Early historiography of Dutch and French women’s literature

Authors – be they male or female – do not belong to a national context only. The Dutch Anna Roemersdr. Visscher (1583-1651) demonstrates this by choosing to translate the *Emblèmes ou devises chrétiennes* published by Georgette de Montenay in 1571. Anna Roemers’ address to her contemporary shows an obvious familiarity apparently based on common religion and shared femaleness. Although she did not publish her translations, she thus participated in a large international network surrounding this French Protestant.\(^1\) Such links between women writers, and the influences they mutually exercised, have scarcely been studied for the earlier periods.\(^2\) *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* does not aim to explore these links, but mentions some of them – Anna van der Horst translating Marie de Gournay, Katharina Lescailje translating Antoinette Deshoulières\(^3\) – and invites to further study of these and similar cases.

These individual links cannot be investigated here either.\(^4\) This paper will discuss some preliminaries. Clearly, the study of international contacts between women authors requires knowledge of the positions permitted to women as authors in the countries concerned. In this connection, limiting myself to the Netherlands and France, I want to focus here on a broad comparison of female literary production in the two countries during the 18th century.

Comparing French and Dutch writers compels me into a discussion of sources to be used as French parallels to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*. This discussion involves due consideration of the different traditions of literary historiography on women in the two countries.

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1 Her poem addressed to Montenay has been reproduced in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.151 (contribution Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen and Hans Luijten), and (with a translation in English) in Meijer 1998, p.54-5. See about Montenay: Matthews Grieco 1994, who states (p.794) that the *Emblèmes ou devises chrétiennes* were published ‘in all of the major European languages’: Latin, German, Italian, Spanish, English and Flemish – this does not refer to Visscher’s translation, which was published only in the 19th century; see also the contribution of Marijke Spies to this volume.

2 A notable exception is of course Moers 1963, who discusses the influence of Germaine de Staël, Stéphanie de Genlis, and George Sand on English women writers.

3 See *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.608 (contribution Annelies de Jeu) and 68 (Introduction).

4 It will be done in a volume actually in preparation under the direction of Suzan van Dijk, Petra Broomans, Pim van Oostrum and Janet van der Meulen.
Presence and absence of catalogues in France and the Netherlands

The situations are totally different: in France, since the 18th century, a considerable number of catalogues of women writers have been published, but at the moment there is no French work available for the purpose of comparing authors mentioned in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* to French contemporaries. This is of course partly due to the number of French female authors being too large to permit a thorough presentation such as that given here to the Dutch women authors.

In the Netherlands, before *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, no catalogue of women writers had been published, that is to say: no compilation of women writers exclusively. More general catalogues of learned women have been compiled in the past; they are disregarded here, as they contain also non-writing women (authors of correspondences which, though learned, were not meant to be published); they do not mention authors of non-'learned' texts. I will not deny the importance of these enterprises undertaken, and partly even realized, during the 17th and 18th centuries: Van Beverwyck's *Van de wtnementheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts* (On the excellence of the female sex), Van Almeloveen's catalogue project at the end of the century and Pieter de la Ruë's *Nederlands geleverd vrouwentimmer* (Dutch female learnedness). But these catalogues were meant to be used as arguments in the discussion about female education; sometimes they simply give an exhibition of female learnedness as a mere curiosity. Consequently, there is no recognition of women's actual role in literary communication. More significant would have been the

