

*www.hanskoning.net*

April 13<sup>th</sup> : Writer Hans Koning has died at the age of 85 at his home in Easton, Connecticut after a short illness. The author of over 40 fiction and non-fiction books, he was also a prolific journalist, contributing for almost 60 years to many periodicals including the New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Atlantic Monthly, The Nation, Harpers and The New Yorker.

Born in Amsterdam on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1921 to Elisabeth van Collem and Daniel Koningsberger, he was educated at the University of Amsterdam 1939-41, The University of Zurich 1941-43, and the Sorbonne in 1946. He was the grandson of the well-known Dutch poet Abraham van Collem.

Escaping occupied Holland with the Resistance (he was a wearer of the Dutch Resistance Cross), he was one of the youngest sergeants in the British Liberation Army, 7 Troop, 4 Commando, working as an interpreter during the allied occupation of Germany at the end of the war. His Major wrote of him, "The problems of occupation have been made much easier with the help of this NCO who not only knows the character and customs of the German people but has studied the academic approach to international affairs. Sgt 'Hans' as he is known to everyone in the battery has been a loyal and trustworthy member of the unit...his quiet sense of humor and his fundamentally serious mien have won him the friendship of officers and men alike".

The war was a vital event in his life – he wrote later that "Looking back on it, I am glad I lived through two years of German occupation of Holland (before I escaped to England). I think it taught me about how the darkness of towns felt in the Middle Ages, why Jane Austen's heroines made a point of traveling when the moon was full or nearly, how people used to live "one day at a time," how cold it really is in winter."

As an editor of the Groene Amsterdammer, a Dutch weekly, 1947-50, he was invited to run a cultural program on Radio Jakarta, Indonesia which he did from 1950-51. It was after this that he came by freighter to the United States. His first novel, "The Affair", was published in 1958 and received critical acclaim. He also began writing non-fiction, including several travel books, including Love and Hate in China (1966), where he was one of the first US-based journalists to travel to China post- revolution, after waiting four years for a visa.

In 1970 he changed his name from Koningsberger to Koning, mostly because it was always being misspelled, and in 1978 he was naturalized as an American citizen.

During the Vietnam War he turned his attention to protest: "Writing novels began to seem an indulgence and my activity became political in the anti-war movement in the U.S". During this time he helped found the still-active 'Resist' organization in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Noam Chomsky among others.

His political life during those years left him with a dedication to what he called 'committed literature'. In his contribution to 'Writers on Writing, Collected Essays from

the New York Times”, he says that “It means to me that if you want to write a serious novel, you should not only be out to entertain but you should also, in a hidden way, reflect on the world’s justice and injustice, hope and illusion...perhaps the essence of our time is that we have to look beyond our own individual lives. As for me, I keep aiming for a ...true novel, a novel for our time, dealing with an essential theme and an essential message in a subterranean, carefully hidden way, a message like a snake in the grass, as Trollope put it.”

At the end of the Vietnam war in 1975 he moved his family back to London as what he described as ‘self-imposed exile’, only returning to the United States in 1988 to make a permanent home in New York and Connecticut. He wanted to be known as an ‘American’ writer – and had, until recently anyway, great faith in the United States as a place where things were possible – both politically and artistically.

*Columbus: His Enterprise: Exploding the Myth*, published in 1976 by Monthly Review Press, was a groundbreaking book at the time – and has stayed in print since then, selling 30,000 copies in 1992, the quincentennial of Columbus’ voyage. It is used in schools nationwide. Kurt Vonnegut wrote of it, “I think your book on Christopher Columbus is important. I’m more grateful for that book than any other book I have read in a couple of years.”

It was followed by *The Conquest of America: How the Indian Nations Lost Their Continent*, the sequel, printed in 1993.

He wanted to be seen as novelist first and foremost though, and was a two-time recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for creative writers, for fiction.

Four of his novels have been made into films: *A Walk with Love and Death*, which was Angelica Huston’s first film, directed by her father, John Huston, *The Revolutionary*, starring Jon Voight, *Death of a Schoolboy*, for the BBC London, and *The Petersburg-Cannes Express*. He never felt, though, that his books had been done justice by these films.

