

**‘Beautiful Souls’ and ‘Bluestockings’:
the reception of 17th- and 18th-century Women writers in Dutch literature of the 19th century**

Quite a number of Dutch novels, novellas, plays and poems of the 19th century deal with the lives and works of Dutch women writers of the 17th and 18th centuries. These texts draw upon several different discourses. First of all, they reflect the contemporary discourse on gender. As far as women and writing were concerned, this discourse offered a simple formula: generally, women were neither able nor allowed to produce literature. A woman poet always ran the risk of being considered a ‘bluestocking’, which was supposed to be the opposite of a virtuous woman.¹ Another important context for these texts is the 19th-century discourse on nation building and national identity. Presenting the lives and works of these female authors meant bringing the glorious past of the Dutch nation and its cultural achievements back to the collective memory.² At the same time, women writers served as role models from whom national as well as female virtues could be learned. A third context to be mentioned here is the discourse on literary history and the canon of national literature. The texts investigated here reflect the mechanisms and criteria of integration into and exclusion from the literary canon.³

Among the 17th- and 18th-century Dutch women poets, who was considered a virtuous woman, a national role model worthy of a place in the pantheon of Dutch literature? Fictional texts from the 19th century more or less limit themselves to one heroine: Maria Tesselschade Roemers. I have analyzed all the texts I could find – twenty novels, novellas, plays and poems, two of which were written by women – in which she is the protagonist or one of the protagonists.⁴ No other Dutch woman writer has gained comparable literary fame, not even Maria Tesselschade’s older sister Anna. The latter is never conceded more than a modest supporting role beside her sparkling younger sister. The texts keep repeating the stereotype of the ‘wise Anna’

¹ Streng 1997, p.5-17, 48-55.

² The ‘Golden Age’ of the Netherlands became a popular subject in 19th-century Dutch literature. The protagonists are often artists, poets as well as painters. See Van Sas 1992 and Kloek 1992.

³ In a case study about the 17th-century poet Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero I have tried to demonstrate these mechanisms; cf. Leuker 2000b. See for the discourse on literary history in the 19th-century Netherlands in general: Wiskerke 1995.

⁴ See the bibliography of primary sources.

and the 'beautiful Tesselschade'.⁵ The only advantage that Anna had over her sister, though, was that her collected works had been published by the end of the 19th century.⁶ Tesselschade had to wait for that honour until the 400th anniversary of her birth in 1994.⁷



Anna and Maria Tesselschade Roemersdr. Visscher as presented on a painting by Petrus Kremer, 1827 (fragment).

With regard to their literary reception, all the other women writers do not get much further than having their names mentioned in poems of praise dedicated to all women, such as the poem 'De vrouwen' (The women) written by H.A. Spandaw in 1807 and published in an extended version in 1819, or the song of praise 'Aan de vaderlandse vrouwen' (To the women of our fatherland) that Petronella Moens dedicated to her fellow female citizens in 1819.⁸

⁵ The first printed evidence for the attribution of these epithets to the sisters is a poem by Constantijn Huygens written in 1620, on the occasion of the death of Roemer Visscher, the father of Anna and Tesselschade Roemers. See Huygens 1892, vol.1, p.195. Huygens' characterization was revived by Scheltema 1808. This book became the most important source for 19th-century authors of Tesselschade-literature.

⁶ Visscher 1881. A recent attempt to relieve Anna Roemers from the clichés imposed on her and her oeuvre by the historiography of literature: Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1997.

⁷ Roemers 1994. This edition contains 32 poems, all her works that have been preserved. Her poetry is written in mannerist style and inspired by her contemporaries and literary friends Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft and Constantijn Huygens. Only ten of her poems were printed during her lifetime. Precedent of the 1994 edition is the anthology Worp 1918, in which J.A. Worp compiled letters and poems written by and addressed to Tesselschade Roemers. The 1994 edition is the first separate edition dedicated to her oeuvre. It contains texts that were not yet known in 1918, and in contrast to the Worp edition the poems are edited without the 'corrections' applied by contemporaries.