5 As in Germany; see the contribution of Cornelia Niekus Moore to this volume.
6 In contrast to Germany; see, again, Moore in this volume. This is not to say that nothing is happening in France in this field. I now only refer to overviews which include all literary genres, and are concerned with the earlier period as well. For my comparison, for example, the recent Makward/Cottenet-Hage 1996 is of little use, nor is the earlier Sullerot 1974. In the first book a quite rigorous selection for the earlier period has been made, while the criteria used are not clear; in the second book the restriction of theme does not suit the present objective.
7 There was a CNRS project, which – for the time being? – has been stopped. Its aim was to give an overview of ‘la production littéraire des femmes du Moyen Age à 1940’. Béatrice Slama described the problems this raised: for the 16th century 73 women writers had been found, but in the 19th century their number was at least 2000 (see Slama 1992, p.87). The large number seems to have been a smaller hindrance for the English female authors to be classified and studied.
8 Itself in fact a sub-genre of the genre of the catalogue of famous women; Brita Rang considers the emergence of this sub-genre as a ‘realistic development’ (see Rang 1988, p.40 and 45).
9 As Saskia Stegeman observes, ‘in many catalogues and treatises on learned women [...] the practice of poetry is seen as proof of the learning of a woman’; this however does not apply to practising the genre of the novel, and certainly not in the 18th century (Stegeman 1997, p.451).
10 Nor the usefulness of projects concerning men and (some) women (whether or not these have been realized) as that of Lambert Bidloo (the *Panpoëticon Batavum*, 1720) and Diederich Ulrich Heinemeyer at the end of the century (cf. Hochstenbach/Singeling 1988); these, however, are not so much predecessors of as sources for *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*.
12 See Stegeman 1997. Both (Van Beverwyck and Van Almeloveen) did not restrict themselves to Dutch women.
13 Never published; see the Introduction to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.92.
14 Perhaps this particularly applies to Van Almeloveen; Stegeman remarks on his project: ‘Van Almeloveen’s method of collecting data shows that he did not start this project with the aim to prove or refute the ability of women to be professional in these fields. In his particular case, he could have compiled a collection of an arbitrarily chosen “article”’ (Stegeman 1997, p.450).
anthology, to be entitled *De geest der Nederlandsche dichteressen* (The spirit of Dutch poetesses), planned – but not realized – at the end of the 18th century by Jacob Eduard de Witte. It was not until 1856, with the publication of Van der Aa’s *Parelen uit de lettervruchten van Nederlandsche dichteressen* (Pearls from the literary fruits of Dutch poetesses), that we had a collection which went further than the manuscript stage – but this work is rather limited in size and scope. The first serious inventory is one published in Flanders in 1920, by Maurits Basse. A point worth mentioning is the absence, during this whole period, of female compilers, although it should be said in this connection that Dutch (novice) women writers often themselves referred to female predecessors: this sometimes resulted in the making of ‘short lists’.17

When compared to France, where from the 18th century onwards catalogues of women writers were published, by both male and female compilers, this is obviously very limited. There are, in fact, many women writers included in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* who did not appear in the collections made by Van Beverwijck, De la Ruë and Van der Aa, and for whom the Dutch researchers have had to go back to contemporaneous documents, after having found their names in biographical manuals concerning other categories of people (pietists, Zealanders, theatre artists etc.).

There is a considerable advantage here: in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* relatively few traces are to be found of the deformation and mythicizing that can so clearly be seen in the successive French inventories, and from which even more recent research sometimes hardly distances itself. Mythicizing of this order begins already with the very first inventories dating from the end of the 1760s. In those years two different initiatives were taken to produce catalogues containing exclusively women writers. The most influential was by the abbé Joseph de La Porte, a journalist and professional compiler. In his five-part *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises* (1769) he names about 300 women writers – of whom 200 had no more than one page, or even

