



'And the award goes to...' Women on the Dutch literary award scene

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Abstract. Prizes have become indispensable to contemporary literary culture and have developed into one of its most high-profiled phenomena. This article examines the intersections between literary awards and gender, whilst drawing on field-theoretical approaches to literature. It successively discusses awarding behaviour, jury composition, and jury reports of a large number of Dutch literary prizes from the post-war era to the present. It argues, that the award scene has been governed by a conservative judging habitus, which seems to be inspired by the literary dispositions, inclinations and preferences of (white) middle-aged men who have predominantly populated juries for many decades; yet a drastic change in jury composition and awarding behaviour has swept through the award scene in recent years, resulting in a steep rise of female laureates. Additionally, it examines the ways in which juries have written in their reports about gender in connection to literary quality over the course of years.

Keywords. Dutch literature / Nederlandse literatuur, literary culture / literaire cultuur, literary awards / literaire prijzen, awarding behaviour / bekroningsgedrag, women in literature / vrouwen in literatuur, gender

Introduction

‘If the emancipation of women has succeeded somewhere, it is in literature,’ author Hanneke Eggels triumphantly acclaimed at the dawn of the twenty-first century.¹ This view was widely supported by actors and institutions on the literary field. Dutch literature, both in terms of production and consumption, had allegedly become a predominantly female affair: not only would more and more women work on the literary field as a publisher, editor or critic; female authors would also increasingly dominate the bestseller lists; even the readership of literature would now consist mainly of women. This feminisation resulted in the popular belief that female writers had meanwhile gained a lead over male authors. ‘Women conquer the literary world’ and ‘Female authors and readers call the shots’ could therefore be read in the literary pages of Dutch newspapers.²

Appearances, however, can be deceiving. Lenny Vos and Corina Koolen have come to less jubilant conclusions in their dissertations on the position of women on the Dutch literary field in the post-war twentieth century and twenty-first century respectively.³ They argue that female authors are systematically disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts: publishers perceive their work as less ‘literary’, which makes it harder for them to sign with a prestigious publishing house; literary critics pay less attention to published female authors, and, if they do, write in an unfavourable way about the ‘quality’ of their work more often; also, women are not as frequently considered for literary prizes. The popular argument that most professional authors on the literary scene are men, therefore women appear underrepresented in such statistics, holds no validity today: around 50% of the professional authors are, in fact, female.⁴ In short, every step of the way towards literary acclaim female authors face gender-biased obstacles from the so-called gatekeepers of literature (whether they be publishers, critics, jurors, or other literary experts).

With this article, I would like to contribute to ongoing research into the position of women on the Dutch literary field, and focus on one of those gatekeepers: the literary award scene. Literary prizes have become indispensable to contemporary literary culture and have developed into one of its most high-profiled phenomena. They are part of a larger field in which books are

¹ Hanneke Eggels, cited in L.C. Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld* (Dissertation University of Groningen, 2008), p. 15: ‘Als de emancipatie van vrouwen ergens is gelukt, dan is het in de literatuur’. All translations in this article are mine.

² Erica van Boven, *Bestsellers in Nederland, 1900-2015* (Antwerpen [etc.]: Garant, 2015), pp. 158-159, and Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, pp. 15-18: ‘Vrouwen veroveren Letterenland’ and ‘Schrijfsters en lezeressen maken de dienst uit’.

³ See Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, and C.W. Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality* (Dissertation University of Amsterdam, 2018).

⁴ Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*, pp. 36-55, and Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, p. 16. Cf. Pauwke Berkers, Marc Verboord & Frank Weij, ‘Genderongelijkheid in de dagbladberichtgeving over kunst en cultuur. Een vergelijkende studie van Frankrijk, Duitsland, Nederland en de Verenigde Staten, 1955-2005’, in *Sociologie* 10.2 (2014), 124-146.

produced, distributed and consumed and can be studied from a field-theoretical perspective.⁵ Moreover, they can be seen as important legitimizing mechanisms that are part of a wider debate on consecration: they promote competing forms of acclaim; intersect the dynamic relationships of actors and institutions; and contribute to defining the parameters of literature and literary culture. Claire Squires has therefore argued that 'research into literary prizes can potentially be extremely pertinent in the understanding of the material and ideological conditions of the production and reception of literature and literary value'.⁶

Even though literature can hardly be imagined without awards anymore, scholars have only just begun to investigate their impact on the dynamics of literary culture. In his ground-breaking study, *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), James English has researched Anglo-Saxon cultural prizes from a very broad field-theoretical perspective. He considers awards as the instrument par excellence for converting heteronomous capital from different social domains into symbolic capital (prestige).⁷ He does not, however, distinguish between different cultural products (such as literature, film, theatre, and music), and pays almost no attention to the national contexts and historical dimensions of cultural award scenes, which makes it difficult to understand how they may have influenced the dynamics of a particular cultural (sub)field in the short and long run. Last but not least, he disregards the role of gender.⁸

Research into the Dutch literary award scene is still in its infancy. Though some studies have been conducted, such have predominantly focused on a very limited number of awards, a short period in time or both.⁹ Furthermore, such inquiries were not specifically tailored to studying the role of gender in the symbolic production of literature through awards.¹⁰ I would therefore like to focus on the question which role(s) gender plays on the Dutch literary award scene, and investigate to what extent female authors are awarded literary prizes, to what degree women participate as jurors in the award scene, and in which ways is written about female laureates in jury reports (more specifically, to what extent – if at all – gender factors into the jury's justification). In order to do so, I will successively discuss the awarding behaviour, jury composition, and jury reports of a large number of literary awards from the post-war era to the present. First however, I will explore the Dutch literary award scene.

⁵ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, 'De produktie van geloof. Bijdrage tot een economie van symbolische goederen', in *Opstellen over smaak, habitus en het veldbegrip* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1992), 246-283, and Idem, *De regels van de kunst. Wording en structuur van het literaire veld* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1993).

⁶ Claire Squires, 'A common ground? Book prize culture in Europe', in *The Public* 11.4 (2004), p. 37.

⁷ James English, *The economy of prestige. Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value* (Cambridge, MA [etc.]: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 10.

⁸ Cf. Koolen, *Reading beyond the female*, p. 41 onwards, and Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, p. 31 onwards.

⁹ E.g. Gillis Dorleijn, 'De achterkant van de recente poëzie. De VSB Poëzieprijs 1993-2002', in *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 7.4 (2002), 389-425, W. de Nooij, 'Gentlemen of the jury... The Features of Experts Awarding Literary Prizes', in *Poetics* 17 (1988), 531-545, Charlotte Paauwe, *Het literaire prijzencircus. Onderzoek naar de positie van literatuurprijzen in het Nederlandse literaire veld* (Masterthesis Radboud University Nijmegen, 2017), Hugo Verdaasdonk, 'De kans om de P.C. Hooft-prijs te winnen', in *Snijvlakken van de literatuurwetenschap* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2008), 125-142, and Idem, 'De kans om de AKO-prijs of de Libris-prijs te winnen', in *Ibid.*, 143-167.

¹⁰ Except as part of a chapter in Koolen, *Reading beyond the female*, pp. 36-47, 53-55, where she focuses on Dutch literary awards as part of her inquiry into the production and dissemination of literary prestige as related to gender on the Dutch literary field of the twenty-first century.

