Nicolaas Beets

Nicolaas Beets (1814-1903), Dutch writer and pastor, born in Haarlem. Beets, influenced by the English poet Lord Byron, was one of the first Dutch writers to move toward romanticism. Under the pseudonym Hildebrand he wrote a collection of sketches, tales, and essays called *Camera Obscura* (1839), considered the finest piece of 19th-century Dutch prose, combining realism with whimsical humor.

Beets was ordained in 1839, and during his subsequent successful career in the church he produced many works of prose and verse. His major works, however, are those written during his earlier years, such as the poetic tale *Guy de Vlaming* (1837).
Willem Bilderdijk

Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831), Dutch poet and dramatist, born in Amsterdam. Handicapped from birth, he gave his energies to writing and teaching, at one time tutoring Louis Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon, who briefly ruled (1806-10) Holland. Bilderdijk's passionate love poetry and sensitive religious verse introduced the romantic movement to Dutch literature. In *Gebed* (Prayer, 1796) he set an example followed by religious poets in Holland for a generation. His most enduring work is an incomplete epic, *De ondergang der eerste wareld* (The Destruction of the First World, 1820), telling of conflict among Cain's descendents. He expressed his critical views on the importance of feeling in poetry in the poem *De kunst der poezij* (The Art of Poetry, 1908), but being disinclined toward self-criticism, he seldom maintained his ideals in his own work. His plays, heavily didactic, have been largely forgotten.
Jacob Cats

Jacob Cats (1577-1660), Dutch poet and statesman, born in Brouwershaven, Zeeland, and educated as a lawyer. In 1602 he married a woman of wealth and was able to retire to a farm in Zeeland, where he spent his time in farming and writing poetry. In 1627 and 1631 he was sent by the government of Holland on missions to England. He served from 1636 to 1651 as grand pensionary of Holland, the highest office of the province. He was the author of many books of poetry that, although relatively unknown elsewhere, were so popular in the Netherlands for about 200 years, he was given the name Father Cats. His autobiography, *Eighty-two Years of My Life*, was published posthumously in 1734.
Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820-1887), Dutch civil servant and writer. He entered the Dutch colonial service in 1838, holding various posts in the Netherlands Indies, and resigned in 1857 in protest against Dutch colonial policies in Java. In 1860 he published *Max Havelaar* (trans. 1927), the Dutch counterpart of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which revealed the oppressed condition of the natives in the Dutch colonies. Its publication brought about some reforms in colonial administration.
Erasmus's works, written in an elegant Latin, display vast erudition usually tempered by tolerance and wit. His Adagia (Adages, 1500; enlarged 1508), a collection of Latin proverbs, established his scholarly reputation. Most of his other early works attack corrupt church practices and the rationalist Scholasticism developed by churchmen. The Manuell of the Cristen Knycyte (1503; translated 1533) and the famous satire The Praise of Folye (1509; translated 1549), dedicated to More, both advocate a return to simple Christian ethics. His Greek New Testament (1516), based on recently discovered manuscripts, with critical notes and a new Latin translation, was a more accurate version than the Latin Vulgate. Because these works influenced religious reformers of the time, Erasmus is sometimes called the father of the Reformation, a 16th-century religious revolution in the Christian church.

Erasmus expounded enlightened educational views in De Ratione Studii (On the Method of Study, 1511) and De Pueris Satim ac Liberaliter Instituendis (On Teaching Children Firmly but Kindly, 1529). He held that elementary Latin and basic Christianity should be taught at home before the start of formal schooling at the age of seven. Latin was to be taught first through conversation and only later through grammar, a method similar to present-day teaching techniques. Equally advanced were his advocacy of physical education, criticism of severe discipline, and insistence on arousing the interest of pupils.

In 1517, when the Reformation had become a burning issue under the energetic leadership of German theologian Martin Luther, Erasmus's intellectual life took a new direction. He had always been admired and feared as a critic, but now he became an apologist, not really trusted by either Roman Catholics or Reformers, always refusing to take sides. He remained a Roman Catholic although he frequently associated with the Reformers. In his Colloquia (Colloquies, 1518), his continuing assaults on the evils and errors of the church authorities and on superstition made him vulnerable to the accusation that he was a Lutheran, a charge he vehemently denied. He was also accused of concealing his true opinions for fear of the consequences. To counter this, Erasmus wrote a complete declaration of his theological position, De Libero Arbitrio (On the Freedom of the Will, 1524), which contains a brilliant attack on Luther. A counterattack by Luther elicited a final polemic, or argument, by Erasmus, Hyperaspistes (1526). Meanwhile he was producing, with the publisher Froben, numerous scholarly editions of the works of the church fathers.

Although Erasmus is often regarded as a precursor of the Reformation and his works were later listed in the Index of Forbidden Books by the Council of Trent, his war against ignorance and superstition was prompted by his convictions as a humanist rather than as a theologian.
Constantijn Huygens

Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), Dutch poet, musician, and statesman, born in The Hague. A diplomat, he was secretary to several princes of Orange and traveled widely in England and on the Continent. He was acquainted with many men of letters, including the French philosopher René Descartes and the English poet John Donne, whose work he translated (1630) into Dutch. Huygens wrote many sophisticated, intellectual, ornate poems in French, Italian, and Latin, as well as in Dutch. They were collected as *Korenbloemen* (Cornflowers; 27 volumes, 1658-72). He also wrote *Trijnte Cornelis* (1653), a play sympathetic to lower-class life; *Costelick Mal* (1622), a satire on female dress; and three moralistic autobiographical works. Huygens was an accomplished musician, and he composed numerous airs for strings. He was the father of the scientist Christiaan Huygens.
Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), Dutch poet and playwright, born in Cologne, Germany; for most of his life he lived in Amsterdam. Although largely self-taught, Vondel became the outstanding poet of Holland's golden age. As a humanist, he rebelled against the strict Calvinism of his day; later he converted to Roman Catholicism.

Vondel's first successful play, *Het Pascha* (The Passover, 1621), and his early poems were the result of his study of classical drama and poetic theory. Lyrics from his subsequent plays are considered the finest poetry in the Dutch language. His adaptations of classical Greek tragedies, masterpieces of the high baroque style, are actually concerned with the search for Christian faith. They were accompanied by a parallel series of original tragedies—among them *Hierusalem verwoest* (Jerusalem Laid Waste, 1620); *Jeptha* (1659); and a trilogy: *Lucifer* (1654; trans. 1917), which is considered to have influenced the English poet John Milton, *Adam in Exile* (1664; trans. 1952), and *Noah* (1667). Medieval Dutch traditions shaped one of his most famous plays, *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* (1637).