



Tollens' Nagalm. Het dichterschap van Hendrik Tollens (1780-1856) in de Nederlandse herinneringscultuur

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SUMMARY DISSERTATION *TOLLENS' NAGALM*, Ruud Poortier

The central theme of this research is the memory culture surrounding the Dutch poet Hendrik Tollens (1780-1856). Tollens was the most widely read, most popular and most acclaimed poet of his time and the first of his contemporaries outside the royal family to be the subject of a national monument. He wrote the text of the first national anthem (*Wien Neêrlands bloed*) and his epic poem *Tafereel van de Overwintering op Nova Zembla* was a compulsory subject for schools. He was especially popular for his domestic poetry and his patriotic poems. He also wrote nature poems and made his work available for charity projects.

During the last years of his life there were already signs that he would not attain the prophesied immortality and thirty years after his death little remained of his fame, certainly as far as the literary canon was concerned. It took a century before any serious attention to his work and his place in literature began to revive, helped by the revaluation of the early nineteenth century around 1818, when the study of literature became a subject of research in the newly established kingdom.

In this study I investigate the way in which the memory of the poet Hendrik Tollens has been transmitted and kept alive. I restrict myself to Tollens as a poet and leave aside his role in public life and as a paint dealer. Further I limit myself to The Netherlands and for the most part leave Flanders out of consideration.

For my research I make use of the theory put forward by Aleida Assmann in her book *Erinnerungsräume*. She does not go specifically into the remembrance of writers and poets, but her concept can well be used to do so. Focused on literature this means that after the passage of several decennia the direct remembrance of a writer or poet becomes blurred as a result of the living transmitters becoming less active and dying out. The transmission of the recollections to a following generation no longer takes place directly, but through stored up, documented memory transmitters, which can be activated as the occasion arises and can then be assigned a new function. The question then arises as to which period and which impulses can bring about the 'reanimation' of such an oeuvre. A second reference point is Ann Rigney's study of the *afterlife* of Sir Walter Scott, which I shall use for comparison with the *afterlife* of knight Hendrik Tollens.

In this context the memory transmitters play an essential role. As far as Tollens is concerned, this means that after 1885 his work, with the exception of the *Volklied* and the *Overwintering*, is only available from antiquarian booksellers and in anthologies. Moreover, the negative judgment of the critic Conrad Busken Huet in 1874 has for decennia determined the image of Tollens as a simple verse-monger, without a fundamental discussion of his work ever taking place. Neither university nor secondary education has made any difference to this situation: literary history has literally shelved his work and left it there to gather dust. The attention still paid to him, has not led to reappraisal.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were, however, other memory transmitters, semi-literary, non-literary, which preserved the name of Tollens. This study takes into consideration eponyms (drama societies, street names), biographies and reference works, musical settings, illustrations, commemorations and collections as well as some organizations which have kept his name alive, such as the Tollens Fund and the Tollens Ensemble. Attention is also paid to the literal *lieux de mémoire*, namely Tollens's two places of residence Rotterdam and Rijswijk.

In the concluding section I give a chronological summary of the developments in the separate memory transmitters and I make a suggestion for the application of the theory of Assmann to the memory culture of a writer or poet. This can be undertaken by means of a number of steps.

In the first place a researcher will have to determine the corpus of texts which he counts as belonging to the memory. Here the important issue is the extent to which the relevant work has been generally disseminated. In the second place he will have to determine whether the biographical data, in which I also include the visual representations, have influenced the remembrance of the poet (thus as *poet*) and if so, to what degree. In this connection I refer to the fact that a portrayal of Tollen's outward appearance partly contributed to Busken Huet's authoritative, but damning judgment of Tollen's poetic qualities. Conclusions drawn on such grounds can thus be of fundamental importance for the way in which a poet is remembered. Assmann also distinguishes physical memory transmitters and I add to this the emotional-physical reactions which can be evoked by reading a literary work, such as pathos, anger or the urge to act. Her last category embraces the literal places of remembrance, which in the case of a writer or poet can be found, for example, in eponyms, collections and commemorative monuments.

I expand her categorization with a fifth element, which I derive from the work of Rigney, namely remediation, the capacity to inspire other forms of art.

The essence of the memory culture surrounding a writer or poet is, however, his literary work, in so far as it has been generally disseminated. If there is to be any question of national remembrance, remembrance in a linguistic region as a whole, then the availability of the work is a prerequisite, preferably in a complete edition and/or a reliable anthology. Moreover, there is the need for a guideline to the heritage, certainly where an author from a more distant past is concerned. Where the literary discussion dies out or fails to take place, then the chance of oblivion is highly likely. This also applies to the place he is accorded in education: in the first instance in scholarship and secondly in general education, where each year a new generation can come face to face with the writer or poet.

The other memory transmitters - and they can be many and varied - have a contributory, and possibly referential or inspiring function: to keep the name remembered as a first step in reaching the person and the author behind him in the hope that there is sufficient interest to actually embark on the following step.