⁸ Moens 1819 mentions Betje Wolff, Aagje Deken, Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken, Katharina Schweickhardt, Fenna Mastenbroek and Francijntje de Boer. Her poem of praise is reprinted in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, 1997, p.751-753. According to the commentary by the contributor, Lia van

Readers who are not acquainted with Dutch literary history might ask ‘who was Maria Tesselschade Roemersdr. Visscher?’ An answer is given in Mieke Smits-Veldt’s biography that came out in 1994, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Tesselschade’s birth.⁹ Maria Tesselschade was born in 1594 and died in 1649. She grew up in Amsterdam in an atmosphere open to humanist thought and artistic expression. As a girl and a young woman, she was given the opportunity to develop her intellectual potential and her manifold talents. Her father, a wealthy merchant and a poet himself, was acquainted with the leading poets of the time. Already in the 17th century, Tesselschade Roemers was surrounded by admirers who praised her in poems and letters.

These texts, and with them the woman poet, supposedly a charming beauty, were rediscovered in the 19th century, when Maria Tesselschade became, as Mieke Smits puts it in her biography, ‘the idol of the whole nation’.¹⁰ Tesselschade Roemers was seen as the embodiment of a unique mixture of female qualities, talents and virtues. The 19th-century ideal of femininity was projected upon the historical person of the 17th century. The records concerning Tesselschade Roemers were selected and presented according to current needs. Biographical facts, the few poems and letters by her that had survived, letters written and poems dedicated to her by contemporaries, were interpreted in a way that allowed for the creation of the perfect example of a Dutch woman, a role model for all girls and women. The idol was not created by literature alone, however; painting and the historiography of literature also played important roles.¹¹ In this article, I have to limit myself to the literary image of Tesselschade Roemers, whereas in my forthcoming book I have also taken paintings and historiographical texts into consideration.¹²

Tesselschade Roemers’s literary achievements were not decisive for her fame, neither in the 17th century, nor in the 19th century; of much greater importance were her talent for singing and playing the lute, her skilfulness in all sorts of needlework, and, last but not least, her beauty and charm, with which she captivated many a male contemporary. As a character in 19th-century literature, Tesselschade Roemers personifies the harmony of artistic talent and female virtue. In the 19th century, these characteristics were generally considered incompatible. Artistic expression implies

Gemert, Moens followed the examples of M. Westerman: ‘De invloed der vrouwen op de vier tijdperken des levens’ (1816) and of H.A. Spandaw: ‘De vrouwen’ (for the latter, see the bibliography of primary sources). In the first edition of his poem published in 1807, he mentions 23 women authors, among them Petronella Moens and most of the poets included in her poem. After Jacobus Scheltema had found fault with the omission of Anna and Maria Tesselschade Roemers, Spandaw published an extended version of his text in which he dedicated 100 verses to the sisters. See the exposition catalogue *Maria Tesselschade*, no.98.

⁹ Smits-Veldt 1994; see also Nichols 1990, Schenkeveld 1991, or Stouten 1999. One poem by Tesselschade, and several by Anna Roemers have been reproduced, along with a translation in English, in Meijer 1998, p.50-58.

¹⁰ Smits-Veldt 1994, p.7.

¹¹ Cf. Scheltema 1808. About historical paintings of Tesselschade Roemers and her literary friends in the legendary ‘Muiderkring’, see: Smits-Veldt 1998.

¹² Leuker 2000a.

creativity, a characteristic which was regarded as exclusively male.¹³ Nonetheless, Tesselschade Roemers manages to reconcile the opposites, according to many fictional texts. These texts are to a great extent based on biographical facts, for Roemers led her life according to the demands of ideal femininity as formulated in the 17th as well as the 19th century. When she married, she set aside all the artistic pretensions to which she had dedicated her life until then. She became an honourable, true and devoted wife and a caring mother. After the death of her husband, she lived as a chaste widow in the spirit of the much-read, influential moralist Jacob Cats.¹⁴ She never remarried. However, during the last fifteen years of her life, she found time to take up writing again. Thus, her life history can be divided into three phases: first she follows her artistic leanings, then she fulfils her female duties, and finally she lives under conditions that allow her to combine both. Her life history can be regarded as a reconciliation of artistic creativity with female duties. This pattern is taken up by the fiction concerning Tesselschade Roemers. In particular, Andriessen's novel *De Muiderkring* (The circle of [the castle of] Muiden, 1868), a book for young people, as well as the biographical sketch 'Maria Tesselschade Roemers' (1853) and the essay 'De liefdesgeschiedenissen van twee Nederlandse dichters' (The love stories of two Dutch poets, 1871) by Alberdingk Thijm present her *curriculum vitae* as exemplary. For the authors of these and all the other texts it is a matter of concern to emphasize that Tesselschade Roemers is an artist and at the same time a woman in the true 19th-century sense of the word.¹⁵

