

## The weight of a laurel-crown: the future of Dutch early modern women writers

Compiling an anthology of Dutch women writers between 1550 and 1850, called *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*,<sup>1</sup> has been a very interesting task. At first, the 26 Dutch and Flemish contributors did not expect to find very much material because the Dutch and Flemish countries form a relatively small area, but in the course of the project they became accustomed to finding ever more facts and to developing many hypotheses based on them. There was at least one profitable consequence of this. When the book appeared, it was so huge and heavy that it could hardly be overlooked. However, this created a countereffect. Dutch and Flemish bookstores were not so eager to put *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* onto their shelves, including women's bookstores. Apparently, even proprietors of women's bookstores had not reckoned that their own past has its 'monuments of maidens' too.

In this paper various responses to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* in the Dutch media are discussed. They will lead to some thoughts on future investigations concerning women writers. Finally, the problem of extending projects like these for a broader audience will be considered.

### The Dutch media

*Met en zonder lauwerkrans* was given a good deal of attention in Dutch daily newspapers and cultural magazines, where both professional reviewers and professional scholars gave their impression for a broad public.<sup>2</sup> Most reactions were positive. The majority of the reviewers were women. This indicates not only that women conduct

<sup>1</sup> In 1997, a survey on women painters in the Republic was published too (Kloek et al. 1997). I thank Annelies de Jeu, G.R.W. Dibbets and Frank van Wijk for their help in collecting the work of Elisabeth van den Heuvel. I also thank Annelies de Jeu for her information on some material in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Some 40 reactions appeared in magazines, newspapers etc., among them the influential Dutch daily journals *De Volkskrant* (K. Fens, 8 December 1997) and *NRC Handelsblad* (M. Meijer, 16 January 1998), and the weekly magazine *Vrij Nederland* (A. van den Oever, 28 March 1998). Also, some 10 radio programmes paid attention to the book. Within a year reviews were published in some scholarly journals: *Neder-L* 7 February 1998 (M. Smolenaars); *Historica* 21/2, 1998 (D. Sturkenboom); *Literatuur* 15/3, 15/5, 1998 (N. Noordervliet/J. Stouten); *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 114-4, 1998 (T. Streng/A. van Toorn); *Boekmancahier* 10-37, 1998 (S. Janssen); *Nederlandse letterkunde* 3-4, 1998 (M. de Baar); *Tijdschrift voor genderstudies* 1-4, 1998 (S. van Dijk).

the prominent research in this field, but also that men still rather leave this tricky business to the other sex.

Most critics were amazed that so many women writers had been active in early modern times, and they were even more surprised when they realized how many had been left out of the book. We left out a number of authors, partly because only printed material has been selected, and partly because beyond some point – about a year before publication of the book – no new names were added any more, unless someone turned out to be a striking case of female authorship.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the reactions combined astonishment with praise. In brief, the critics especially applauded the way in which the vast amount of new names was brought to life: their writings are now – at least partly – accessible, while the short essays on lives and ideas give an adequate description of the authors, along with the many portraits and other illustrations. In addition, the thematic introduction provides a lucid analysis of 300 years of female authorship in the Northern and Southern Netherlands. This positive reception makes it clear that one of the contributors' goals has been reached. They wanted a book that would not only be read by professional historians of literature, but that also would be interesting for other colleagues within the field of history, literature and women's studies, and preferably also for the large but rather unknown group of general readers. The reactions confirm a certain level of accessibility.<sup>4</sup>