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15 He was Maria van Zuylenkum’s husband; for De Witte and his project see the entry on this author in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.715 (contribution Lia van Gemert).
16 Although the *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* introduction states that he does little more than give a list (p.94), his intention was to ‘make a book which, while being scientifically accurate, was at the same time accessible to a wide public’ (Basse 1920, preface). Basse was the son of the Flemish poet Eliza Mather (*Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.935 (contribution Piet Couttenier)).
17 As, for example, Betje Wolff does in the preface to one of her first publications, Wolff 1765, p. X–XII; and also Johanna Hoobius in her *Het lof der vrouwen* (Praise of women); see *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.227-234 (contribution Els Stronks).
18 Rang also mentions Louis Jacob, *Dictionnaire biographique des femmes écrivains, depuis l’antiquité jusqu’au xixe siècle*, a manuscript from 1646 that should be in the B.N. (f.fr. 22865), and which has been cited by English and German catalogue authors. Strangely enough, it does not figure in the list given in DeJean 1991, p.219-221; nor in the one of Geffriaud Rosso 1984, p.189-211. Once again based on numerous catalogues of famous and learned women – an essential part of what DeJean calls ‘the worldly anthology tradition’ (DeJean 1991, p.185).
19 During this period a new form of literary history was being created: in 1740 the abbé Goujet had begun, in his *Histoire de la littérature française* (18 vols.) to transform the hitherto prevailing ‘worldly anthology’ into ‘the arm by which critics could police the reading habits of the «honnête homme» and thereby shape both his taste and his national prejudices’ (DeJean 1991, p.187-8).
20 In 1768 Pons-Augustin Alletz had already published *L’esprit des femmes célèbres* where he only presents 26 writers. In the same year as La Porte Jean François de La Croix published a *Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres*, contenant l’histoire des femmes savantes, des actrices [etc.].
less, dedicated to their work. La Porte presents his chapters as letters to ‘Madame’, and he seems, in doing so, to be addressing a female audience, but it is worth noting that he shows a certain lack of respect for the texts he is presenting. This can be seen in the ‘Avertissement’, in which he declares that he will do some rigorous editing, convinced that it can only improve the texts.\textsuperscript{22} Nevertheless, the mere presence of these names in La Porte’s work had important consequences. His book has been much used, and subsequently, many of the women – and along with them, many of

\textsuperscript{22} La Porte 1769, vol.1, p.vii-viii.
La Porte’s formulas—reappear in later catalogues (of women writers\textsuperscript{23} as well as those of ‘famous’ women\textsuperscript{24}) and in more general overviews concerning French literary history\textsuperscript{25}—most of which were written by male authors.\textsuperscript{26}

But around 1800 some women, themselves writers, also intervened in the debate. Their position is interesting. Without being able to significantly change established, and establishing, traditions, each of these women assumes a rather polemical attitude. In 1788, Louise de Kéralio has the intention ‘d’élever un monument à la gloire des femmes françaises distinguées dans la littérature’; she starts an anthology which was to include 36 volumes, but—because of what was happening on another level—did not get further than twelve. Kéralio’s viewpoint on the matter is traditional: study makes women ‘plus agréables dans la société intime et générale’, where they should avoid exhibiting their learnedness, showing only ‘cette aimable modestie, cette espèce de pudeur qui prête autant de charmes à l’esprit qu’à la vertu’.\textsuperscript{27}

Nearly 20 years later,\textsuperscript{28} Fortunée Briquet, considering that more should be known about the ‘agréments que l’esprit des femmes procurerait à la société, et surtout à elles-mêmes’, makes it clear that she is opposed to La Porte’s prejudices.\textsuperscript{29} She clearly did use his Histoire for her own Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique, but at the same time she distanced herself from certain characterizations. Briquet is much more rigorous than La Porte: writers of whom no titles survive are not included; and she is more objective than Stéphanie de Genlis,\textsuperscript{30} who in her De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française (1811) lets her personal preferences prevail: someone who can be called an ‘épouse fidèle et bonne mère’\textsuperscript{31} must be a good writer. So, Briquet’s dictionary mentions many more women writers than Genlis’ work does, namely 526. But her example of rigour and objectivity was not

\textsuperscript{23} For example: Louis-Edmé Billardon de Sauvigny, Le Parnasse des Dames (1773), who presents Greek, Roman, French, English, Danish and German women writers; P. Jacquinet, Les femmes de France poètes et prosateurs (1886); and Larnac 1929.

\textsuperscript{24} La Croix, Dictionnaire portatif (see note 21); and L. Prudhomme, Répertoire universel, historique, biographique des femmes célèbres, mortes ou vivantes (1826, reprinted in 1830).