Another recurring feature is Tesselschade Roemers' integration into a network of social relations. As an artist and a woman, she is defined by her personal ties. She is shown as a daughter, a sister, a wife, and most frequently, as a friend. Her most prominent friends were the great Dutch poets of her time: Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, Constantijn Huygens and Joost van den Vondel. The records that have come down to us, in particular the correspondence, confirm a lifelong friendship between Hooft and Tesselschade Roemers. Like other friends of the Hooft family, she frequently visited him and his wife in Muiden castle, their summer residence near Amsterdam.¹⁶ But literature goes far beyond historical evidence: 19th-century fiction tries to create a Dutch *Hôtel de Rambouillet* by inventing the 'circle of Muiden'. Hooft and his friends, poets and intellectuals, were said to have met regularly in Muiden castle and to have combined their efforts to improve Dutch language and literature.¹⁷ The texts place Tesselschade Roemers in the centre of this circle: she is 'de ziel van het gezelschap' (the soul of the party) or 'de spil waarom onze kring draait' (the axis

¹³ Streng 1997, p.10-17. Streng's argumentation is mainly based on Karin Hausen's research on the polarization of gender in the 19th century (Hausen 1976).

¹⁴ Smits-Veldt 1994, p.109.

¹⁵ In the second chapter of Andriessen 1868, Roemers is introduced as a versatile artist: poet, painter and sculptor, moreover knowing Latin, Greek and needlework (p.29). In chapter eleven, the readers get the opportunity to visit the home of Allard Crombalch and his wife Maria Tesselschade. Here the narrator emphasizes Roemers' housewifely qualities (p.184).

¹⁶ Smits-Veldt 1994, p.49-66.

¹⁷ See Spies 1984; Leuker 1995, and recently Smits-Veldt 1998.

around which our circle rotates).¹⁸ As a fictional character, Tesselschade deliberately devotes all her artistic skills to the service of the circle of her friends: she weaves garlands to decorate the great hall of Muiden castle, she sings to entertain the friends gathered there, she engraves the glasses out of which they drink wine. The authors of historical literature drew all these details from the correspondence of Tesselschade Roemers' friends and used them to illustrate her unique combination of artistic and female qualities. In particular, in the plays *Maria Tesselschade Visscher op het slot te Muiden* (Visscher at Muiden castle, 1819) by Adrianus Beeloo and *Een Amsterdamsche winteravond* (An Amsterdam winter evening, 1832) by Jacob van Lennep, as well as in Andriessen's novel *De Muiderkring*, Tesselschade Roemers is presented as a 'virtuosa of sociability'. This is a title conferred on women of polite society by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, indicating the appropriate field for women to develop their artistic abilities.¹⁹

The creation of a harmonious atmosphere appears to be the most important task of the 'virtuosa of sociability'. If contrasting tempers or conflicting opinions clash, Tesselschade Roemers manages to reconcile them. In this respect, the fictional 'circle of Muiden' shows a gendered division of labour. The men release centrifugal energy: they argue, they display their genius and individuality, they compete with each other. In contrast, Tesselschade acts as the centripetal force of the circle. She employs her artistic talents and her female virtues to harmonize the discord in selfless service to her male friends. The novel *Het leven van Hillegonda Buisman* (The life of H. Buisman, 1814) by Adriaan Loosjes, and Beeloo's play *Maria Tesselschade Visscher op het slot te Muiden* allude to the well-known tensions between Hooft and Vondel that arose after Vondel's conversion to the Catholic faith, which, in the novel and in the drama, give Maria Tesselschade the opportunity to mediate between the two poets in order to restore the unanimity within the circle of literary friends.