Dutch literary awards¹¹

According to the *Algemeen Letterkundig Lexicon* (2012-), literary awards can be divided into prizes that are financed by public funds (i.e. national and local governmental bodies), and prizes that are financed through private funds (e.g. foundations and companies).¹² Companies have different motives to fund literary awards than the aforementioned sponsors. Charlotte Paauwe points out that in the case of, for instance, the Libris Literatuur Prijs or ECI Literatuurprijs, its sponsors, a bookstore chain (Libris) respectively a book club (ECI), are companies that have commercial interests in funding a literary award as they sell books themselves. A company that does not operate on the literary field, a governmental body, or a foundation do not have commercial interests: they can increase their symbolic capital by means of an award, but do not seek to increase their economic profit on the literary field.¹³ It is therefore useful to further refine this typology of literary awards by distinguishing between commercially and non-commercially funded awards.

The Literatuurmuseum in The Hague has listed over 500 Dutch literary awards that have been installed at some point in recent history in its *Litteraire Prijzen* database.¹⁴ These prizes are awarded to a wide range of authors and texts, that – in a very liberal sense – could be considered ‘literary’: ranging from contests to awards for life-time achievement; from prizes for children’s books to adult literature, for lowbrow to highbrow texts, and for works published in every (sub)genre imaginable. After removing duplicates (many prizes are listed twice in the database, for example because they have changed names over the course of time), 399 unique literary awards remain. Figure 1 shows the number of unique prizes awarded per year. If a prize is awarded more than once a year (e.g. multiple Zilveren Griffels are awarded annually), it is only listed once.

¹¹ In a previous article, I have discussed the Dutch literary award scene in more detail. See Petra Boudewijn, “Alleen vette prijzen doen ertoe”. De receptie van literatuurprijzen in de literaire dag- en weekbladkritiek’, in *TNTL: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- & Letterkunde* 136.1 (2020), 20-54.

¹² G.J. van Bork e.a., ‘Litteraire prijzen’, in *Algemeen letterkundig lexicon* (2012-heden), https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/dela012alge01_01/ (accessed on 19 September 2019).

¹³ Paauwe, *Het literaire prijzencircus. Onderzoek naar de positie van literatuurprijzen in het Nederlandse literaire veld*, p. 17.

¹⁴ This database can be consulted online at www.litteraireprijzen.nl. According to the Literatuurmuseum, the database would contain ‘an overview of more than 500 Dutch and Flemish literary prizes’ (‘een overzicht van meer dan 500 Nederlandse en Vlaamse literatuurprijzen’). However, in the spring of 2018 – when the Literatuurmuseum kindly granted me access to the underlying data – that was not the case and the database only contained Dutch literary awards.

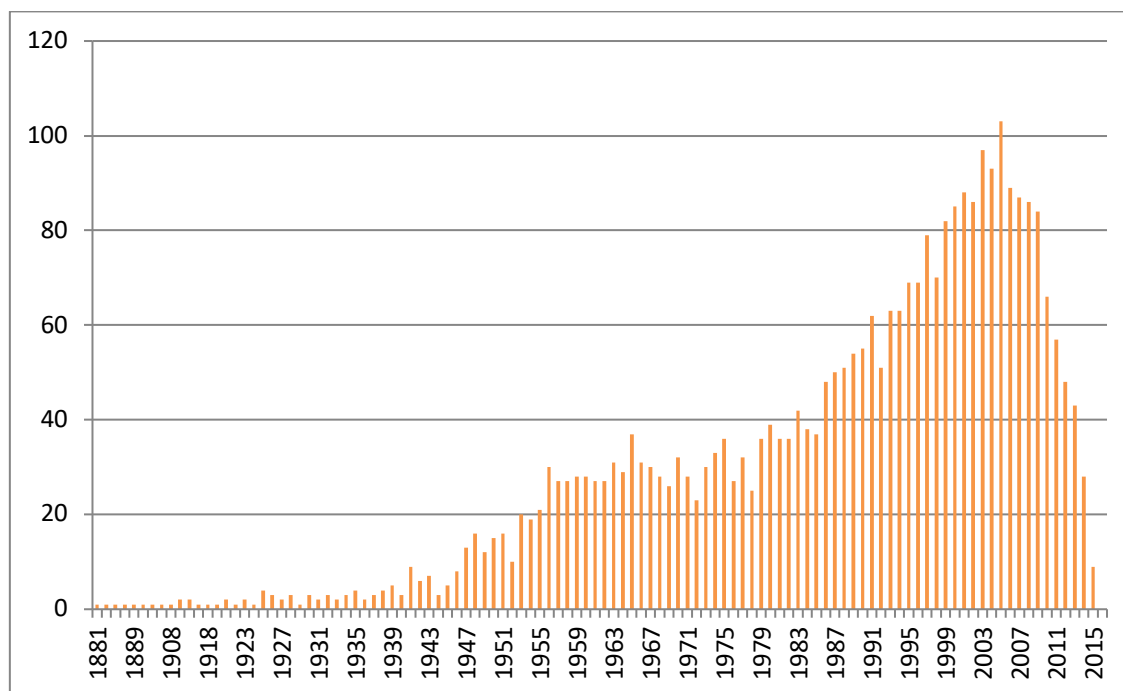


Figure 1: Number of unique literary prizes awarded per year in the Netherlands

As the graph shows, the Netherlands initially had only known a handful of literary prizes (about 2 to 3 unique awards per year). In the pre-war era, therefore, one can hardly speak of an ‘award scene’. From the Second World War onwards, the number of literary awards began to grow steadily to around 30 unique prizes per year; and from the 1980s onwards, that number even began to rise exponentially until 2005, when 103 unique prizes were awarded. After 2005, the number of literary prizes appears to be declining. The extent to which this has actually happened, is difficult to ascertain. The database has been systematically updated until around 2005, with compilers striving for consistency and comprehensiveness.¹⁵ Since then, however, it has been sporadically supplemented and after 2015 no new data was added at all (to which the sharp fall in Figure 1 is to be attributed).

Since the database consists of prizes in nearly every category that is somewhat eligible for the qualification ‘literary’, I have further curtailed the corpus for the sake of this study. The corpus will only include awards that are intended for texts originally written in Dutch (no translations); that are aimed at an adult readership (no children’s books, young adult literature, and so on); and that are from the field of limited production (no thrillers, romance novels, and other categories of so-called bestsellers, that traditionally belong to the field of mass production). In addition, I have excluded contests, as they represent a different type of competition, in which not a published work or oeuvre is awarded, but unpublished texts are submitted for review by a jury. After curtailment of the corpus according to these criteria, of the 399 unique prizes around 190 remain.

With the rapid growth of literary prizes, a hierarchy of awards has emerged – after all, one prize yields more prestige than the other. In a previous study I have shown, that the symbolic capital a prize represents, is strongly tied to its journalistic capital (i.e. the critical attention an

¹⁵ Cf. Verdaasdonk, ‘De kans om de P.C. Hooft-prijs te winnen’, p. 136.

award manages to generate).¹⁶ The extent to which an award succeeds in catching the eye of the literary press, in turn, correlates to the amount of economic capital (i.e. prize money) that is involved (more prize money generally equals more critical attention). Awards that entail a large sum of prize money are, moreover, predominantly perceived as prestigious (even if the economic capital is provided by political or commercial sources). Once they have been perceived as such, they will continue to be regarded so – even if meanwhile more lucrative prizes have appeared on the literary field.¹⁷

I have been able to identify a small number of literary prizes (circa 10) per decade, that are considered valuable in that particular timeframe: these are the ones that are much discussed in the press (and that authors generally want to win).¹⁸ This top 10 accounts for 85% of the articles on literary prizes; the top 3 even often accounts for around 50% alone. Although the composition of those top 10s and top 3s change over the course of decades, they are dominated by prizes that are funded by the same bodies: the Dutch state, the municipality of The Hague (awarded by the Jan Campert Stichting), the municipality of Amsterdam, Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, and commercially-funded parties (AKO, Libris and their successors). Due to the symbolic value attributed to these top-10 awards, these prizes (listed in the appendix of this article) will be the main focus of this present study. The other awards will serve as a background corpus to these top-10 prizes.