From 2000 to 2006 he also found time to run “Literary Discord”, a radio program broadcast by WPKN Bridgeport, dedicated to discussing such literature and the state of publishing in the United States.

Most of Koning’s novels were also published in England and Holland; five titles in France, and others in Italian, German, Japanese, etc. New South Books started a series of reprints in 2001. His *Little Book of Comforts and Gripes* is online at [www.comfortsandgripes.com](http://www.comfortsandgripes.com). His latest book *The Irish Deserter* is awaiting publication.

He is survived by his wife Kate and their children Christina and Andrew, and two children by former marriages, Tess Koning-Martinez and Lynne Koningsberger. His papers are archived at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

## Quotes:

- \* " I am filled with admiration... I apologize for not having read you earlier, and am particularly sorry because this has deprived me of a great joy for several weeks. It is a rare fact, you know, to find an author with whom one feels on the same wavelength, but it will have been my case with you." - Georges Simenon
- \* "One of America's most accomplished writers" - George Plimpton
- \* "His style works like dry ice on the mind." - Newsweek
- \* "Extraordinarily stirring" - The New Yorker
- \* "One of the most beautiful (novels) I have read for a long time" - Keith Waterhouse in the New Statesman
- \* "Hans Koning is that rare combination - a masterful story teller with a sense of history" - Howard Zinn
- \* "There has always been something recognizably distinct in Hans Koning's novels: a ruthless sparseness in the manner, a kind of passionate desperation in the plot" - Alastair Reid

## Fiction

(until 1972 writing under the name Hans Koningsberger)

- o The Affair *Alfred Knopf 1958, New South Books 2002 Reprint*
- o An American Romance *Simon and Schuster 1960, New South Books 2002 Reprint*
- o A Walk with Love and Death *Simon and Schuster 1961, New South Books 2003 Reprint*
- o I Know What I'm Doing *Simon and Schuster 1964, New South Books 2005 Reprint*
- o The Revolutionary: a novel *Farrar Straus Giroux 1967*
- o Death of a Schoolboy *Harcourt Brace 1974*
- o The Petersburg-Cannes Express *Harcourt Brace 1975*
- o America Made Me: A Novel *Thunder's Mouth Press 1979*
- o The Kleber Flight *Atheneum 1981*
- o De Witt's War *Pantheon 1983*
- o Acts of Faith *Henry Holt 1986*
- o Pursuit of a Woman on the Hinge of History: A Novel
- o Zeeland or Elective Concurrences *New South Books 2001*

## Plays

- o The Blood-Red Cafe
- o Hermione
- o A Woman of New York

## Children's Books

- o The Golden Keys *Doubleday 1958*

## **Translations**

- o The Ten Thousand Things by Maria Dermout (Dutch) *New York Review of Books* 2002
- o Carlo Coccioli, Manual the Mexican (French) *Simon and Schuster*
- o The Islands by A. Alberts *Tuttle Co.* 1999

## **Non-Fiction**

(until 1972 writing under the name Hans Koningsberger)

- o Modern Dutch Painting (1960)
- o Study in Holland: A Guide for Prospective Students (1961)
- o Love and Hate in China *McGraw-Hill* (1966)
- o Along the Roads of New Russia *Farrar Straus Giroux* (1967)
- o World of Vermeer *Time-Life* (1967)
- o Amsterdam *Time Life* (1968)
- o Along the Roads of the New Russia *Farrar & Rinehart* (1968)
- o Holland and the United States: A Tale of Two Countries (1976 / 1982)
- o Amsterdam *Little Brown & Co* (1977)
- o The Future of Che Guevara *Doubleday* (1971)
- o The Almost World *Dial Press* (1972)
- o A New Yorker in Egypt *Harcourt Brace* (1976)
- o Nineteen Sixty-Eight: A Personal Report *Norton* (1987)
- o Columbus: His Enterprise: Exploding the Myth *Monthly Review Press* 1976, 1991
- o The Conquest of America: How the Indian Nations Lost Their Continent *Monthly Review Press* (1993)
- o Hans Koning's Little Book of Comforts and Gripes (2000)
- o Rene Burri *Phaidon Press* (2006)