for which the colonial press was known. He strongly opposed the rightist journalist H.C. Zentgraaff, who strived after a nationalist Indies movement of whites only. Salomonson belonged to the ethical school of thought, which wished to advance the Indonesian people, yet without granting them autonomy until in a distant future. He was, as the title of the biography suggests, a "human" colonialist, nevertheless a real colonialist, judging the indigenous people on the basis of Western norms and values. In the so-called colonial issue, he didn't take a firm stance, and he was, as Termorshuizen points out, a bit naïve about the course colonial society was taking. He didn't see the upsurge of reactionary sentiments coming, but when the owner of the *Java-Bode* wanted to impose a more rightist direction on the paper, bowing to the conservative taste of readers and advertisers, Salomonson knew it was time to go, which he did at the end of 1926. Under his direction, the *Java-Bode* had obtained a more cultural aspect, and he had allowed the progressive PEB (Politiek-Economische Bond 'Political-Economic League') to contribute a supplement to the paper, *De Indische Loods* ('The Indies Pilot'). It was an ironic twist of fate that a future editor-in-chief of the *Java-Bode* (from 1932) was to be H.C. Zentgraaff, this racist proponent of the white privilege.

Salomonson was able to leave the *Java-Bode* without suffering a financial loss, since Dominique Berretty (1890–1934), the founder of news agency Aneta (1917), had asked him to become the director of Aneta's branch in The Hague. It was Salomonson's way out; moreover he was able to maintain the luxurious lifestyle he and his wife had become accustomed to. Particularly elucidating are Termorshuizen's remarks about the economic situation of journalists in

those days: a beginning journalist in the Dutch East Indies earned only 250 guilders a month, an editor-in-chief between 1000 and 1500 guilders, but when Salomonson took up his position in 1923, he received the splendid sum of 1800 guilders a month. As a director of Aneta in The Hague, he earned 1100 guilders a month, but we may assume that the cost of living was less dear in The Netherlands than in the East Indies. When a deputy director was appointed to help Salomonson, the latter's salary dropped to 750 guilders, but this was at his own request, as he wished to spend more time writing his novels. Besides, he was able to profit from emoluments of 1000 and 1200 guilders, paid out to him in 1932 and 1933, at the height of the economic crisis.

From 1932 onward, Salomonson published a continuous stream of novels. His novels had a high entertaining value and were therefore popular with the reading public. Besides, Salomonson played a role in the literary life of The Hague. His home situation, however, was far from ideal. He was fond of his two children, Hans and Netje, but the relationship with his wife Annie suffered from her capricious behaviour and quarrelsome moods. It was therefore maybe a relief for him when he had to spend another year, by himself, in Batavia, after the untimely death in an aeroplane crash of Berretty, December 1934. Berretty's financial heritage was a disaster, and it was up to Salomonson to save Aneta. Due to his determination and diplomatic skills, his effort was crowned with success, even though he was opposed by some former colleagues who didn't shy away from playing the racist card. Even governor-general B.C. de Jonge had wanted to get rid of this Jewish journalist. During his time in the Indies, Salomonson stayed with Dutch colonial official Piet Idenburg and his wife Mies. Both were followers of the ecumenical evangelic Oxford movement, founded by American preacher Frank Buchman. Their example inspired Salomonson to return to "the living God", at the beginning of 1936. This was a turn his wife and children didn't go along with, but Salomonson himself felt all the stronger because of his newly found belief: "the joy not to own anything is the joy of the Oxford group". As Dutch author Top Naeff wrote in her obituary of Salomonson, he used to ridicule his over-sensitive nature, but deep down he was a very private, reticent character. Apparently, his religious belief strengthened his resolve and his resignation to fate, not to say his fatalism. Termorshuizen writes that he accepted the evil which had come over the world and refused to flee to England, as his daughter had begged him to do. After having broadcasted anti-German warnings over the radio, he was arrested. Given an option to serve German interests, he refused, saying the Christian idea would triumph. On his way to Mauthausen, a fellow prisoner wanted him to flee along with him, but he refused. On 7 October 1942, Salomonson was murdered in Mauthausen.

Termorshuizen makes clear that Salomonson's conversion had a positive effect on his writing, because he got rid of the would-be witticism which had been his trademark. The novels he wrote since 1936 have been written out of an inner necessity which makes them all the more valuable. I already mentioned *De razende berg* (1939), which received a relatively positive

review by Du Perron, who praised the knowledge the human character Melis Stoke displays, although he adds that his overly fluid style tends to spoil the effect. Termorshuizen gives short characteristics of these novels, without going too deeply into them. A few novels might deserve a reprint. The story of Salomonson's life and works has been admirably told by Gerard Termorshuizen, who along the way provides many insights into colonial society. He concludes his biography with a poem Salomonson wrote for his daughter Netty. Two lines in this poem (my translation) open a window upon this remarkable loner: "A man who gives shape and image to life/is in the solitude no longer alone."