Awarding behaviour

Literary prizes form an institution of their own on the literary field and play an important part in the symbolic production of literature.¹⁹ The purpose of the process of symbolic production is to convince others of the literary quality of a text, for example, by means of awarding an author. Through the act of institutional validation, an award does not only affect the ascribed literary value of a work, but often also its economic value (in terms of sales figures): this holds particularly true for commercially-funded prizes that aim to award the ‘best’ novel of the year.²⁰ Juries determine who wins a prize, and as such pass judgements on literary quality. They generally consist of literary professionals (writers, publishers, critics, literary scholars, and so on), and operate independently. They are free to choose whomever they like for a winner, however, their choice is somewhat limited by, for instance, the objective of the award (as stipulated in its rules of eligibility) and the willingness of authors to enter the competition.²¹ Except for literary prizes

¹⁶ See Petra Boudewijn, “Alleen vette prijzen doen ertoe”. De receptie van literatuurprijzen in de literaire dag- en weekbladkritiek’.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 48-51.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-54.

¹⁹ Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, p. 31.

²⁰ De Bestseller 60, an index of bestselling books in the Netherlands, which is updated weekly by Stichting Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek (a foundation with the objective of promoting the interests of Dutch publishers and booksellers), shows that the sales figures of nominated and winning novels of the AKO and Libris literary prizes generally peak shortly after the shortlist respectively winner is announced. See <https://www.debestseller60.nl> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

²¹ English, *The economy of prestige. Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value*, pp. 130-137.

specifically aimed at female authors, their freedom of choice is not restricted by notions of gender.

Yet gender factors into the jury's decision in other ways. For example, every literary work published within a certain period of time could, in theory, compete for 'best' work of the year. In some cases however, such as the Libris Literatuur Prijs, publishers have to pay a fee in order for a novel to enter the competition, which make them likely only to submit works that they already attribute great literary value to.²² As previous research has shown, publishers are more predisposed to ascribe literary quality to male authors, a gender-bias that presumably also affects their submissions for literary prizes.²³ Publishers might take past awarding behaviour into consideration too, and decide to strategically submit a novel by a male writer in order to increase their chances of winning, as the percentage of female laureates of the Libris Literatuur Prijs is notoriously low. In such cases, juries have to make a choice based on a pre-selection made by publishers. Other prizes however, such as those awarded by the Jan Campert Stichting, do not allow submissions from publishing houses, but choose freely from the available range of literary works.²⁴

Although juries operate (more or less) independently, they act according to a set of internalised dispositions, inclinations, and strategies on literature and one's (and everyone else's) place on the literary field, that has been described by the founding father of field theory, Pierre Bourdieu, as *habitus*.²⁵ In this paragraph, I will focus on awarding behaviour, which results from the *habitus* of literary experts who serve on juries, and which English – elaborating on Bourdieu – has called the 'judging *habitus*'.²⁶ Of course there are also prizes awarded by lay-men juries (such as the NS Publieksprijs voor het Nederlandse boek). However, it concerns a handful of prizes that are not included here, because I wish to examine the awarding behaviour of expert-juries in their capacity of gatekeepers of literature. In addition, I intend to study awarding behaviour from the 1950s onwards, because (as previously mentioned) there was no Dutch literary award scene to speak of before the Second World War, and because a large number of prizes, which are considered 'prestigious' by players on the literary field today (the P.C. Hooft-prijs and those of the Jan Campert Stichting for example), first came into being in the late 1940s.

²² Lucas van der Deijl et al., 'Mapping the demographic landscape of characters in recent Dutch prose. A quantitative approach to literary representation', in *Journal of Dutch Literature*, 7.1 (2016), pp. 25-26.

²³ See Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, and Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*.

²⁴ Paauwe, *Het literaire prijzencircus. Onderzoek naar de positie van literatuurprijzen in het Nederlandse literaire veld*, pp. 85-86.

²⁵ English, *The economy of prestige. Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value*, p. 364.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-123.

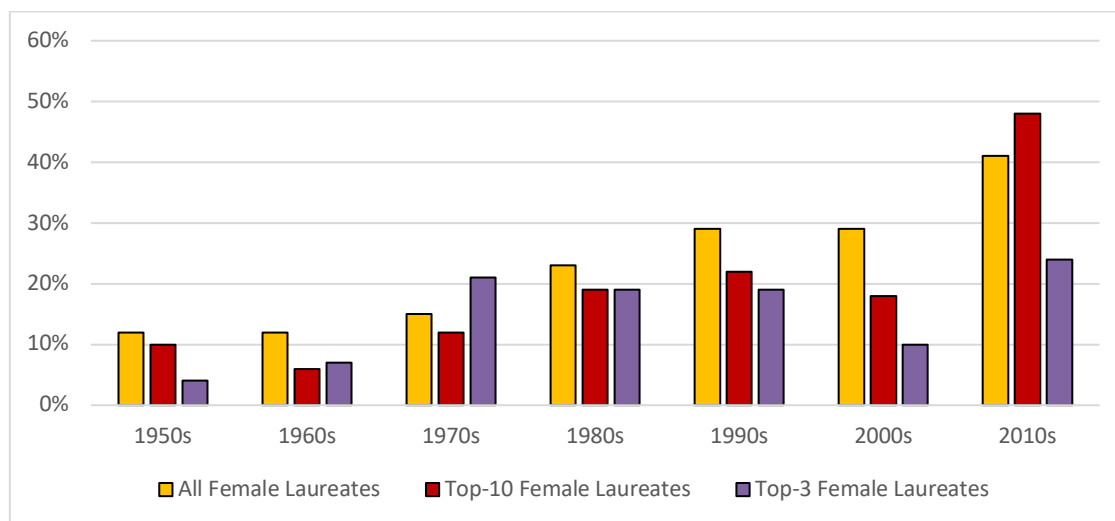


Figure 2: Percentage of literary prizes awarded to female authors in the Netherlands

When one looks at the judging habitus of expert-juries, patterns with regard to the awarding of female authors emerge. Figure 2 shows a gradual increase of female laureates for all literary awards included in the corpus: from 12% in the 1950s to 41% in the 2010s. Please note that in the most recent decennia, this increase may be influenced by skewed data. As aforementioned, the database is incomplete from 2005 onwards. I added the data for all top-10 awards up until 2019. The overall increase of awards won by women, however, seems to fit the trend seen in the second half of the twentieth century. This trend shows that the number of female laureates is on the rise from the 1970s onwards, which is on par with social historical developments (such as second-wave feminism), that have contributed to (somewhat) levelling the playing field for female authors: they have resulted in the establishment of literary awards specifically aimed at female talent – the Annie Romein-prijs (1979) and Anna Bijns Prijs (1985) – and presumably made juries, given the overall increase of female laureates and the fact that female authorship did not start rising on the field of limited production until the 1990s, more susceptible of literary works written by women.²⁷

When zooming in on the top-10 awards, one sees that the percentage of female laureates increases from the 1970s onwards as well, however it fluctuates over the course of decades. This rise can be partially attributed to the arrival of literary awards for women on the award scene, since 100% of their laureates are female. Both the Anna Bijns Prijs and Annie Romein-prijs (renamed Opzij Literatuurprijs) feature in these top-10s in the 1980s and 2010s respectively. In both cases, they increase the percentage of female laureates by 6%. Another factor are newly-established debut prizes – the Anton Wachter-prijs (1977) for prose and C. Buddingh'-prijs (1988) for poetry – that feature in these top-10s from the 1980s onwards. They more often award female authors (29% respectively 49% on average) than, for instance, the state-funded awards for life-time achievement: the P.C. Hooft-prijs (19%) or Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren (14%). Debut prizes that feature in the top-10s increase the percentage of female laureates by 2% on average during the period studied, and by 4% on average from the 1980s onwards.