\textsuperscript{25} Sabatier de Castres, Les trois siècles de notre littérature, ou Tableau de l’esprit de nos écrivains depuis François I jusqu’en 1772 (1772); N.L.M. Desessarts, Les siècles littéraires de la France (1800).

\textsuperscript{26} They like to present themselves as ‘panégyristes du beau sexe’. In a reaction to the Parnasse des Dames, the reviewer of the Année littéraire assumes that ‘les femmes elles-mêmes applaudiront sans doute à une entreprise où leur gloire est particulièrement intéressée; car toutes les recherches de l’auteur [...] semblent n’avoir pour objet que de flatter leur amour-propre, qui souvent est si bien fondé’ (Année littéraire 1773, vol. I, p.186).

\textsuperscript{27} Kéralio 1786-1788, vol. I, p. ix and xii-xiii. See on her work DeJean 1991, p.186: ‘The volumes Kéralio did complete are astonishingly well researched and put together and could easily be used today as the basis for a curriculum in French women’s writing’. The last volume is about Madame de Sévigné (17th century).

\textsuperscript{28} In the meantime, things had changed: Sylvain Maréchal had even had the opportunity, in 1801, to publish his Projet d’une loi portant défense d’apprendre à lire aux femmes; see about this brochure Fraisse 1989, p.13-46.


\textsuperscript{30} Genlis seems to dispute Briquet’s assumptions: ‘On a donné au public plusieurs ouvrages volumineux, contenant l’histoire des femmes auteurs; mais la plus grande partie de ces auteurs sont très médiocres, ou même tout à fait dénués de talent, et les trois quarts de ces femmes célèbres portent les noms les plus obscurs et les plus oubliés’ (Genlis 1811, vol. I, Avertissement). She comes to a figure of about 30 women writers who would have really been influential.

\textsuperscript{31} As Madame Deshoulières (Genlis 1811, vol.I, p.203).
followed. Precisely because she ‘corrected’ ‘male’ traditions, without succeeding in
undermining them, and thus had very little influence, Briquet, paradoxically enough,
is of interest to us.\textsuperscript{32} She expressly presents her 526 authors as such, but does not
attempt to canonize them, although some are given much more attention than others.
In my view, her work – and this certainly applies to her treatment of 18th-century
authors\textsuperscript{33} – can be seen as a registration of the success enjoyed by the work of these
women writers with contemporary male and female readers. Naturally, she did not
decanonize either, which was in fact what La Porte did, as well as his compiling imi-
tators.

These imitators of La Porte often adopted his own words and value judgements\textsuperscript{34}
– but added slightly more emphasis. The judgements were not really negative, but
confirmed the special status of the authors discussed: they are exceptional figures,
but they are women. Their femininity and feminine beauty are, for example, consid-
ered relevant: a less appreciated writer can have her beauty emphasized by means of
compensation, and a celebrated romancière can be called ugly.\textsuperscript{35} The possibilities
offered here are fully developed and applied by Sainte-Beuve in the mid-19th cen-
tury;\textsuperscript{36} in his \textit{Portraits de femmes}, he seems to transform real authors (their novels
sometimes still on sale in recent editions) into fictional characters, reassuring the
public: ‘I will not be talking about her work!’\textsuperscript{37} His influence is visible in Jean
Larnac’s \textit{Histoire de la littérature féminine}.\textsuperscript{38} In his preface, this author mentions as
one of his main points of reference, and as a shining example, his illustrious prede-
cessor, Joseph de La Porte. And indeed – since that is what it was all about – we can
find a great number\textsuperscript{39} of ‘La Porte’s women’ in Larnac’s book.

We have to take note, therefore, that this ambivalent 18th-century recognition of the
status of women as participants in a literary circuit resulted in the survival of their names
up to the 20th century. The problem is that La Porte, and his imitators, seem to keep a
certain distance or even to show disdain towards this specific circuit itself, in which For-
tunée Briquet was a participant later on. Some of the formulas used by the La Porte fol-
lowers might be said to show the removal of women writers from historical reality.