But this does not mean that the problem of reaching a wider circle has been solved. Again, the reactions illustrate this. Although the critics praised the thematical introduction, they found it hard to jump forward and back in time, meanwhile having to remember names and dates of unknown people. Some suggestions for an alternative order were made, for instance a totally thematic one.<sup>5</sup> An additional problem is how to hold up this colossal book in order to read it. Simply reading *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* almost immediately becomes studying. More than once reviewers suggested that a pocket edition would be very helpful, especially for teaching purposes. Such an edition would be even more fruitful if it appeared in English, containing both the original texts and translations.<sup>6</sup> The point of reaching a broader audience will be discussed again at the end of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Like Meynarda Verboom, who severely criticized the famous Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel, for his play *Adam in ballingschap* (Adam in exile, 1664). Vondel was a leading author, especially in the field of tragedy, praised by many of his colleagues. Not many people dared to gibe at him. See *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, p.304-312 (Contribution Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen) and Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Streng/Van Toorn (note 2) would have preferred a more scholarly study with elaborated theoretical questions, footnotes etc. De Baar (note 2) remarked that the book halted between two intentions: a study and an anthology. She also pointed out the risk of reproducing the old but unproductive antithesis between women's and men's literature. One critic, Monica Soeting (*Surplus* 12/2, 1998) even saw the book as a superseded and old-fashioned confusion of biological aspects with qualities of art. Soeting's opinion was severely countered by Elsbeth Etty in *NRC Handelsblad* (9 March 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Sturkenboom (note 2). Furthermore, a subject index would certainly have been helpful to facilitate browsing through the book.

<sup>6</sup> Meijer 1998, a bilingual anthology entitled *The defiant Muse*, presents poetry by 45 Dutch and Flemish women from the Middle Ages to the present.

## Literature and sociability

Another topic arising from the reactions is the question of completeness. A few suggestions about missing sources have been made.<sup>7</sup> To some extent it is possible to predict what kind of material is still to be found. Considering the southern part of the Dutch-speaking Low Countries (Flanders; today part of Belgium), there may be a number of names from the 17th and 18th century hidden in church archives that are not yet accessible. However, our knowledge of the cultural situation in Flanders seems to indicate that 'new' authors will not differ very much from the religious women in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*. Of course, further research has to prove this point. For the northern part of the Netherlands, the Dutch Republic, the situation is more complex, as women writers there produced lyrical poetry, drama and prose fiction.

Striking aspects of – at least Dutch – women's literature are its links with networks of writers (of both sexes) and its conversational character. This goes especially for the many occasional poems. In fact, quite a number of women were discovered *because* they wrote a dedication poem to praise a new book of a friend. Tracing such a poem often meant tracing more poetry, for instance on the occasions of birthdays, weddings and funerals.

This kind of verse underlines the communicative character of early modern poetry, and from a number of papers in this book it can be seen that the Dutch were not alone here: throughout Europe poetry reflected communication. This also makes it possible to reconstruct social circles of acquaintances. My impression is that in the Republic these networks almost always consisted of a number of males (a majority) and a few females (the minority).<sup>8</sup>

It will be useful to continue this kind of investigation. To illustrate this, I focus attention here on Elisabeth van den Heuvel, a 17th-century widow of a clergyman, probably living in The Hague, the city where the affairs of central government of the Republic were conducted.<sup>9</sup> Van den Heuvel is one of the authors who was not included in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, because she turned up after the closing date

<sup>7</sup> Van Dijk pointed to the Heinemeyer archive in Leyden, containing mainly 18th-century material (see note 2; see also Hochstenbach/Singeling 1988). Other new material was presented by De Jeu in *Musaeus* (5-4, 1998). It concerns the Flemish Everarde van Gent (around 1653), and Cornelia Steengracht from Middelburg (around 1702). The *Musaeus* editors also elaborate on Helena Smunnix (?-1733; Zwijndrecht and Dordrecht), Grietje van Dijk (Leiden) and Johanna Corleva (Amsterdam). (For copies of *Musaeus*: B. Thijs, Prins Bernhardstraat 4, 3171 CP Poortugaal, The Netherlands.) Streng/Van Toorn (note 2) mention three writers from the early 19th century: Ernestine van Beijeren (alias Lucretia Tornaar), and the two Boëseken sisters, all authors of historical novels. G.J. Schutte and V. Pieters focus on Aletta Beck, who in the early 18th century left Arnhem to live in South Africa (*Zuid-Afrika* 74-9 (1997), 75-2 (1998), 75-3 (1998)). Furthermore, we did not explore daily newspapers. Political poetry by women can be found there, for instance in the revolutionary decade 1790-1800 (i.a. J.J. van Haren-Beaumont (*Haagsche Courant* 1798, January 10, July 4)). With thanks to Peter Altena and Hans Ester.