²⁷ Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, pp. 55-60.

Yet the percentage of female laureates of top-10 awards consistently falls behind by that of female authors on the field of limited production. Only due to the presence of the Anna Bijns Prijs in the top-10 awards of the 1980s, both percentages (around 25%) briefly match. From there on, female authorship on the field of limited production starts to climb from 35% in the 1990s to around 40% in the 2000s, however the percentage of female laureates of top-10 awards declines from 23% to 18% respectively.²⁸ A major factor in this decline is the arrival of the commercially-funded prizes – the AKO Literatuurprijs (1986) and Libris Literatuur Prijs (1993) – on the literary award scene. Both awards are modelled after the British Booker Prize and (cl)aim to award the 'best' novel of the year.²⁹ They dominate the top 3 from the 1990s onwards, together with the P.C. Hooft-prijs, which has featured in the top 3 since the 1950s. In case of the commercially-funded awards, women are severely underrepresented. Upon examining the AKO Literatuurprijs for example, Paauwe concluded (among other things) that its nominees and laureates are typically men in their fifties, who have made their debut some ten to twenty years ago.³⁰

The commercially-funded prizes nominate on average 1.3 (AKO) and 1.5 (Libris) women out of 6 nominees each, and oftentimes do not shortlist any female authors at all. During the 1990s and 2000s the percentage of female laureates of the commercially-funded prizes declines from 20% to 10% (AKO) and 17% to 10% (Libris) respectively. The percentage of female laureates of the P.C. Hooft-prijs, that many consider the most prestigious literary prize of the Netherlands, also drops around this time: from 29% in the 1980s to 20% in 1990s and 10% in the 2000s. These top-3 awards account for the sudden decrease in female laureates of top-10 awards in the early twenty-first century: without them, the percentage of female laureates remains more or less the same until the 2010s (around 25%). A percentage that still lags behind by that of female authorship on the field of limited production during a period, in which – ironically – the emancipation of Dutch women was declared complete by the then Minister of Social Affairs,³¹ and that is made considerably worse by the conservative awarding behaviour of the top-3 awards.

In recent times however, the judging habitus of top-10 awards seems to be drastically changing: the percentages of female laureates have stopped dropping and started increasing significantly (from 18% in the 2000s to 47% in the 2010s on average). This trend includes the state-funded prizes, which are known for their relatively conservative awarding behaviour: the percentage of female laureates of the P.C. Hooft-prijs for example, rises from 10% in the 2000s to 40% in the 2010s. The percentage of female laureates of awards for 'best' work of the year also generally increases: in case of, for instance, the AKO Literatuurprijs (renamed ECI subsequently BookSpot Literatuurprijs) from 10% to 20%; and in case of the VSB Poëzieprijs (renamed De Grote Poëzieprijs), a privately-funded award for poetry, which features in the top-10 awards since its inception in the 1990s, from 10% to 44%. When looking at debut prizes, women are now even in the lead: the percentage of female laureates of the Anton Wachter-prijs and C. Buddingh'-prijs

²⁸ Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*, pp. 40-41, and Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*, pp. 55-56.

²⁹ Interestingly, as Hugo Verdaasdonk has observed, both prizes have never awarded the same literary work. Verdaasdonk, 'De kans om de AKO-prijs of de Libris-prijs te winnen', p. 144.

³⁰ Paauwe, *Het literaire prijzencircus. Onderzoek naar de positie van literatuurprijzen in het Nederlandse literaire veld*, p. 65.

³¹ See for example 'Emancipatie van vrouwen is volgens De Geus voltooid', in *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 November 2003.

exponentially grows from 20% and 30% respectively to 80% each. The percentage of female laureates of the other top-10 awards stabilises, when compared to the previous decade.

In short, women are on the rise on the Dutch literary award scene, and the percentage of female laureates seems to be catching up with that of female authorship on the field of limited production. Two possible explanations can be provided for the improving conditions for female writers on the award scene. On the one hand, the renewed public interest of recent years in feminist issues (such as equal opportunities for women who aspire to top positions in business, politics and other fields), might have made juries more susceptible of female authors who compete for a position in the literary top.³² On the other, since women are reportedly employed ever more as experts on the literary field, juries could have become more diversified, which subsequently might have translated into their awarding behaviour. I will next turn my attention to the composition of expert-juries, in order to examine the participation of women as jurors in the award scene as possible explanation for the degree of female-friendliness in the judging habitus of top-10 awards over the course of years.

Jury composition

With women reportedly ‘conquering’ the literary world, one would expect more diversified juries over the course of decades. In order to study this hypothesis, I have gendered all the names of jurors in the database. When looking at all literary awards included in the corpus, one sees a gradual increase of the percentage of female jurors: figure 3 shows that up until the 1970s the percentage of female jurors remains around 11%; from then onwards it starts to grow from 17% in the 1980s to 47% in the 2010s. The percentage of female laureates shows a similar trend during this period: up until the 1970s the percentage of awards won by women remains around 13%; from then onwards it steadily increases from 23% in the 1980s to 47% in the 2010s. Please note again, that from 2005 onwards the database is incomplete, and that I have added the data for all top-10 awards up until 2019. The fact that the percentage of female and male jury members is about the same in the 2010s, a ratio that is on par with that of men and women in Dutch society, is therefore mainly due to the jury composition of the top-10 awards.³³

³² For an overview of recent gender-related topics and research with regard to Dutch society, see Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, ‘Emancipatiemonitor’: https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Terugkerende_monitors_en_reeksen/Emancipatiemonitor (accessed on 23 September 2019).