\textsuperscript{32} Germaine de Staël does participate in the discussion concerning the position of female authors, but
she mentions no names; see her chapter ‘Des femmes qui cultivent les lettres’ in Staël 1800, p.332-342.
\textsuperscript{33} Probably less to her presentation of earlier authors.
\textsuperscript{34} Which he actually borrowed from the magazines and other sources where he found his information.
\textsuperscript{35} In relation to La Porte’s influence, see Van Dijk 1997.
\textsuperscript{36} These are, for example, judgements from which Briquet distanced herself.
\textsuperscript{37} See on his slightly denigratory attitude: Diaz 1992; the then influential critic, ‘portraitiste attitré des
femmes’ turns out to have a preference for ‘celles qui furent écrivains sans y penser, sans y prétendre,
en dispersant au hasard leur conversation ou leur émotion sur des feuilles volantes’ (Diaz 1992, p.80,
78).
\textsuperscript{38} This is how he begins his portrait of Françoise de Graffigny, insisting on the presentation of this
18th-century novelist as a ‘personnage’: ‘[s]a vie était un roman plus touchant sans doute que ceux
qu’elle a écrits’ (Sainte-Beuve 1858, vol.ii, p.209). He prefers women to be authors of private docu-
\textsuperscript{39} He is paraphrasing Sainte-Beuve, describing Graffigny as ‘un peu bavarde et vulgaire, un peu caillé-
lette, comme on disait alors’ (Larnac 1929, p.145). See Marks 1993 about his way of ‘reconduit[re] les
clichés les plus dommageables sur l’inévitable infériorité des femmes, en tant que femmes et en tant
qu’écrivains’ (p.832).
\textsuperscript{30} I.e. 106; Larnac clearly did not use Briquet: writers she omitted from her listing are to be found here
again.
A comparable process of more or less conscious decanonization of female writers cannot really be traced in the Netherlands. The transformation of a woman writer into a ‘personnage’ can at best only be said to apply to Tesselschade Roemers and (perhaps through public response in other countries) to Anna Maria van Schurman. With the exception of three or four canonized women and of local celebrities, most of the Dutch writers simply disappeared into oblivion, even those who had been cited as role models. As far as most of them are concerned, there is hardly a history of reception, which might have been taken up by Met en zonder lauwerkrans or which could be in need of rectification. The editors of the book had to make a ‘jump backwards’, and in doing so found themselves relatively close to these writers: in a position which is, in a certain way, similar to that of Briquet in relation to the French writers of the 18th century.

**A comparison between the Netherlands and France**

This recognition of the merits of Met en zonder lauwerkrans (and of the usefulness of the recent reprint of Briquet’s work) is meant to justify my comparison, which will be based on these two overviews: one rather old, one brand-new. Although neither of them can be said to be complete, both give information about the respective positions and productions of women writers. My comparison is based upon figures reproduced on the next page, showing the French and Dutch female literary productions for the 17th and 18th centuries.

I want, at first, to raise a general question on the problems of ‘genre and gender’. A large difference is discernible between the numbers of 18th-century authors of prose narrative. In France they are relatively numerous: 108 women produced