<sup>8</sup> Annelies de Jeu is preparing a Ph.D. thesis on literary networks, which will appear in 2000. She has already shown that the literary starting point leads to intellectual, political, religious and economic networks, not only in big cities like Amsterdam, but also around the cities of Groningen and Leeuwarden. See De Jeu 1996, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Her date of birth probably was 7 February 1631, as can be concluded from the poems by her friend Vollenhove (Vollenhove 1686, p.207-209 and 539-540, see note 11). In 1659 she married Johannes de Carpentier, clergyman at Barendrecht, near Rotterdam. He died in 1660 or 1661. According to one of

for admission. With a few variations, the works of this author fit into the pattern of conversational lyrics directed to friends. We become acquainted with her when she publishes some religious work of her husband after his death. This indicates a relatively independent lifestyle; otherwise she seems to be a self-conscious widow too, truly pious but not satisfied to be a perfect housekeeper like the biblical Martha. From 1665 to 1695 Van den Heuvel produced some 40 poems.<sup>10</sup> The word ‘produce’ is used here intentionally, because many verses are of the type ‘variations on a theme’, or even: ‘variations on one occasion’. Her friend Johannes Vollenhove, a poet himself, once thanked her ironically for the great quantity of poems she produced on the occasion of his birthday.<sup>11</sup> Quantity is a dominant element in Van den Heuvel’s work: in mourning someone’s death, seven or more variations are no exception. The same goes for poems of praise, especially a series of more than 20 on the Royal family of William III and his wife Mary Stuart. Obviously, writing meant playing with language: besides the variations on a theme, one finds many examples of word play in anagrams and acrostics. And letter games seem to have been a speciality: almost every name is shifted into a sentence. She used four devices herself, all derived from her name: ‘Belust na de lieve Haven’ (Longing for sweet Heaven) and ‘Helt Jesu dau val(t) beneen’ (Lord Jesus, inspire us), plus two variations on the last one.<sup>12</sup>

Van den Heuvel’s work has a religious character. Apart from many references to the Scriptures, there are allusions to sermons and poetry by several clergymen, colleagues of her late husband. Maybe they paved her way to a writer’s network. The most important of these clergymen is the above-mentioned Johannes Vollenhove.<sup>13</sup> He was a poet from the ‘second level’ and showed great admiration for the great Dutch model Joost van den Vondel. In fact Vollenhove imitated Vondel so often that he was ironically called ‘his son’. Whether Van den Heuvel caught this fever too is doubtful. She wrote a poem on the melody of the famous Vondel-song ‘O Kerst-

the Dutch biographical lexicons, Van den Heuvel may have had a son, Casparus (*Nieuw Nederlands biographisch woordenboek* vol.II, p. 300). We do not know when she died.

<sup>10</sup> So far poems have been found in J. de Carpentier, *De bruyloft des Lams [...]* (The wedding of the Lamb). Amsterdam 1662; J. Vollenhove, *Afscheit [...]* (Good-bye). The Hague 1666; *Verscheide lykdichten [...]* *Simonides* (Funeral poems on Simonides). The Hague 1675 (Knuttel’s pamphlet catalogue nr. 11362); *Zions herten-leet [...]* (The grieve of Sion). The Hague 1681 (Knuttel’s pamphlet catalogue nr. 11791); *Vorstelyke eertrap [...]* 1660 [...] tot 1688 (Royal stairway from 1660 to 1688). The Hague 1689 (Knuttel’s pamphlet catalogue nr. 13287); *Vorstelyke helden victory-kroon [...]* (Crown of victory for royal heroes). The Hague 1695 (Knuttel’s pamphlet catalogue nr. 14036); *’t Ontstelde Europa* (Europe upset). The Hague 1695 (Knuttel’s pamphlet catalogue nr. 14088).