³³ Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, ‘Mannen en vrouwen per leeftijdsgroep’, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2018/35/mannen-en-vrouwen-per-leeftijdsgroep> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

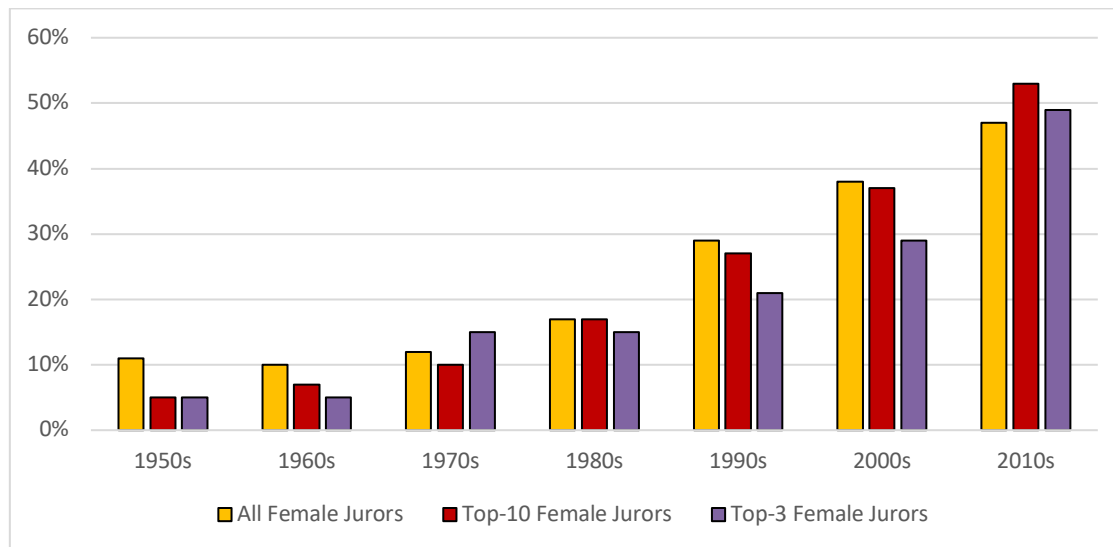


Figure 3: Percentage of female jurors on the Dutch literary award scene

At first glance, jurors have become more diverse and so have the laureates, for never before have so many women served on juries and never ever have so many female authors been awarded literary prizes as in the 2010s.

Upon closer inspection however, some side notes are to be made: particularly in case of the 'prestigious' prizes. While the percentage of female jury members of top-10 awards on average continues to rise steadily from 5% in the 1950s to 53% in the 2010s, this trend does not translate to the same extent into their awarding behaviour, for the percentage of female laureates fluctuates (as previously discussed). The top-3 awards seem more conservative than the other top-10 awards: not only in their share of female laureates, but also in the percentage of female jurors, which has risen from 5% in the 1950s to 49% on average in the 2010s. If the top-3 prizes are not taken into consideration, the percentage of female jury members of top-10 awards increases to almost 40% on average in the early twenty-first century, while the percentage of female laureates (as aforementioned) stagnates around 25% from the 1980s through the 2000s. Thus, until the 2010s, top-10 awards are typically governed by a more conservative judging habitus, that favours the literary works of male authors over those by female writers to a considerable degree.

Furthermore, a more diverse jury does not equal a more female-friendly judging habitus. Of the winners of the aforementioned debut prizes (that are known for their relatively progressive awarding behaviour) 25% (Anton Wachter-prijs) and 60% (C. Buddingh'-prijs) are female; while their juries on average consist of 'just' 10% and 37% women respectively. The reverse is true for the commercially-funded prizes (which are known for their conservative awarding behaviour): where 'only' 20% (AKO Literatuurprijs) and 12% (Libris Literatuur Prijs) of their laureates are female; their juries consist of 34% and 35% women on average respectively. In the 2010s, the percentage of female laureates of the Libris Literatuur Prijs has stooped to 10%, even though its share of female jurors has risen to 50%. The awards of the Jan Campert Stichting, that had all-male juries up until the 1990s, could serve as another example.³⁴ Those prizes have displayed

³⁴ With the exception of the Vijverberg-prijs 1954, which was then once issued for a play (instead of a novel) and for which actress Heleen Pimentel was invited to sit on the jury in addition to the board members (who double as jurors of

more female-friendly awarding behaviour than, for instance, the Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren, whose juries at the time consisted up to 43% of women, however which awarded its first female author only in 1992.

In addition, demographic aspects other than gender, as well as expertise and preferences of jury members likely factor into awarding behaviour. Previous research into some of the literary prizes listed in the top 10 indicates, that the average jury member of such awards is a middle-aged male, presumably white, who works on the literary field as a journalist (in the capacity of literary critic) and who fancies literary works written by authors that resemble him in demographic background, as such writers often appeal to his literary preferences (in terms of themes, styles, and protagonists for example).³⁵ In search of explanations for the recent strong rise of female laureates, I have added other demographic data as well as the fields of expertise of jury members of top-10 awards to the database. I have refrained from including ethnicity, which in itself is a vague yet complex concept. I have registered the nationality of jury members; however, nationality cannot speak to someone's ethnicity and how such is perceived by those around them – one can safely assume though, that the Dutch literary field is (still) overwhelmingly white.³⁶

Jury members of top-10 awards, male and female alike, are on average around fifty years of age over the course of decades: the youngest female juror being 25 and the oldest 85; the youngest male juror being 22 and the oldest 83. Women typically sit 2,85 times on juries, whereas men serve 4,34 times as jury members. Because men generally stay on longer as jurors, they mark the judging habitus of literary prizes more strongly, as their dispositions, inclinations and preferences continue to influence awarding behaviour for a longer period of time. People are typically invited to join juries because of their social and cultural capital: they are often well-connected on the literary field and dispose of a form of sought-after literary expertise.³⁷ Figure 4 shows the representation of groups in which the jury members can be subdivided:

the foundation's awards). See Hubert Michaël et al., *Nederlandse literaire prijzen. 1880-1995* (Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij, 1986), p. 94.

35 Cf. Van der Deijl et al. 'Mapping the demographic landscape of characters in recent Dutch prose. A quantitative approach to literary representation', pp. 21-22, 28 onwards, and Paauwe, *Het literaire prijencircus. Onderzoek naar de positie van literatuurprijzen in het Nederlandse literaire veld*, pp. 42,66.

36 Cf. Karin Amatmoekrim, 'Een monoculturele uitwas. De ondraaglijke witheid van de Nederlandse letteren', in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 August 2015, and Claire Schut, 'Jan Campert prijzen 2016: "whites only"?' in *Neerlandistiek.nl*, 24 January 2017, <https://www.neerlandistiek.nl/2017/01/jan-campert-literatuurprijzen-2016-whites-only/> (accessed on 29 March 2019). Nationality will not be further discussed in this article, as it does not seem a relevant category in this case: the vast majority of jurors (>80%) has Dutch citizenship (which includes, for instance, literary professionals from the former colonies, such as Surinam or the Antilles, who may not identify as white).