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40 See De Baar/Rang 1992 and Maria-Theresia Leuker’s contribution to this volume.
41 Anna Bijns, Betje Wolff, Aagje Deken, Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint (see fragments of works on pages 29-33, 155-9, 223-5).
42 Such as Juliana de Lannoy (see on her Met en zonder lauwerkrans 1997, p.632-638 (contr. Pim van Oostrum); texts with translations in Meijer 1998, p.62-71) from Breda and the Fries Clara Feyoena van Sytzama (Met en zonder lauwerkrans 1997, p.592-601 (contribution Arie Jan Gelderblom)). Some others, for example Elisabeth Maria Post and Margareta Geertruid van der Werken (id., p.696-706 and 602-607 (contribution Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen)), have been as it were ‘retrieved’ – thanks to the, novelistic, genre they practised (see further).
43 To paraphrase the title given by Annelies van Gijsen to her lecture on the possibility of presenting an anthology of Dutch female writers before 1550 (lecture held for the ‘Werkverband Vrouwenstudies-Neerlandistiek-Literatuurgeschiedschrijving’ (Working group Women’s studies-Literary History) in March 1998).
44 The Met en zonder lauwerkrans-introduction states that it proved impossible, particularly for the 18th and 19th centuries, to present every woman who wrote. Briquet probably will have tried to be as complete as possible, according to her own criteria. In fact she is not: her book gives a very concise picture for each author, which does not present the whole oeuvre. For example, although we saw earlier the polemic position taken up by a woman such as Louise de Kéralio, an item ‘polemics’ does not appear. For practical reasons, I did not go back to the texts themselves.
45 That is, compared to the Netherlands. The French female novel-production is probably 15-20% of the total production. This evaluation (made in Van Dijk 1988, p.227) was based on Martin/Mylne/Frautschi 1977. In England the number of women novelists seems to have been more considerable: Spender lists 116 women who published novels in the 18th century (Spender 1986). Turner comes to a figure of 174 authors publishing in the period 1696-1796; for many of the women she added, she only mentions one novel (Turner 1992, p.152-211).
46 For a number of them Briquet mentions only one novel.
different types of fictional narrative. The figure is still more considerable if we include autobiographical narrative (letters and so-called ‘histoires’ and ‘réflexions’), knowing that in France, as in England, the boundary between the two categories is not very sharp. In this connection, it would seem that in France the novel has been used by women to raise their own issues and problems. That in fact a significant number of them did this is clear from the preference for certain combinations of characters and for narrative solutions, to which contemporary (male) critics took exception.\(^{47}\)

Tabel 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Netherlands (Lauwerkrans)</th>
<th>France (Briquet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17th century</td>
<td>18th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of writers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional and secular verse</td>
<td>27 (64%)</td>
<td>45 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious writing/verse (protestant)</td>
<td>15 (35%)</td>
<td>25 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>14 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translations</td>
<td>9 (21%)</td>
<td>13 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for children</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political themes</td>
<td>8 (19%)</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictional narrative</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>8 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female issues</td>
<td>7 (17%)</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Auto)biography</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didactic poem/essay</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polemics</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Country house poem’</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroids</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emblematics</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious writing/verse (catholic)</td>
<td>8 (19%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Netherlands, the situation appears to be completely different. Before Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken in the 1780s, Dutch women writers did not feel the same needs or follow those examples, and only at a relatively late stage did they enter the domain of the novel.\(^{48}\) *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* includes only eight 18th-century

\(^{47}\) See on this question: Van Dijk 1998a.

\(^{48}\) Germany might seem, with Sophie von La Roche, to have started equally late, but in the 17th century there already were practising women novel-writers. Meise presents 18 female novelists publishing between 1771 and 1798 (Meise 1992); but Ute Brandes discusses some women who follow the example of the French ‘roman héroïque’, one of whom, Sibylle Ursula von Braunschweig-Lüneburg, corresponded with Madeleine de Scudéry (Brandes 1988, p.244).
novel writers, who were active in the last quarter of the century, and does not really discuss the problem as to why this difference exists. Indeed, it is actually the point of correspondence that is emphasized: the fact that in the Netherlands, just like elsewhere, women are often novel-writers (and novel-writers women); little attention is paid to the actual difference concerning the moments of starting. Seen from the perspective of the present state of research on the French novel, the difference seems more conspicuous.

How should this difference be explained? Is it enough to refer to the late beginnings, in Holland, of the novel as a genre – be it female or male? We have to admit that only in the 1780s did the number of prose fiction works published in the Dutch language start to have any significance, and that even then these works include translations (about 50%) and adaptations of older texts. The reason for me to think this is not wholly conclusive for understanding the choices made by Dutch female writers is the – just mentioned – lack of a sharp distinction between fictional and autobiographical narrative. It has already proved possible to find more female autobiographies than those presented in Met en zonder lauwerkrans. These texts need further investigation, particularly in comparison with contemporary fictional texts.

