


Storytelling has always been among the most favored of pastimes in the Netherlands. However, all kinds of technological developments that have rapidly changed Dutch society have almost extinguished storytelling there as a performing art. It has nevertheless managed to survive in written form as a favorite topic of interest to both lay and professional audiences. This has resulted in a publishing tradition that includes *Volksverhalen uit Oost-Indië* [Folktales from the East-Indies] and *Sprookjes van Grimm* [Grimm’s tales] by Jan de Vries, which contain annotated excerpts of tales.

The layout of *De boom vol schatten* [The tree full of treasures] is evidently modeled after the successful formula displayed in De Jong & Sleutelaar (1985) and Poortinga (1976). It is a compilation of 150 tales from all over the Indonesian province of Maluku and intends to acquaint
the Dutch public with “the many-sidedness of the Malukan culture” (p. 6).

The tales are arranged in three groups of four chapters each, which inform the reader about the origin and genesis of modern Malukan society, its worldview, and history. Although the majority of stories are adaptations from older sources, this book contains some material that has never been published before. For example, no. 61, *Let Bungsu* from Ambon, and no. 104, *De rots van het weeskind* [The orphan’s rock] from Babar, were initially submitted as papers in one of the courses supervised by the *Steunpunt Edukatie Molukkers* in Utrecht. Four stories are based on actual spoken material: the anonymous no. 145, *De belegering van Iha* [The siege of Iha], and the two fairytales and the excerpt of a myth that were taken down during a storytelling session in Leti.

The author claims to be targeting a teenage audience, but I believe her book will be equally popular among older readers as well. Her great skill in making readable texts out of a huge quantity of intertwined stories is clearly demonstrated in the myth from Leti mentioned above. Each story is numbered and furnished with notes at the end of the volume. The notes are rather concise, referring only to the source of the tale and to the chapter in *De zee van verhalen* where Hans Straver discusses it in its literary context.

*De zee van verhalen* [The sea of tales], named after a Salman Rushdie novel, is a textbook on Malukan oral literature that aims at a broad audience. Although the author modestly states that his book “just bears ... an exploring character” (p. 8), its importance for Malukan studies is evident.

Previously, Malukan oral literature had never been a topic for serious study. That is why the tales that Hans Straver discusses are either from supplementary text samples in specialized studies on language, culture, or history, or else from anthologies like Jensen’s monumental *Hainuwele* (1939). The few older literary observations, such as those of Baron van Hoëvell (1882) and Geurtjens (1921), were certainly biased insofar as the spirit of the age could not appreciate anything that was not modeled after the classics. Hans Straver actually is the first, at least in the Netherlands, to approach the subject with an open mind.

The book is arranged in such a way that each chapter focuses on a specific item that is then exemplified by a discussion of one of the tales
in *De boom vol schatten*. Where necessary, I refer to these tales here by bracketing its appropriate number in the reading book.

Chapter 1 describes step-by-step what the author considers to be the Malukan culture area. Treading carefully, he does not impose a concrete definition of what this area should be, but simply states that it is a “wide transitional zone between the culture area of Southeast Asia and the culture area of Melanesia” (p. 14). This is elaborated by a discussion of the Lion of Oma [no. 136].

Chapter 2 provides a concise historiography of the study of Malukan storytelling. As exemplified by the story from Kei of Towi and the leatherback [no. 85] that appeared to be decisive in a protracted lawsuit between two villages, early records merely served administrative and missionary purposes. Although an impressive collection of stories was gathered over the years, the publication of the texts in dispersed venues hampered a thorough literary study.

From my point of view as a linguist, chapter 3 is one of the most interesting. The author shows that the traditional division into religious myths or legends, on the one hand, and secular sagas or fairytales, on the other, is not appropriate for Malukan literature. The author points out that although there is considerable cultural differentiation among the islands of the archipelago, Malukan storytellers and their audiences seem unanimous in discriminating which history is real. This chapter proposes a classification applied to the fairytale from Seram of the breadfruit baby brother [no. 120]. A story can be classified by four criteria of form (language, language use, performance, structure), four of content (persons, times, locations, names) and four of function (degree of veracity, occasion, audience, socialization).