37 Cf. English, *The economy of prestige. Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value*, pp. 121-122.

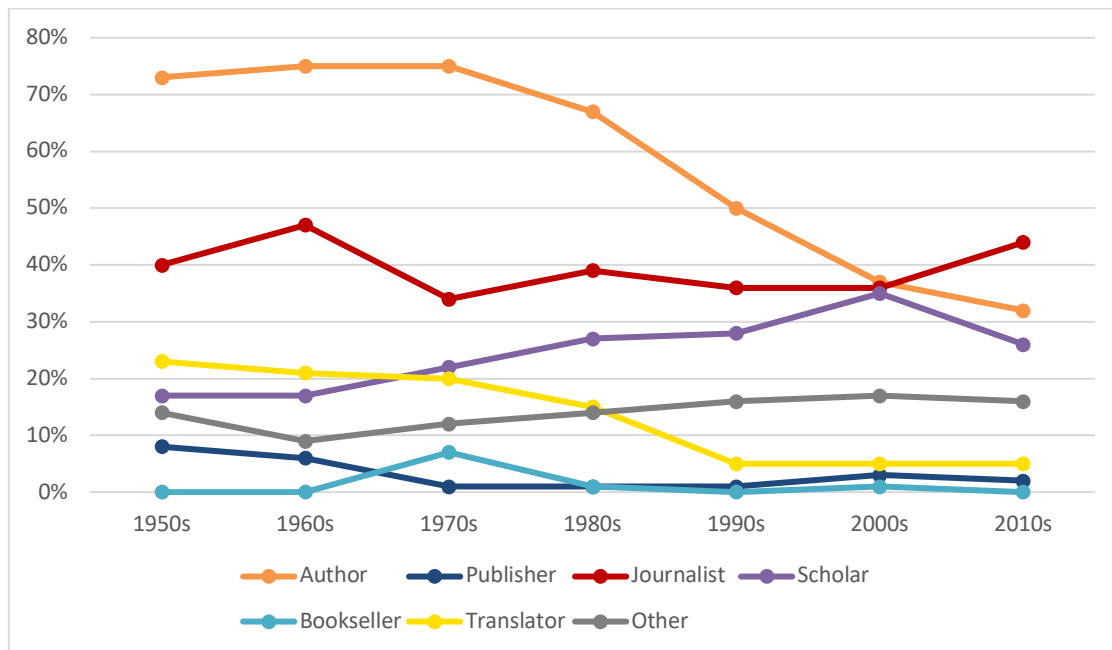


Figure 4: Expertise of jury members of top-10 literary awards in the Netherlands

Just as the percentage of female jurors increases steadily over the course of time, so does the share of women within the different groups of jurors. Oftentimes jurors have multiple areas of expertise, as they play multiple roles on the literary field: combinations that often occur are, for instance, journalist and scholar, or author and translator. Authors, journalists and scholars are in the lead among jury members, and as such impact the literary award scene the most. There are hardly any jurors with commercial interests, i.e. publishers and booksellers, among the jury members of top-10 awards. The category 'other' consists mainly of administrators. For example, the jury chairperson of the AKO and Libris prizes is typically a prominent politician. The rest of this category is predominantly made up by administrators of organisations on the literary field, such as the Literatuurmuseum or Letterenfonds.

The largest group of jury members consists of authors. These author-jurors typically stem from the field of limited production. They are often last year's winners or otherwise renowned for their expertise of Dutch creative writing. As long as the field of limited production is dominated by male writers, the pool of author-jurors is predominately male as well, yet the percentage of women is slowly but surely increasing from 5% in the 1950s to almost 50% in recent years. The share of author-jurors on juries steadily declines over the course of decades however: from 73% in the 1950s to 32% in the 2010s. Apparently, in jury composition other types of literary expertise are increasingly favoured over those of authors.

Journalists form the second largest group of jurors (their share fluctuates around 40%). The percentage of female journalist-jurors rises from 2% in the 1950s to 51% in the 2010s. Because jury members generally need to have literary expertise, jurors who are listed as journalist are typically literary critics. It has been well-observed both inside and outside academia that literary critics (male and female alike) tend to favour works of literature written by men over those by women: not only do they review literary works by male authors more frequently and extensively,

they also write more often in a favourable way about them than they do about literary works by female writers.³⁸

Scholars account for the third largest groups of judges (25% on average). These scholar-jurors typically specialise in literature or an adjacent field. By partaking in the award scene, they therefore simultaneously help to shape the object they study (literature and literary culture in a broad sense). The percentage of female scholar-jurors rises from 6% in the 1950s to 59% in the 2010s. Although scholars have increasingly begun to study the literary works and position of female writers (due to the introduction of gender studies at Dutch universities in the late 1970s, among other things), much of the research in terms of academic focus and consecration is still predominantly directed at the lives and works of male authors or the male-dominated field of limited production in general.³⁹

The aforementioned observations on the different juror-groups (their dispositions, inclinations and preferences) could account for the predominantly male-oriented judging habitus of top-10 awards. Their awarding behaviour could be – at least, partially – attributed to the so-called gender effect, that is well-researched in other fields, in which women are competing for top positions. On such fields, gatekeepers (such as selection committees) often divide the vacant positions between candidates who resemble them in terms of demographic profile (gender, ethnicity, social class, age, and so on), as such candidates often share their preferences and perspectives. This should not be regarded a mere conscious decision on their part to discriminate against others, but is a matter of course wrapped up in a discourse on ‘quality’ in order to select the ‘best’ candidate. People who resemble the current gatekeepers (who often turn out to be white, upper-class, middle-aged men) are judged more favourably and therefore have better chances of securing a top position (such as a seat on a company’s board) in comparison to those who differ from the present gatekeepers.⁴⁰

The gender effect also takes hold on the literary award scene. Although the pool of jury members has steadily become more diverse, up until the 2000s the top-10 awards appear to adhere to the judging habitus of the (white) middle-aged male, who has dominated jury compositions for so many years on end. Juries seem to have internalised his ideas, beliefs, and preferences on literary ‘quality’, which have then translated into their awarding behaviour. One could argue that, as a rule of thumb, the more ‘prestigious’ the prize, the more ‘conservative’ its

³⁸ Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*, pp. 41, 45-46, and Lezeres des Vaderlands, ‘Mogen wij de rekening? Een jaar #lekkertellen’, 16 February 2017, <https://lezeresdesvaderlands.wordpress.com/> (accessed on 29 March 2019).

³⁹ Exceptions include but are not limited to Jacqueline Bel & Thomas Vaessens (eds.), *Schrijvende vrouwen. Een kleine literatuurgeschiedenis van de Lage Landen, 1880-2010* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), Erica van Boven, *Een hoofdstuk apart. ‘Vrouwenromans’ in de literaire kritiek 1989-1930* (Amsterdam: Sara/Van Gennep, 1992), Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*, Maaike Meijer, *De lust tot lezen. Nederlandse dichters en het literaire systeem* (Amsterdam: Sara/Van Gennep, 1988), Marianne Vogel, *Baard boven baard. Over het Nederlandse literaire en maatschappelijke leven 1945-1960* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2001), and Vos, *Uitzondering op de regel. De positie van vrouwelijke auteurs in het naoorlogse Nederlandse literaire veld*.

⁴⁰ M.C.L. van den Brink et al., *Black box tussen aanbod, werving en selectie van vrouwen. Onderzoek naar genderpraktijken in de benoemingen voor leden van RvB’s en RvC’s in het Nederlandse bedrijfsleven* (Research Report Radboud University Nijmegen, commissioned by Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschap / Directie Emancipatie, 2016), p. 19.

judging habitus (considering that top-10 prizes consistently award women less on average).⁴¹ With the steady increase of female jury members however, especially during the last decade (when the percentage of female judges started to match and exceed that of male jurors), the judging habitus of top-10 awards has grown much more female friendly – not because women would only want to award other women, but because (as research from related fields of study repeatedly shows) ‘diverse’ selection committees generally arrive at more ‘inclusive’ judgements than those consisting merely of members of the ‘old boy network’.

Next, I will focus on jury reports in order to examine to what extent juries take gender into their considerations for awarding a prize, and in which ways they write about women in connection to literary quality.