Viewed – again – from the present French perspective, something else is striking. It is true that few novelists figure in Met en zonder lauwerkrans, but the proportion of poets is very large indeed: 45 of the 55, while among the 25 authors of religious writing there were also some poets. I shall illustrate the degree of surprise this may provoke by referring to the recent (concise) Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française by Makward and Cottenet-Hage. It mentions 45 18th-century women writers (selected according to rather arbitrary criteria), of whom 21 are novel-writers and 4 poets. This is incomplete, but fits the perceptions which are operative today in France regarding female literary activity during this period.

What do these proportions signify if we consider the Briquet-figures – representing, as I suggested, the importance attached by contemporaries to the 18th-century writers? Her work provides us with an important insight, because in addition to the 108 female novel writers (and the 55 authors of autobiographical texts, certainly read for a large part as if they were novels, showing a woman as the protagonist), she names 90 women poets, plus seven women writing religious verse. They were active mainly in social frameworks in the French ‘province’. Smaller towns were indeed of significance here, particularly Toulouse (with its ‘Académie des Jeux Floraux’), but also many of these women published their poems in the (Parisian) periodical press.

49 Met en zonder lauwerkrans 1997, p.77/8; see also the contribution to the first part of this volume by Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen.
50 Or, Dutch women would not have been familiar with the problems treated by French women in their novels? In fact, French travellers are often surprised by the ‘coldness’ of Dutch people and by the absence of any ‘vie mondaine’; cf. Van Strien-Chardonneau 1994, p.257-264.
51 More than about 10 a year (Mateboer 1996).
52 Following Nieuwenboer 1982.
53 In the Mercure de France, the Journal des Dames (that in 1778 would be incorporated in the Mercure), and in the yearly Almanach des Muses (which for a long period was associated with the Journal des Dames).
In short, novel-writing may well have been less dominant among French women than has often been suggested.

If we are about to attack this so-called dominance, it may be useful to make a distinction between the role women played in the development of the novel as a genre, and, on the other hand, their choice to practise one genre or another. Concerning the significance of women for the genre of the novel, we can say that it has often been recognized, even in the 19th century, during which period in France female writers and 18th-century novels were held in equally low esteem. In 1840 Villemain mentions, in his *Tableau de la littérature française*, only four novel-writers, but they are two men and two women. When in 1922 Servais Etienne publishes his large survey of the novelistic genre, he still feels naturally obliged to discuss many women. The intense preoccupation with the novel we saw during the last decades finally provided us, in my opinion, with a larger number of ‘re-discovered’ male than female novelists.

It was not so much thanks to literary historical as to bookhistorical research – initiated well before Etienne by Daniel Mornet – that the 18th-century impact of female novel-writing has been clearly established.

As for the seemingly exclusive choice made by women for the writing of novels, Briquet’s data may be enough to prove that this is a misrepresentation. But what factors are here at play? We have to realize that those poets of the French 18th century who faded into oblivion were not only female: until recently the ‘Siècle des Lumières’ was considered to have produced no significant lyrical poetry. This is now changing. New research on the question will have to include the work of women. This will further demonstrate how much the study of French female authors has been conditioned by the considerably greater interest for the novel, and by the implicit idea that because women played a role in the development of the novel, the novel must have been their favourite genre. Besides, the novel had ‘brought forth’ so many women authors that the need for further investigation into women’s writing in other genres has for a long period been insignificant.