Tesselschade Roemers' image as a fictional character has had far-reaching consequences. In the 19th century, she was admitted to the literary canon, but above all as a friend of poets and not in the first place as a poet herself. Publications concerning her life and work always surround her with her contemporaries outshining her in poetic fame. 'Maria Tesselschade and her literary friends' is a recurrent title, from the 19th century up to the present, and a look at the historiography of Dutch literature during the past 150 years confirms this impression. Roemers is not presented as an individual character, but as a character in relation to others in 17th-century literary life.²⁰

¹⁸ Scheltema's characterization of Roemers as 'de ziel van het gezelschap' is quoted by i.a. Andriessen. See Scheltema 1808, p.53 and Andriessen 1868, p.71. The admiring description of Tesselschade Roemers as 'de spil, waarom onze kring draait' is put into the mouth of P.C. Hooft by Jacques Perk (Perk 1902, p.224).

¹⁹ Schleiermacher's remark 'Zufolge des Geschlechtscharakters sind die Frauen die Virtuosinnen in dem Kunstgebiet der freien Geselligkeit' is quoted by Frevert 1995, p.152.

²⁰ One of the first anthologies which made texts by Tesselschade available for 19th-century readers is entitled *Tesselschade Roemers en hare vrienden in 1632-1649* (Van Vloten 1852). Likewise, Worp 1918 presents her as inseparable from the circle of her literary friends. And even the exhibition on the occa-

So far, I have sketched what could be called the ‘standard version’ of the Tesselschade myth of the 19th century. But there was another version of that myth which entered into competition with the standard version. The ‘father’ of that alternative myth was the Catholic writer Joseph Albert Alberdingk Thijm. In contrast to the common Protestant myth of the circle of Muiden, a group of famous people which had in its centre Tesselschade Roemers as a devoted friend, Alberdingk Thijm did his best to establish Joost van den Vondel, the most famous Dutch poet, and Tesselschade Roemers as a couple of mythical heroes united in spiritual friendship and jointly devoted to literature and to the Catholic faith. Thijm’s efforts to establish Vondel and Roemers as a mythical couple must be seen in the context of the demand of Dutch Catholics to be integrated into the Dutch nation that until then had been exclusively and intimately linked with Protestantism. Thijm was a very important cultural spokesman for the Catholics. Writing historical novellas was only one of his various activities.²¹

It was Thijm who added the most and the most substantial contributions to the list of texts that constitute the Tesselschade myth.²² Also in his version, Tesselschade Roemers is a character in relation to someone else. Since his study of the sources had convinced Thijm that she had been a Catholic all her life, he lets Tesselschade lend Vondel her support during the difficult time of his conversion to the Catholic faith.²³ As an artist, she depends on Vondel. Under his guidance, she translates Torquato Tasso’s epic *Gerusalemme liberata* from Italian into Dutch.²⁴ Thijm’s point of view reflects the then current opinion concerning women’s poetical competence: like his contemporaries, he does not believe that women are capable of autonomous creativity. And with respect to Tesselschade Roemers, he would not even find that capability desirable, because this would mean that she could be regarded as a learned woman, a ‘bluestocking’. In his essay ‘De liefdesgeschiedenissen van twee Nederlandsche dichters’, Thijm rejects the contemporary cliché of the learned Tesselschade Roemers. She was not at all ‘a woman forever with ink-spots on her cold and clammy fingertips’, he argues: her kindness alone would already have made this impossible.²⁵ In a very agreeable way, she stands out against her contemporary Anna Maria van Schurman, who was praised as a wonder of erudition during the 17th century.²⁶ Thijm’s contrasting valuation of the two women reflects the 19th-century ideology concerning female gender. Learned women are disapproved of because their

sion of the 400th anniversary of her birth in 1994 was entitled *Maria Tesselschade en haar literaire vrienden*, whereas Smits-Veldt’s biography published in the same year also uses the motif of friendship: *Maria Tesselschade. Leven met talent en vriendschap* (Smits-Veldt 1994). The current handbooks of Dutch literary history refer to Tesselschade Roemers primarily as a friend and only secondarily as a poet.

²¹ See, for example, Van der Plas 1995.

²² See the bibliography of primary sources.