Jury reports

Juries account for the choices they make in jury reports: why they believe that a given author or literary work is worthy of their award. In addition, they sometimes reveal something about the range of literary texts they had to choose from (in terms of the overall literary quality or lack thereof in their opinion), what selection criteria they have used (which are often only vaguely discussed), how the decision-making process has gone (whether or not they readily agreed on who would win), and so on. At the same time, jury reports are carefully polished texts to uphold the award’s public image. The reports paint a picture of the deliberations that juries like to project to the outside world. Since the decision-making process typically takes place behind closed doors, one cannot be sure what was (not) said and done (in connection to gender). Some reports are published, others are only read during the award ceremony. Of the top-10 prizes, most jury reports are accessible through online and offline publications.⁴²

Juries often report that they have faced a difficult task, regardless of whether the range of literary works was disappointing or exceeding expectations. Generally, jurors take their duties seriously and perform them honourably, for not doing so would reflect poorly on the award’s prestige and their own as literary professionals.⁴³ Because prizes have the objective to award the ‘best’ author (whether it is for their debut, latest work, or oeuvre), juries aim to assess literary quality, therefore they typically use literary criteria to justify their choices. Extraliterary criteria, which gender is often considered to be, do not – at least, openly – factor into their justifications. For example, the report of the Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren 2018, which was awarded to Judith Herzberg, states that the award: ‘has existed since 1956, and has been awarded 21 times, 19 times to a man, twice to a woman. The jury of 2018 leaves it at this observation’.⁴⁴ In mentioning the lack of female laureates, they simultaneously make it clear they do not want discuss gender.

⁴¹ With the exception of the 2010s. See my remark at the beginning of this paragraph on the composition and completeness of the data.

⁴² Much information on Dutch literary awards (including jury reports) can be found on www.literatuurplein.nl, hosted by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (accessed on 10 September 2019) or on the individual websites of prizes.

⁴³ English, *The economy of prestige. Prizes, awards, and the circulation of cultural value*, pp. 121-122.

⁴⁴ Marita Mathijssen et al., *Het doorgestreepte blijft te lezen. Het schrijverschap van Judith Herzberg. Juryrapport Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren 2018* (Den Haag [etc.]: Nederlandse Taalunie, 2018), p. 6: ‘[De Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren] bestaat sinds 1956, en is 21 keer toegekend, 19 keer aan een man, tweemaal aan een vrouw. De jury van 2018 laat het bij deze constatering’.

Except for the women's prizes, juries do not consider it their task to advocate for female authors. Gender is therefore typically not addressed at all, while at the same time women's voices are being wrapped up in a discourse on the so-called universality of (common) literary themes. If a literary work by a female author is awarded – even if the prize-winning novel's protagonist is a woman pondering womanhood in search of her place in the world – juries do not emphasise its 'female' perspective, but rather stress its 'universal' nature. For example, the report of the Libris Literatuur Prijs 1994, which was awarded to Frieda Vogels for a volume of her autobiographical opus magnum, reads: 'In a subdued tone, the meticulous self-examination of the protagonist and the tragedy of fate are articulated into a narrative in which art and life are one'.⁴⁵ The jury then goes on to praise the novel for its striking portrait of 'the universal condition humaine'.⁴⁶

If gender is openly discussed, it is as part of the recurrent 'feminist' themes that are being addressed in the laureate's work. When Hella S. Haasse was awarded the Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren 2004, for instance, the jury report read:

Both in her literary work and in her erudite essays – about female writers, about images of women in literature, about the work of admired colleagues such as Vestdijk, Hermans and Multatuli – Haasse has often shown herself very sensitive to the different lives and positions of men and women and their cultural and literary representation. In these cases, she has often been far ahead of her time.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy, that in this fragment the 'female writers' in question remain anonymous, whereas the male authors are mentioned by name. Furthermore, the report would have provided the jury with the perfect opportunity to take a stand in the matters they applaud Haasse in her literary work for. They do not seize the opportunity however: gender-related criticism can be part of an oeuvre, but not of a jury report apparently.

Not all themes are considered 'universal' or appropriate topics for female authors for that matter – at least not for those who want to make it on the field of limited production. In a jury report released at the announcement of the shortlist of the Libris Literatuur Prijs 2007, the jury first scolded authors for only producing 'dull craftsmanship, polished and flawless in the best cases, yet impersonal and soulless', but which had more often resulted in insufferable books 'full of sloppiness'.⁴⁸ The jury then admitted they had initially 'forgotten' to nominate a female author, as 'one knew how such went in case of a men's jury' (obviously not counting chairwoman Cox

⁴⁵ Jan Terlouw et al., 'Uitreikingsrapport Libris Literatuur Prijs 1994', 16 May 1994, <https://literatuurplein.nl/detail/literaireprijseditie/libris-literatuur-prijs-1994/532> (accessed on 2 September 2019): 'Op ingehouden toon worden het minutieuze zelfonderzoek van de hoofdpersoon en de tragiek van het noodlot verwoordt tot een relaas waarin kunst en leven één zijn'.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 'de universele condition humaine'.

⁴⁷ Jozef Deleu et al., 'Juryrapport. Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren 2004', http://prijsderletteren.org/2004_juryrapport/ (accessed on 2 September 2019): 'Zowel in haar literaire werk als in haar erudiete essays – over schrijfsters, over beelden van vrouwen in de literatuur, over het werk van bewonderde collega's als Vestdijk, Hermans en Multatuli – heeft Haasse zich vaak zeer sensitief betoond omtrent de verschillende levens en posities van mannen en vrouwen en hun culturele en literaire representatie. Zij is hierin haar tijd vaak ver vooruit geweest'.

⁴⁸ Cox Habbema et al., 'Juryrapport Nominaties Libris Literatuur Prijs 2007', 26 March 2007, <https://www.librisprijs.nl/2007-juryrapport-nominaties> (accessed on 6 September 2019): 'braaf maakwerk, in de beste gevallen gepolijst en foutloos, maar onpersoonlijk en zielloos', 'boeken vol slordigheden'.

Habbema, who was not a literary expert anyway).⁴⁹ So, the report goes on, they re-read all the female entries (50 out of 160 novels) and passed some harsh judgement: the women had amounted to nothing but 'lightweight' prose about 'small personal trifles' and 'relationship problems'.⁵⁰ No female authors had made the first draft of the shortlist, because apparently they could not measure up to – let alone, transcend – the 'dull craftsmanship' of their male competitors.

Subjects that are traditionally associated with women, such as domestic life and child rearing, appear in particular off limits for female writers who wish to be considered for a 'prestigious' literary award. However, when Bernard Dewulf was awarded the Libris Literatuur Prijs 2010 for an autobiographical novel on family life, the jury praised him for his 'courage' in 'writing about the very, most ordinary, that is at the same time the most precious: one's own children'.⁵¹ They considered this 'Bildungsroman of a father' an example of 'high quality literature' and a 'stylistic crown jewel'.⁵² Apparently, different standards are applied when it comes to evaluating literary texts of men and women. Jury members almost automatically associate male writers with literary quality (regardless of their subject-matter), whereas female authors are not read the same way – or to put it poignantly: when a woman writes about domestic themes her work is considered a mere personal trifle, while a novel on the same subject by a man is perceived as a masterpiece of literature.

Furthermore, juries unapologetically shortlist men only, while appealing to literary quality as their prime selection criterium. The AKO Literatuurprijs is notorious for doing so: of the 33 times that the prize has been awarded, 8 times it was on account of an all-male shortlist. In addition, of the total of 198 nominees, just 45 were female, and only 6 women ever won the prize. The last time the AKO Literatuurprijs shortlisted no women was in 2014. In the media, (some) commotion had ensued after the announcement of the longlist, which made the jury take a stand in their nominations report. They wrote that, according to the press, this year's edition appeared to be for 'white old men' exclusively.⁵³ The jury argued however, that they took 'a different perspective' and defended their choices by claiming they had only shortlisted 'good literature'.⁵⁴ Their awarding behaviour gave away a strong gender-bias against female authors, as the jury predominantly reserved the qualification of 'good literature' for male authors, since women had been severely underrepresented on both their longlist (3/25) and shortlist (0/6).