It is clear from this comparison between *Met en zonder lauwerkrons* and Briquet’s *Dictionnaire* that my initial question about the differences of numbers of novelists was partly based on a false assumption, and that there is (at least) one obvious point of correspondence to be noticed: both in the Netherlands and in France (even before the 19th century) women wrote poetry! The Dutch poets have been catalogued: we can now discuss the need to integrate their work in a literary canon of some kind. The French women poets of this period have as yet hardly been studied; it is to be hoped that we shall soon know more about their work and the roles they played, their specific – ‘feminine’ (?) – role in cities such as Toulouse, their use of the genre of the

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54 Le Sage, Prévost, Madame de Tencin, Mademoiselle Delaunay (Villemain 1840).
55 *Sans beaucoup d’estime pour les qualités littéraires des hommes et des femmes névo­listes: ‘J’ai accordé une grande attention aux œuvres de second et de dernier ordre: il n’y a guère que cela dans le roman de l’époque’* (Etienne 1922, p.6).
56 His famous article, which mentions as the most frequently read (or at least possessed) novelists Duclos, Mademoiselle de Lussan and Madame Riccoboni, has been much criticized, but its conclusions have been *grosso modo* confirmed.
57 See the contribution of Christine Planté.
periodical press in order to obtain a wider audience, and perhaps about the question to what extent this ‘social poetry-writing’ can be linked to what happened in the salons. As to the novelists: in France they are so numerous and sometimes so prolific that in many cases their work has hardly been studied and their originality is difficult to recognize. As far as the Netherlands novelists are concerned – or rather: the authors of fictional or autobiographical prose narrative –, I must say I think it possible (because of sources not having been used up to now)\(^58\) that more of them will be found. The number is not interesting in itself, but will permit a better understanding of their advancement to professionalism.

The need for and the possibility of making comparisons

An international comparison of this kind provides us with the opportunity to be quite precise in putting some broad questions concerning female literary activities. It is useful to point out that these comparisons are also a direct result of the material we are studying: these writers crossed boundaries themselves, forming those individual links I started with. Not only Anne-Marie du Boccage went to the Netherlands, Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken to France and Mary Wollstonecraft to Sweden, but their works travelled also, and thus they met other women, the texts being either imported in the original version or made available in translation. Numerous novels by French women are to be found, for example, in Swedish circulating libraries and in Dutch book-sale catalogues,\(^59\) and the number of women providing translations was considerable. Often, they did not only produce translations: they were also women who created their own oeuvre, or were later to do so. This fact does not only apply to writers translating into Dutch or French. Some of these female translators seem to have had a special interest in the works of other women. The best known example in the Netherlands is Betje Wolff who translated Stéphanie de Genlis, Louise d’Epinay, Lady Montague and Sophie von La Roche.\(^60\) In Germany, Luise Gottsched, for example, translated Marie-Anne Barbier and Françoise de Graffigny. Graffigny’s work was translated into English by Clara Reeve; and Isabelle de Montolieu translated into French (among many others) Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Helme and Jane Austen. These activities and international contacts could not be reconciled with a view of the writers as ‘personnages’, nor with their being lost from collective memory. On the basis of broad comparisons – now more and more possible – these contacts between women writers need to be further investigated.

\(^{58}\)In particular the periodical press; possibly in combination with the notes taken by Heinemeyer for his intended dictionary concerning the Dutch Republic of Letters (mentioned above, see note 10). In their presentation, Hochstenbach and Singeling state that much of the information contained in these notes is not new, because they are largely based on the contemporary press; for women authors this might be different, periodicals not having been used systematically to study their cases. See Hochstenbach/Singeling 1988 and Van Dijk 1998b.

\(^{59}\) Sources currently used in bookhistory, and too little for the moment in women’s literary historiography. Margareta Björkman’s study of seven circulating libraries shows the importance of the success, in Sweden, of Madame Riccoboni. Alicia Montoya analyzes Dutch private libraries on this point; her research will be published in the volume announced in note 4.

\(^{60}\) And, without naming her, Jeanne Leprince de Beaumont; see Van Dijk/Van Raamsdonk 1998.
Works cited

* women's writing


* histories/anthologies of women's writing
- concerning Dutch authors


- concerning French authors


* studies in (historiography of) women's writing and related subjects


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