²³ Alberdingk Thijm 1876, p.80-86, 94-98.

²⁴ Alberdingk Thijm 1853, p.263 and 282; 1871, p.262-263; 1876, p.19 and 38-42; 1879, p.324-334.

²⁵ Alberdingk Thijm 1871, p.257.

²⁶ See about the life, the works and the reception of Anna Maria van Schurman: De Baar et al. 1992.

intellectuality contradicts female qualities such as passiveness, modesty and emotionality. Since the second half of the 18th century, women (in the Netherlands and in other Western-European countries) are supposed to be 'schöne Seelen', 'beautiful souls', who above all distinguish themselves by their moral integrity, and not by their cultural productivity.²⁷ The 'bluestocking' is the unfeminine counterpart of the 'beautiful soul'. This can be read about for example in the anonymous brochure *De blaauwkous of hoe geleerder hoe verkeerder* (The bluestocking, or, the more learned, the more errant) that came out in 1854. And the 19th-century writer Jacob van Lennep takes the same line when he jokes that he knows nothing more unbearable than a learned woman, except for *two* learned women.²⁸ This attitude is adopted not only towards women poets from the past, but also towards women writers from the 19th century. Much evidence can be found in the book reviews and the other source material analyzed by Toos Streng as well as by Lia van Gemert, Ans Veltman-van den Bos and Arie Jan Gelderblom.²⁹

Thijm is not the only author who feels obliged to defend Tesselschade Roemers against the suspicion of being a 'bluestocking'. In the novel *De Muiderkring*, Andriessen stresses that she was a domestic rather than a learned woman.³⁰ Obviously, they both based their argumentation on the treatise *Anna en Maria Tesselschade, de dochters van Roemer Visscher*, the first academic study on the Visscher-sisters published by Jacobus Scheltema in 1808. Scheltema used his source material to illustrate his subjective and sometimes speculative ideas about the Visscher sisters. The Tesselschade myth originated in his book. Scheltema comes to the conclusion that Tesselschade and her sister Anna 'both used their outstanding intellectual gifts for the best purposes and ornamented them with moral purity based on godfearing principles and modesty' and that 'they remained women and never transgressed the boundaries of their nature like the so-called Savantes; they both followed the high vocation and became wives and mothers'.³¹ Eighty years later, Jonckbloet, the author of the first academic encyclopedia on the history of Dutch literature, uses nearly the same words. After he has enumerated the various talents of Anna and Maria Tesselschade, he adds: 'Nevertheless, they were no pedantic bluestockings'. He quotes Van Lennep, who characterized them as kind and endearing girls skilfully entertaining their guests with sometimes merry, sometimes edifying, conversation.³² For the rest, Jonckbloet is not very enthusiastic about the quality of literature by women writers. He mainly contents himself with mentioning some names and with the statement: 'Our country has never lacked female rhymesters, but most of the ladies do not at all better their brothers in art, so we shall not dwell on them'.³³

²⁷ Bovenschen 1979, p.158-164, 194, 200f.; Streng 1997, p.14, 48-53, 72.

²⁸ Streng 1997, p.51.

²⁹ Streng 1997; Gelderblom 1997 and Van Gemert/Veltman-van den Bos 1997.

³⁰ See above, note 15.

³¹ Scheltema 1808, p.63-64.

³² Jonckbloet 1889-92, vol.III p.317.

³³ Id., vol.IV., p.173.

Except for the Visscher sisters, only Betje Wolff, the author of famous epistolary novels which she wrote together with her friend Aagje Deken at the end of the 18th century, seems worthy of a chapter of her own. However, she is also characterized in the usual stereotypical way: 'Don't think that she was a pedantic bluestocking. Far from it! She never neglected her female duties and did not consider it beneath her dignity to do the laundry'(!)³⁴