<sup>11</sup> In 1679 Vollenhove wrote: ‘Vriendin, die ons verplicht/ En sticht met dicht op dicht’ (Friend, we are obliged to you, because of the many edifying poems you send us). Apparently Vollenhove did not always send a birthday poem, although he regularly received one from her. He apologizes: ‘[...] menigvuldig/ Vont myn gemoet zich schuldig/ Aan uw goet hart voorheen./ Als myn verjaaron scheen’ (Often, I felt guilty towards your good heart when my birthday came). J. Vollenhove, *Poëzy*. (Lyrical verse) Amsterdam, 1686, p.207 (also p.539-540).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Jesu dau helt val beneen’ and ‘Jesu dau val helt beneen’.

<sup>13</sup> Van den Heuvel mentions for instance (in her words): Vollenhove’s *Paessang*, *Cruys-triumph*, *Christi ballingschap*, and Sluyter’s *Triumpherende Christus* (Eastern song; Triumph on the cross; The exile of Christ; Christ in victory). Among the sermons are those of Vollenhove, Simonides and Lantman. On Vollenhove see especially Dibbets 1991.

nacht' – from the play *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637)<sup>14</sup> –, but for a thorough assessment of Vondel's influence more research is necessary. The same holds for the question whether Van den Heuvel had access to poetry from others in the Vollenhove-milieu of Vondel-epigones, for instance Geeraerdt Brandt, Joan Antonides van der Goes and Katharina Lescailje. Maybe she preferred to stick to the closer circle of personal acquaintances. In that way she also may have avoided entering religiously dangerous domains; after all Vondel was a Roman Catholic.

Thus, Van den Heuvel assumed a marginal position in a network around Vollenhove, who himself played his part in a group around Vondel. Again – as has been shown many times in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* – poetry sheds light on social contacts in the Republic. There, ambitious women could enter poetic circles. Even literature itself sprang from contacts and networks. My impression is that isolated individuals never published anything, and maybe writing itself was directly connected with intellectual contacts. To take up writing, one had to be a member of some network or other. Regarding Dutch literature, this thesis may hold very well until 1850. And I think this is also a key to poetry throughout early modern Western Europe.

The thesis that writing was connected with social networks can also be tested on material other than lyrical verse, for instance drama. *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* has shown that Dutch women only hesitatingly entered this genre. It brought them out in the open and it took a certain level of intellectual acumen. This goes especially for tragedies, the most esteemed form of drama: it was not until about the middle of the 18th century that women started contributing texts of their own to this genre.<sup>15</sup> Before that, they merely chose the genre of comedy.

Furthermore, their plays were often translations out of French, English or German, or adaptations based on translations, like Catharina Questiers' *D'ondanckbare Fulvius, en de getrouwe Octavia* (The ungrateful Fulvius and the faithful Octavia), originally a Spanish comedy.<sup>16</sup> It served as the opening play for the rebuilt Amsterdam theatre in 1665. Ten years before, another comedy by Questiers had been performed, *Den geheymen minnaar* (The secret lover), an adaptation of *Si no vieran las mujeres* by Lope de Vega. Annelies de Jeu (1996) has shown that this piece was successful. Next year another one appeared: *Casimir, of gedempte hoogmoet* (Casimir or composed pride), adapted from a play by Antonio Enríquez Gómez. In her turn, Questiers

<sup>14</sup> 'Nasang, Op 't Wettig verkiesen der Majesteyten William en Maria [...]', 'Stem: O kersnagt'. *Vorstelyke eertrap*, p.23-24 (Song to the legal election of Their Majesties William and Mary, on the melody of the song 'O Holy Night'. In: Royal stairway).