As already stated, this book is intended for a broad audience. Therefore nothing is taken for granted, and everything that is of some relevance is taken into account. Because it focuses on the orality of Malukan literature, chapter 4 is quite different from what a reader would be used to in the Netherlands. Oral literature presupposes the interaction of the performing artist and his audience and thus heavily depends on the moment of speech itself. A short reflection shows how and why a person becomes a storyteller. As exemplified by the intermezzos in the fairytales of the Leafed Stone [no. 99] and the Mouse Mammy [no. 66], the techniques of verbal art function as an aid to the storyteller’s memory and as a means to get the audience emotionally involved in the perform-
ance. A closer look at a historiographic lamentation [no. 144] shows how the same principles are used in sacred texts.

Chapter 5 mentions the twofold character of oral literature. On the one hand, oral literature defines a society’s worldview by explaining natural phenomena, such as the explanation that the moon is a piece thrust off of the sun in the story of Atuf [no. 7] from Tanimbar. Thus it determines mankind’s place in the world. This is further elaborated in chapter 6. The living are differentiated from the dead, humans are differentiated from nonhumans, and all live in their separate worlds. At the same time, oral literature determines the place of the individual, of men and women, in society by providing rules to regulate social interaction. This is exemplified by Hainuwele [no. 3] and elaborated in chapter 6, where the author focuses on the motives of metamorphosis.

Chapter 8 discusses historiographic literature that tells about the origin and migration of the first settlers in Maluku and their settlements. The changing political and economic scene during the 15th and 16th centuries has had a lasting impact on traditional literature. The author shows how the Central Malukan literary production initially displays new themes, but then, because of the dominating role of “the colonial powers” (p. 170) in local history, is reduced to the historiographic lamentations or kapata.

Chapter 9 deals with literary influences from outside of Maluku. Islam and Christianity were incorporated into the traditional worldview without any direct impact on traditional storytelling, because the literary devices that transferred these new concepts did not fundamentally differ from the traditional literature. Indirectly, via the pesantren on Java, two popular genres were introduced: the rogue story and the beast fable. An example of the rogue story is the Benuas cycle from Kei [no. 116] that is modeled after the Malay Abu Nawas, which itself derives from an Arabic-Persian corpus. The recurrent turtle theme in the Malukan beast fable is found all over the world and can be traced back to India.

Chapter 10 concludes the exposition with a concise survey of the genesis of a written tradition, which until very recently was limited to Ridjali’s *Hikayat tanah hitu*.

*Pohon harita* [The treasure tree] contains twenty tales from *De boom vol schatten* that are translated in the Malay proposed by the *Steunpunt Edukatie Molukkers*. They are distributed over seven chapters, each with
a separate theme: food, colonial history, mysticism, origin, alliances, beast fables, and fate.

Of course, some minor corrections could be made. For example, no. 8 *Dag en nacht* [Day and night] in *De boom vol schatten* is referred to as a tale from Leti instead of Kisar. This is probably a typographic error, because a quick look at the appropriate note shows that Mrs. Lilipaly-de Voogt did mention J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong (1937) as the source.

Hans Straver selects the theme of a marriage to a sea princess to exemplify thematic innovation in traditional sacred literature (pp. 163–167). This seems to me a somewhat unfortunate choice. Because he considers this theme “to form part of a widespread and influential Austronesian tradition” (p. 167) without explicitly saying that the variant of the marriage to a local princess is pre-Austronesian, he actually implies the introduction of an Austronesian feature into an Austronesian area.

The *Steunpunt Edukatie Molukkers* has resulted from a Dutch pedagogical program that develops courses to be used by teachers of immigrant children (Boelens 1988: 7–9). It therefore intends to provide insights into the cultural background of the Malukan minority in the Netherlands, both for the Dutch and for the Malukans. This is the goal in the simultaneous publication of these three books. The tradition of Malukan storytelling is exemplified in Dutch by *De boom vol schatten*, translated into Malay in *Pohon harta*, and explained in *De zee vol verhalen*. I think this approach has been very successful.

Hans Straver went far beyond the original scope of his *De zee van verhalen* and wrote the introduction that we were all waiting for. Therefore I hope for at least a translation into English, as well as Indonesian, in order to make this useful book accessible to a much larger audience.

**REFERENCES**