Like Jonckbloet, Thijm accepted no female poet except for Maria Tesselschade Roemers, to whom he was devoted in true admiration. In one of his novellas, three women writers appear, who are characterized as opposites to Tesselschade Roemers, the virtuous woman artist. The novella is called 'Eenige Hollandsche vrouwen der XVIII eeuw' (Some Dutch women from the 18th century) and features Agatha Maria Sena, Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken and Sara Maria van der Wilp.³⁵ In a dedicatory poem belonging to the text, Thijm calls them 'the 18th-century guild, blue-stocked to the teeth, walking along arid paths'.³⁶ His aversion to the 'unnaturalness' of these women poets, as well as to the affected mannerism of their writings, is so strong that he doubts whether the story he is going to tell about them will be attractive enough for his readers. He is afraid that his novella will not equal Molière's comedies about the 'Précieuses ridicules' and the 'Femmes savantes'.³⁷ Sara Maria van der Wilp is presented as a precocious moralist in love with a good-for-nothing fellow who is constantly running after actresses and domestic servants, but never considers marrying her. The narrator seems to be torn between sympathy and contempt for her as a woman who wasted her best years on a lost cause, whereas he does not seem to worry very much about the man's behaviour.³⁸ In her later years, Van der Wilp becomes the laughing stock of the whole world of literature because she has her collected poems printed with a portrait depicting her in a very low-cut dress and with an extravagant hairstyle at the age of 55.³⁹ Thijm is convinced that, had she found someone to marry her, she would have been saved from such foolishness.⁴⁰ Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken did find a husband: at the age of 47 she married the merchant and poet Nicolaas Simon van Winter. In Thijm's novella, she appears as a close friend of Van Winter and his first wife Johanna Muhl. When Lucretia comes to visit them in the evening, she and Van Winter retire to his office, 'where the atmosphere is full of alexandrines and tobacco smoke', for the next few hours. Meanwhile, Van Winter's wife is spending the evening in the 'normal' female manner: having

³⁴ Jonckbloet quotes from Wolff's *Winter-Buitenleven* (1774) (Jonckbloet 1889-91, vol. iv, p. 243).

³⁵ See bibliography of primary sources. Bio-bibliographical information about the three women can be found in: *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p. 499-502 (Agatha Maria Sena, 1692-1772?, contribution Els Stronks), 561-564 (Sara Maria van der Wilp, 1716-1803, contribution Ton van Strien), 572-579 (Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken, 1721-1789, contribution Marijke Meijer Drees).

³⁶ Thijm dedicates his novella to Louise Stratenus (1852-1908), a writer of poetry and novels, who was a friend of him and his daughter Catharina (Alberdingk Thijm, 1883, p. 60).

³⁷ Id., p. 62.

³⁸ Id., p. 76-81.

³⁹ Id., p. 94-98. Reprints of the portraits are to be found in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p. 562.

⁴⁰ Id., p. 93-94.

tea in the living room together with her girl-friends, reading some pages from fashionable novels and knitting another pair of stockings.⁴¹ The opposition between the office as 'male sphere' and the living room as 'female sphere' which is constructed here implies a disapproval of Lucretia van Merken's behaviour as 'unnatural' for a woman. The narrative strategy of contrasting female characters is not only applied in the passage quoted above, but is characteristic of the whole text. The 'bluestockings' Sara Maria van der Wilp and Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken are confronted with the 'beautiful souls' Wilhelmina van der Wilp, Sara's sister, and Johanna Muhl, Van Winter's first wife. Of course, the text explicitly takes the part of the women represented as 'beautiful souls'.

When the narrator introduces the Van der Wilp sisters, he stresses how different they are. While Sara is characterized by her intellectual capacities and the artificiality of her behaviour, Wilhelmina's physical beauty and naturalness are emphasized. Sara's unfeminine 'presumptuous wisdom', the self-assurance with which she is constantly moralizing and giving advice, especially to her younger sister, will, according to the narrator, make it difficult for her to find a husband. In contrast to her, her sister Wilhelmina, 'young, merry and natural', 'an enchanting brunette' showing her shining teeth and her radiant eyes whenever she smiles, is depicted as every man's dream.⁴²

Wilhelmina van der Wilp and Johanna Muhl personify the type of woman that every man, and especially a poet, needs as his counterpart: practical, content with the enjoyments of everyday life, tolerant of artistic excentricity and a patient audience for poetry, even if it sometimes turns out badly.⁴³ And it is especially literature written by women that, according to the narrator, tends to have an unintentionally comic effect.