<sup>15</sup> In Antwerp, Barbara Ogier (1648-1720) may have written original plays, serious and comic. In the Northern Netherlands, tragedies were adapted by, for instance, Katharina Lescailje (French) and Maria de Wilde (French, English and German). In 1745, Lucretia van Merken delivered her first tragedy, later to be followed by more plays and by other authors, like Juliana de Lannoy, Adriana van Overstraten, Maria van Zuylekom, Petronella Moens and Anna Barbara van Meerten-Schilperoort. See *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.391-395 (contribution Marc van Vaeck/Nicole Verhouft); p.396-402 (contribution Lia van Gemert); p.468-472 (contribution Annelies de Jeu); p.572-579 (contribution Marijke Meijer Drees); p.632-638 (contribution Pim van Oostrum); p.742-754, 707-714, 715-720 (contribution Lia van Gemert); p.784-792 (contribution Arie Jan Gelderblom). See also Gelderblom 1996, Van Gemert 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Maybe Questiers' play was adapted in German under the title *Die gedreue Octavia* (Zealous Octavia). See De Jeu 1996, p. 183.

may have been inspired and encouraged by her friend Katarina Verwers, whose *Spaensche heydin* (The Spanish pagan woman) had been performed already in 1644. As far as we know, this comedy, adapted from Miguel de Cervantes' popular *Gitanilla*, was the first play by a woman to be performed on the Amsterdam stage in the 17th century.

The drama material points in the same direction as the occasional lyrics. Again, in order to have one's plays performed, it was essential to be a member of a network. Only they who had contacts in circles around the theatre wrote plays. Besides Questiers and Verwers, Katharina Lescailje and Adriana van Rijndorp are special examples here. Lescailje owned a bookshop that was closely tied to the theatre and sold many plays; she herself translated plays from French. Van Rijndorp managed a theatre company of her own – the 'Duytse comedie' – in The Hague in the first half of the 18th century; she wrote a comedy for her company.<sup>17</sup>

But the drama material may also shed light on other sorts of literature, making it possible to predict what kind of work is still to be found. Looking at the performed plays written by women, it is striking that they are all based on Spanish originals and adapted from Dutch (or possibly sometimes French) prose translations. Thus, it is shown again that Dutch women confined themselves to the popular, but more lowly esteemed, trivial models.<sup>18</sup> Also the conversion from prose to verse is important: prose required much less technical skill than lyrics and often reflected the starting point of a career or modest aspirations – for both male and female writers. And a third point can be added: as we know, prints of plays did not always reveal their author. Concerning women, this is shown in the cases of Petronella Keyzers (around 1640), and Lucretia van Merken (a century later).<sup>19</sup>

Let us have a look at the third genre that was mentioned earlier: prose fiction. This kind of literature got a minor place in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*.

Concerning the novel, there seems to be a difference between France and the Netherlands, at least for the 18th century. In France, women began writing novels earlier than in the Dutch Republic, and it seems that they took more opportunities to bring specific women's themes to the fore. This has also been suggested concerning (English) Orientalism and the oriental tale of the 18th century: this new, exotic 'genre' provided women – and other 'marginal' groups like homosexuals – with the opportunity to develop their own forms.<sup>20</sup> To explain the difference between France and the Netherlands, certain factors have to be taken into account.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, 1997: p.316-321 (contribution Theanne de Boer/Lia van Gemert); p.240-243 (contribution Annelies de Jeu); p.396-402 (contribution Lia van Gemert); p.536-539 (contribution Nelleke Moser). On networks around the Amsterdam theatre see Grabowsky/Verkruijse 1996.

<sup>18</sup> See on the huge popularity but low official esteem for Spanish drama Smits-Veldt 1991 and De Haas 1996.

<sup>19</sup> See Van Vaeck 1996 and *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.213-218 (contribution Marc van Vaeck); p.572-579 (contribution Meijer Drees).

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Mack 1992, p.xvi-xvii; Melocarro 1992.

<sup>21</sup> See also Schenkeveld-van der Dussen's notions on the contrast between milieus of cities and provinces in France, and Van Dijk's paper, both elsewhere in this book.

