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**The Last Illusion. Letters From Dutch Immigrants in the 'Land of Opportunity' 1924–1930.** Herman Ganzevoort (Trans. and Ed.), Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999. 238 pp. Paperback ISBN 1 55238 013 0

This marvellous gem is full of wonderful bits of information about life in Canada in the 1920s and deserves to be read by anyone interested in Canada. We follow some of the writers 'from the polders to the prairies' (p. 15). While the primary theme is 'letters' to newspapers in the Netherlands, there is much more in this book than just a 'Dutch' or 'Frisian' perspective. Like Alexis de Tocqueville's and Harriet Martineau's comments on American life in an earlier era, these 'ethnographic' observations have a kind of universal validity. One can learn a great deal about farming and rural life as well as labouring in the city. Like old photographs from a not so distant past, the letters are full of charming detail. (However, no actual photographs are included, other than the front cover.) There is even an unsolved 'mystery' concerning contested interpretations of what precisely transpired on Graham Island, British Columbia. (Are the Ruttens from Tilburg telling the whole truth?)

A reviewer must, of course, find a few minor blemishes. For some reason Ganzevoort does not mention his earlier book which contains letters by Willem de Gelder from 1910–1913 (1973, *A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies*, University of Toronto Press), which is a very similar endeavour and would seem to merit a footnote at the very least. The "stubborn strength of the western homesteader" (Ganzevoort 1973, p. xv) is also evident in this more recent book. Another minor distraction is the persistence of translations of Dutch phrases which do not come out sounding English (e.g. "they always kick over the dog", p. 105 and "Up with Friesland", p. 134 or "Be Lucky", p. 137, presumably for *Wees gelukkig!*). Perhaps

Herman Ganzevoort, ed. and trans., *The Last Illusion*  
(Hans Bakker)

the desire to "make it sing in English as it had in Dutch" (p. 20) caused an occasional 'Dutch-ism.' But these are very minor points, really, since the reader will find many delightful anecdotes that provide a vibrant sketch of Canada as perceived by sometimes very articulate and adventurous Dutchmen. Ganzevoort speculates there is also possibly one woman – or perhaps an especially keen observer who happens to be a man – who writes about Toronto. The selection 'Toronto the Beautiful' (pp. 187–222) provides a nice slice of urban life. (However, Ganzevoort's speculations that such a sensitive man would probably be 'gay' is misplaced.) Many observations point out nuances which require knowledge of Dutch norms. For example, in the 'Canada is a Funny Country' section (pp. 100–30) the apprentice bricklayer attends a banquet in Oshawa organized by the local union. The writer asks us to imagine a Social Democratic Worker's Party meeting opened by a prayer and closed with the 'Wilhelmus,' just as his union friends had opened with a prayer and closed with "God Save the King." Many writers comment on the Y.M.C.A. as a convenient hostel. There is humour and tragedy. One funny incident concerns the new school teacher who is 'Lost Among the Ruthenians' (pp. 77–91; The 'Ruthenians' are Russians but there is no further explanation.). He falls for the beautiful Zanovia Matzerchek only to discover she has a fiancé. "I found it difficult to believe that such a lovely girl could find even one attractive thing in this big brute," he writes, indignantly. One message that comes out loud and clear is that the authorities in the Netherlands and in Canada were less than honest and often quite deceitful; but, many of the Canadians are considerate and helpful. The story of Cheney's Island (one of the smallest of the Grand Manan Islands in the Bay of Fundy) is an adventure tale worthy of Robert Louis Stevenson.

All in all the book can be heartily recommended as a study of the Dutch experience in Canada which is at the same high level of scholarship as Herbert J. Brink's 1995 *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850–1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), although less comprehensive and with fewer explanatory footnotes. A social scientist would probably like more links to works like W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's famous *1918–20 Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, a classic of Symbolic Interactionist sociology which is also based on extensive letters. But it is not difficult to extract useful information about such topics as the introduction of a new technology: the radio. What was apparently a luxury in Holland in the 1920s is common in Canada. The Dempsey-Tunney fight in Chicago in 1927, for example, was followed avidly in Montreal. Tunney won and St. Catherine Street was suddenly inundated. The Dutch letter writer, however, is mainly concerned that the fight had prompted a young boy to bet \$5. "That's a typical example of [North] American betting lust," he comments. Not all letters are paragons of objectivity. But all of the selections show undeniable value both as a

genre of 'literature' and as first hand observations. Their authenticity is unquestionable. Ganzevoort deserves a polite round of applause for rescuing these forgotten contributions from the obscurity of a disintegrating archive and recognizing them as metaphorically like "the golden treasure horde of a sunken Spanish galleon." The book will make a useful recommended supplementary reader in courses on rural communities, rural Canada, ethnicity and Symbolic Interactionist sociology.

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