The year 1536 could almost justifiably be proclaimed an *annus horribilis* in the history of literature in the Netherlands, since in that year our most famous prose-writer as well as our most famous poet passed away, the latter being only 24 years old. That this year was not recorded as such is closely connected to a tendency to ignore the fact that literature in the Netherlands in its totality contains two components. For a few centuries, a Latin literature reaching far beyond the borders existed and flourished in the Low Countries, alongside a vernacular literature in Dutch. There are good reasons for considering the Latin-language authors of this territory among the national men of letters. Against that background it was postulated that Erasmus could, with some justification, be considered to be Holland’s most famous prose-writer. In one breath, it was added that his younger contemporary who was born in The Hague, Janus Secundus, might be seen as the most famous Dutch poet.²

Erasmus died after an active life of almost seventy years in Basle in the night of 11 to 12 July 1536. When Janus Secundus succumbed to *malaria quartana* on his journey from Spain to the Netherlands in

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1 This is a slightly revised, English version of my inaugural address: C.L. Heesakkers, *Tussen Erasmus en Leiden: Hadrianus Junius en zijn betekenis voor de ontwikkeling van het Humanisme in Holland in de zestiende eeuw*, Leiden, 1989. I have not updated the text to incorporate new insights or information published about Junius over the last two decades.

2 J.P. Guépin, *In een moeilijke houding geschreven*, The Hague, 1969, p. 116: ‘Erasmus is de beroemdste Nederlandse prozaschrijver, want Erasmus schreef in het latijn. Zijn iets jongere tijdgenoot Janus Secundus is de beroemdste Nederlandse dichter. De algemene verwaarlozing van de neolatijnse poëzie maakt dat niet iedereen dit nog weet’. (‘Erasmus is the most famous Dutch prose-writer because he wrote in Latin. His slightly younger contemporary Janus Secundus is the most famous poet. The general neglect of Neo-Latin poetry makes that not everybody is aware of this.’)
September of that same year, he was still an adolescent of 24 years. He was born in 1511, the year in which Erasmus, then in his mid-forties, had already acquired a sudden European fame through the publication of his best-known work, *The Praise of Folly*. The complete works of Erasmus were edited, according to the measures taken by himself, in 10 folio-sized volumes in Basle in 1540, four years after his death.³ The complete poems of Secundus appeared one year later in Utrecht in a small octavo volume, carefully edited by his brothers, Nicolaus Grudius and Hadrianus Marius.⁴

Judging by the scant surveys of the development of Neo-Latin literature in the Netherlands, we cannot help feeling that the death of these two celebrities meant an abrupt end to a flourishing period. The Southern Netherlands was the cultural and literary centre in this period. In the North there was hardly anything like a Neo-Latin culture at a European level. The decades after the fatal year 1536 are interpreted as a period of decline, or, at any rate, of stagnation.⁵ We have to wait for a revival until the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The centre of this revival, of this second florescence of Neo-Latin culture and literature, is in the North, in the County of Holland and to be precise, in Leiden. This flourishing period is inextricably intertwined with the foundation of the first University in the Northern Netherlands.

The representatives of this new flourishing period appear to consider the four decades that divide them from the era of Erasmus and Secundus as an interregnum. A clear indication of this, in my opinion, is the fact that there was a direct reversion to these two figures as models and sources of inspiration, by-passing the generation that immediately preceded the foundation of the University. I do not know a better way to illustrate this than by lingering for a while over the activities of one of the professors of the earliest years of Leiden University, the relatively undistinguished philologist Paullus Merula. This scholar had gained a firm foothold in Leiden after the first *lumen Academiae*, the first light of the University, Justus Lipsius, had turned his

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