The Dutch novel began its heyday relatively late, around 1780, with epistolary novels similar to Richardson's. Soon Wolff and Deken placed themselves in the forefront. They immediately took the opportunity to put a woman at the centre of their stories, and in this respect Elisabeth Post was soon to follow them. It is hard to tell whether Dutch women found their lives more or less problematic than those of foreign colleagues, but it is useful to remember that the Republic had been established on the humanistic philosophy of every individual making his or her own decisions within his or her domain. This philosophy took a kind of balanced model of responsibility and freedom as a basis for behaviour. Of course, this does not mean that women did not have specific problems, but possibly they were less acute than for women in other countries. Further, to denounce their situation, women seem to have chosen lyrical verse rather than prose fiction, as for instance Juliana de Lannoy and Elisabeth Post show.<sup>22</sup> Maybe before 1780 the Dutch novel was too little appreciated to be a serious channel for discussing women's themes. In this view it would have been just the epistolary novel that gave them more possibilities to draw attention to their case.

Before 1780, the prose circuit in Western Europe (for instance in the Netherlands, England and Germany) mainly consisted of 'spectatorial' essays and adventurous love novels, that often showed libertine elements. The problem here is that in most cases we have no idea who wrote them. Although a number of 'spectatorial' writers has been identified – among them two women, Wolff and Moens –, it is difficult to trace authors of anonymous novels, male or female. On this point there are not many results yet, and the recent bibliography of 18th-century prose fiction by Mateboer does not raise much hope.<sup>23</sup> From Mateboer's account we can see that foreign authors like Elizabeth Hamilton and Madeleine de Scudéry have been translated into Dutch, but by whom we mostly do not know. Likewise, up until now investigations into a great number of Dutch prose tales 'from the East' have revealed only a few women, the well-known Betje Wolff and one of the minor authors, Anna van Streek-Brinkman.<sup>24</sup> They both belonged to intellectual networks of a kind, and had to earn their living by writing. It is possible that more women will turn up among the translators,<sup>25</sup> although before 1780 literature does not seem to have been a common way to earn one's living, at least not for women. And the men who tried it, like Van Effen, Weyerman and Kersteman, were not very successful.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See *Lauwerkrans* 1997 p.632-638 (contribution Pim van Oostrum); p.696-706 (contribution Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen) and Van Gemert 1995.

<sup>23</sup> See Mateboer 1996. Altena (1997) argued that the author of *De Delfsche Juffer* (The young woman from Delft) (1758) may have been Franciscus L. Kersteman. He also made plausible that the leading character of the book, 'miss W\*\*' from Delft, was based on Willemijntje Wijnmalen (1729-?). In a letter, Altena suggested to me that the more private circuit was still important for women writers during the second half of the 18th century, as can be seen in *alba amicorum* and in local societies of poets ('dichtgenootschappen'). In my view this might indicate again that women in the Netherlands started to write serious prose fiction later than in adjacent countries.

<sup>24</sup> With thanks for this information to Christien Dohmen, who is preparing a Ph.D. thesis on this subject.

<sup>25</sup> See Kloek 1997. Mateboer mentions J.E. Geroe-de Gast (1996, nr. 1735).

<sup>26</sup> See Kuitert 1994 and Mathijssen 1996.

This does not mean that there is no prose material to be found any more. If we go back one century, we see a lot of religious meditational prose going together with the religious verse. To give just one example: Geertruida Sluiter published pious thoughts on the life of the soul in Amsterdam in 1685. This book was at least five times reprinted until 1741.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, we must be cautious: not every woman is a woman. In prose pamphlets for instance, male authors now and then use female pen-names to criticize political or religious matters. Authors of erotic 18th-century novels also disguised themselves as writers of women's memoirs.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, especially concerning so-called 'trivial' prose fiction, a lot of material is anonymous. And as history has told us before: the 'lower' someone sinks, the harder it is to retrieve him or her. It will be difficult to associate specific authors with anonymous works. In fact, it may be wise to shift the focus of attention from questions of authorship to problems of female and male point of view, introduced by either a female or a male author. At this point it is possible to benefit from results in other fields of women's history, for instance in the study of gender.