On the occasion of Johanna Muhl's death, Wilhelmina van der Wilp and Lucretia van Merken give examples of a more and a less 'natural' way of mourning. After Johanna has breathed her last, the 'beautiful soul' Wilhelmina remains lying in front of the deathbed in deep sorrow with her forehead on one hand of the deceased. Lucretia van Merken arrives too late. After having found her friend Johanna to be dead, the 'bluestocking' does not waste any time shedding tears, but rushes into the office of Nicolaas van Winter and presents to him a copy of her book *Het nut der tegenspoeden* (The benefit of misfortune), a gift which is meant as a consolation.⁴⁴

In a concluding statement, Thijm regrets that the charm and the character of some of the women he sketched suffered so much from the talent for writing with which they believed themselves to be gifted. If only they had not believed in a vocation as poets, but had followed their true female vocation! He apologizes to his characters for tearing down the distinguished veil with which the 18th century had invested them, and commends them to the lenient judgment of his readers.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Id., p.91.

⁴² Id., p.68.

⁴³ Id., p.85-86.

⁴⁴ Id., p.92.

⁴⁵ Id., p.99.

If we compare the way in which women poets are depicted in this novella with the fictional characterization of Tesselschade Roemers by Thijm and other authors, we can discern a fundamental difference. The female characters in 'Eenige Hollandsche vrouwen der XVIII eeuw' embody binary oppositions: a woman with the qualities of a 'beautiful soul' is not creative, and a creative woman lacks the 'beauty of the soul' and becomes a 'bluestocking'. The fictional character Tesselschade, however, reconciles the oppositional qualities: she is an artist and at the same time a 'beautiful soul'. She stands out in artistic talent and skill, as well as in female virtue and beauty. The narrator of the novella 'Eenige Hollandsche vrouwen der XVIII eeuw' blames his female protagonists for their mediocrity with regard to these qualities. The label 'bluestocking' indicates a devastating appraisal of women who fail to live up to male standards of (female) perfection in varied respects.

I wonder how 19th-century women writers may have reacted to Thijm's manner of depicting their forerunners. Or did they not regard them as their forerunners at all? Except for Cornelia Nozeman's poem and for Betsy Perk's sketch of Tesselschade Roemers, in which she exhibits a rather conventional view of women and writing – either poetry, or marriage and family⁴⁶ – I have found no literary text about a Dutch woman writer *by* a Dutch woman writer. The question of whether women writers of the 19th century drew their role models from the history of their national literature needs further investigation. For the most famous and most productive female novelist of the 19th century, Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint, this question can be answered in the negative. As Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has recently pointed out, Bosboom-Toussaint strongly resented the female tradition of domestic novels that she had been brought up with. Instead, she chose 'male' subjects – war, politics, adventure – and was at her best when shaping a male character. She was an author writing for readers, not a woman writing for women.⁴⁷ I agree with Riet Schenkeveld's interpretation of Bosboom-Toussaint's oeuvre as an example of 'écriture masculine'. In the terms that I have used in this lecture, Bosboom-Toussaint certainly does not create for herself the image of a 'beautiful soul', but exposes herself to the danger of being regarded as a 'bluestocking'. Perhaps this is why Jonckbloet hardly ever mentions her in his history of Dutch literature. He refuses to accept her image of herself as a writer of historical novels among male colleagues, and only mentions her name together with that of the less famous Adèle S.C. von Antal-Opzoomer, who published under the pseudonym A.S.C. Wallis. 'Between these two', he proceeds, 'the names of various gifted female novelists could be inserted, but I would rather withhold them than risk missing one of them out.'⁴⁸ And this is all he has to say about the subject! In spite of Jonckbloet's more or less subtle attempt to exclude her from the history of Dutch literature, Bosboom-Toussaint made her way into the literary canon. Her

⁴⁶ Perk [1873], p.27.

⁴⁷ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1996.

⁴⁸ Jonckbloet 1889-92, vol.vi, p.247. Jonckbloet dedicates several chapters to Oltmans, Drost and Van Lennep, male authors of historical fiction, but only this one sentence to Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint.

strategy was not to reconcile artistic talent and female virtue, but to write 'male' literature as a female writer. Perhaps this paradoxical strategy is the secret of her canonization.

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