## The question of gender

Generally speaking, gender is not given very much attention in *Met en zonder lauw-erkrans*, except for the basic observation that women had fewer opportunities than men to participate in literary life. The gender observations do not go much beyond confirming the model of harmony that was dominant in the early modern period throughout Western Europe. Both sexes have their complementary tasks in keeping the world balanced, the man outside, the woman inside. Following this principle, explanations were offered for female docility and modesty, and for women's limited participation in literary affairs. There is certainly some truth in this. The concept of balance restricted the number of political works by women and resulted in their reluctance to write plays.<sup>29</sup>

But we have to find a way to get to other questions, like whether women really did not want to be their opponents' rivals, and what the consequences were of the so called 'double identity'.<sup>30</sup> The role of the rhetorical tradition will have to be taken

<sup>27</sup> I.C.S.V. [Geertruida Sluiter], *Het gee[s]telyk leven der ziele [...]* (The spiritual life of the soul). Amsterdam, 1685. De Jeu will explore this subject in her thesis.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance Anna Vlas-braeck, *Pannekoeck voor Sceperus op den Vastelavondt ofte Buurpraetje, Tusschen Grietje van Moordt, ende Annetje van Wenst-veen [...]* (Pancake for Sceperus on Shrove-Tuesday, or dialogue between neighbours Gretha Murderess and Ann Wishful). Gouda 1664 (Knuttel 776583). Baking her pancake, this so-called 'Anna Vlas-braeck' (her name indicating that she breaks the flax instead of neatly spinning it into a thread) comments on quarrels between clergymen from Gouda. Using the topsy-turvy world of Shrove-Tuesday, the author obviously hides behind the pen-name Vlas-braeck. This pattern shows itself often in 18th-century material too, for instance in titles like *De Engelsche Vrouwelyke Robinson [...]* *Volgens haar eigen Handschrift in het licht gegeven* (The English female Robinson, from her own diary) (Mateboer 1996, nr. 357), or *De Ongelukkige Wilhelmina [...]* *Door haar zelve beschreven* (Unlucky Wilhelmina, from her own diary) (Mateboer 1996, nr. 1184).

<sup>29</sup> See also Sneller 1996, Van Gemert 1998.

<sup>30</sup> See Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1996, Van Gemert/Veltman-van den Bos 1997, Gelderblom 1997, Streng 1997.



into account here, especially concerning the 17th century. For the Dutch material a thesis on this subject is currently being prepared by Simone Veld.<sup>31</sup> After 1700, the influence of rhetorical principles decreased, but Sturkenboom showed in her outstanding thesis that the stereotyping of (undesirable) passions – often linked to the female sex – did not.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, investigations into relatively new fields like journalism, bookselling etc. should not only concentrate on finding new women or facts, but they should also emphatically make comparisons with other relevant individuals, groups and phenomena. In this way the fact that the whole literary world is ‘gendered’, instead of just the women’s part of it, can be fully acknowledged.<sup>33</sup>

## The glass ceiling

Some final observations on the weight of a laurel-crown will be made from the starting-point of literary history. There is no doubt, as for instance Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen states elsewhere in this book, that the anthology *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* springs from sociological and functional research. In the Dutch language area this research has been going on since the 1960s, mainly concentrating on Dutch and Flemish historical literature. In fact, because of the results of this method – also to be seen in the success of authors like Bourdieu –, research on modern Dutch and Flemish literature tends to become more and more functionalistic too. Many scholars emphasize the necessity of breaking the established order of famous ‘classics’. They appreciate the broadening of the literary field and the growing opportunities to investigate more elements in it than just a highly esteemed text. Most of the reviewers of *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* in the Dutch media expressed this opinion too.<sup>34</sup>

In this connection, it is striking that the reviewers of *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* immediately constructed a new shortlist, as we had done ourselves, working on the book. This illustrates that it is hard to relinquish old habits, but also that reading literature often means looking for aesthetic pleasure. At the top of the ranking are for instance the already well-known Anna Bijns, the sisters Anna and Maria Tesselschade Roemer Visscher and Rosalie and Virginie Loveling, and the novelwriting duo Wolff and Deken. Newcomers are the Amsterdam circle of Lescaijle, Questiers and Van der Veer, the champions of irony De Lannoy and Jeanette Delcroix the dancing nun Berchmans, the blind Gerijts and Moens, the maid De Boer and the talented novelist Hasebroek. They all illustrate ‘the law of canonization’, as I would like to call it: only extremes are taken into shortlists, either because of their talent or because of other remarkable features, that mostly do not have much to do with literature.

<sup>31</sup> Since Spies 1986, quite a few contributions to the Dutch part of this field have been made. For recent results see Van Gemert 1994, Sneller 1996, Veld/Jimkes/Thijs 1996, Veld 1998a and b.

<sup>32</sup> Sturkenboom 1998.

<sup>33</sup> See Meijer 1997 and Meijer’s contribution to this book. Lotte Jensen is preparing a Ph. D. thesis on Dutch women’s journalism 1785-1870.

<sup>34</sup> Striking examples of this are the reviews by Janssen in *Boekmancahier*, and Smolenaars in *Neder-L* (see note 2). The latter explicitly judges the ‘dull poetry’ positively because it leads to a more pluriform and realistic picture of the past. Contrary to this attitude, Fens comments on the relatively low degree of poetic quality (see note 2).

At this point, the real question of the weight of *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* poses itself. First, to the scholars. If the results of the search for women writers are to be taken fully into account, the historiography of literature will have to be renewed. New phenomena must be integrated, like the construction of shortlists, the existence of what seem to be the two fundamental concepts of literature (renewal and tradition), the position of various networks and their living up to the conditions of the literary world etc. In the Dutch language area the project of writing a new history of literature, which has just been started, will have a task here.

But secondly, a broader audience for these results has to be spoken to more effectively than has been done up until now – at least in the Dutch language area. It can be found among students of universities, high schools, secondary schools and among all kinds of general readers. This may seem difficult because *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* has relatively little poetical talent to offer. However, the pleasure of literature does not come from aesthetic value alone. Often, people ask what those men and women from the past were *really* like. And to this question, women writers have the perfect answer: a great deal of literature reflecting on everyday life. When, for instance the 18th-century baroness Clara Feyoena van Sytzama addresses her staff out in the open field as follows: ‘Don’t think, my peasants, that I forget you, or that I ignore your warm sweat falling on the ground [...]’, this is a perfect introduction to Enlightenment views on social relations. And when Elisabeth Koolaert-Hoofman urges women with brown curls not to change their colour, no one ever forgets that dyeing your hair was as much an 18th-century habit as a modern one.<sup>35</sup>

Using examples in this way, a different view on literature is offered from those old rankings of superior poets. This may be just the tool to bring the pluriform concept of literature to other platforms than circles of scholars alone. The same goes for views on gender, which often lead to tired reactions from students when they are presented in an isolated form. When integrated into a deeper view on society, for instance through literature, they can be much more effective. Here a pocket edition of the anthology would help, but in the meantime let us use the big red book. This laurel-crown is heavy enough to smash through the glass ceiling one day.

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<sup>35</sup> See *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.592-601 (contribution Arie Jan Gelderblom), quotation p.600: ‘Denk niet, mijne veldelingen! dat ik achtloos u vergeet./ Of met onverschillige ogen zie uw warm en druipend zweet’; p.441-444 (contribution Ton van Strien), quotation p.89: ‘Ruilt no[o]it uw kleur bevallige bruinetten/ Voor blanke verf of blonde kuif’. On this point see also Porteman 1997.

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