In *Reading beyond the female* (2018), Koolen has extensively studied the relationship between gender and the appraisal of literary quality. She has pointed out, time after time, that

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 'Je wist toch hoe dat ging met zo'n mannenjury'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 'En ze herlas: lichtgewicht, kleine persoonlijke wissewasjes, relatieproblemen [etc.]'.

⁵¹ Hans Wijers et al., 'Juryrapport nominaties Libris Literatuur Prijs 2010', 10 May 2010, <https://www.librisprijs.nl/2010-juryrapport-winnaar> (accessed on 6 September 2019): 'Je moet het maar durven. Schrijven over het aller, allergeeueste, dat tegelijkertijd het meest dierbare is: je eigen kinderen'.

⁵² Ibid.: 'een ontwikkelingsroman [...] van een vader', 'literatuur van hoge kwaliteit', '[het] stilistische kroonjuweel'.

⁵³ Job Cohen et al., 'Bekendmaking nominaties AKO Literatuurprijs 2014', <http://www.literatuurplein.nl/litprijseditie.jsp?litPrijsEditieId=1676> (accessed on 6 September 2019): 'Het seizoen 2013/2014 schijnt het jaar van oude witte mannen te zijn'.

⁵⁴ Ibid.: 'De jury kijkt er met een andere blik naar: goede literatuur is tijdloos en dus ook leeftijdloos'. The jury refused to touch upon the media's allegations about ethnicity and gender in their report.

‘perception of gender influences perception of literary quality’.⁵⁵ Readers (the gatekeepers of the literature included) perceive literary works through a ‘gendered lens’: ‘a way of reading a text that is – consciously or subconsciously – affected by the gender of the author’.⁵⁶ The literary award scene is no exception to this: the author’s gender shapes the jury’s expectations (in terms of content and quality of the work concerned), and considering past awarding behaviour determines to a considerable extent their chances of winning. Although juries, no doubt, act in good faith and mean to apply ‘objective’ standards when assessing the ‘quality’ of a literary work, gender plays an important role in their decision-making process: whether it be as an aspect of a conservative judging habitus or, in case of the women’s prizes for literature, in deliberately breaking away from such by advocating female writers on the Dutch literary field.

Concluding remarks

On 3 February 2020, the longlist of the Libris Literatuur Prijs has been released. For the first time in the award’s history, just as many women as men were listed. Moreover, as many female as male nominees made the shortlist. However, on 22 June 2020, the Libris Literatuur Prijs was awarded to another white middle-aged male author, Sander Kollaard, whose prize-winning novel has a ditto protagonist.⁵⁷ Except for the prizes aimed at female talent, the judging habitus of top-10 awards on the field of limited production has been highly predisposed over the course of years towards literary texts by male writers, to whom juries are apparently inclined to attribute literary quality more readily than to their female counterparts. Yet, female authors are on the rise on the award scene: their chances of winning are increasing, which holds especially true for the last decade, and particularly in case of debutants. Although the percentage of female laureates still lags behind that of female authorship on the field of limited production, the gap between both seems slowly to be closing, if the trends found continue.

The steady influx of female jurors seems to account for the changing judging habitus of the Dutch literary award scene. Up until the 2000s, the top-10 awards adhere mostly to the judging habitus of the (white) middle-aged male, who has until then dominated jury compositions. As have been reflected by awarding behaviour, juries seem to have internalised his dispositions, inclinations, and preferences on literary ‘quality’. From the 2010s onwards however, the tables have turned, with women now making up the majority of jury members. As such, they appear to have made their mark on the award scene, since their influx happens to coincide with the steep rise in female laureates of the last decade. Whereas the gender effect first resulted in a gender-bias against female authors, it now seems to be working to their advantage: for as juries are becoming more diverse, the overall male-oriented judging habitus of top-10 awards is starting to give way to a more female friendly one. (Yet, of course, the awarding behaviour of individual prizes may differ.)

⁵⁵ Koolen, *Reading beyond the female. The relationship between perception of author gender and literary quality*, p. 15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ionica Smeets et al. 2020, ‘Juryrapport winnaar Libris Literatuur Prijs 2020’, <https://www.librisprijs.nl/2020-juryrapport-winnaar> (accessed on 5 October 2020).

In their reports however, juries (almost) never account for gender. They sometimes mention gender as part of an author's work, but never as a factor in their deliberations. They list 'literary quality' as their first and foremost selection criterium. Their awarding behaviour shows on the other hand, that gender does often factor into their decision-making process, which – until recently – is usually reflected by a lack of female laureates. As literary works are read through a gendered lens, the gender of the author affects the perception of the work's quality: women being naturally less associated with such. Furthermore, the award scene seems to be governed by a double standard: whereas men are free to choose their subject-matter, women should steer clear from 'female' topics, if they want to be regarded as 'proper' candidates for a prize. Last but not least, themes that juries do applaud women for in their literary work are often incorporated by a discourse on 'universal' human experiences – which could be interpreted as an appropriation and acceptance of female voices at the same time.

Finally, in conducting this study, I have strived to contribute to ongoing research into the position of women on the Dutch literary field – more specially, on the literary award scene, as prizes have developed into a high-profiled phenomenon of contemporary literary culture, while they have simultaneously turned into important legitimising mechanisms that are part of a wider debate on the consecration of literary texts. In doing so, I hope to have contributed to the understanding of the ideological conditions of the reception of literature and dissemination of literary value through awards. The results show that women, both as authors and jurors, are on the rise on the award scene, which may indicate – in turn – that the literary field is slowly moving towards a more level playing field for them. However, these findings can only be interpreted in a meaningful way, when the results of this research are compared to that of others on (the state of) the Dutch literary field in the twenty-first century.

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Appendix: Percentage of female laureates and jurors of top-10 awards on the Dutch literary field

For every decade, a small number of literary prizes awarded by expert-juries (approximately 10) can be identified, that seem to be considered valuable on the field of limited production in that particular timeframe.⁵⁸ I have listed the percentage of female laureates and jurors of these top-10 awards over the course of years below. The calculated averages per decade are weighted averages, considering, for example, the frequency of awarding and number of jury members.

1950s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	P.C. Hooft-prijs	11%	13%
2	L.B. en C.W. van der Hoogt-prijs	0%	0%
3	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	0%	0%
4	Jan Campert-prijs	0%	0%
5	Vijverberg-prijs	29%	3%
6	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	0%	3%
7	Poëzieprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam	16%	5%
8	Essayprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam	11%	12%
		10%	5% on average

1960s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	P.C. Hooft-prijs	0%	7%
2	L.B. en C.W. van der Hoogt-prijs	20%	8%
3	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	0%	0%
4	Poëzieprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam	5%	12%
5	Prozaprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam	7%	12%
6	Vijverberg-prijs	0%	0%
7	Jan Campert-prijs	22%	0%
8	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	0%	9%
9	Henriette Roland Holst-prijs	0%	7%
10	Essayprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam	0%	14%
		6%	7% on average

1970s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	P.C. Hooft-prijs	10%	28%
2	Multatuli-prijs (previously Prozaprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam)	13%	27%
3	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	40%	0%
4	L.B. en C.W. van der Hoogt-prijs	10%	8%
5	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	0%	29%
6	F. Bordewijk-prijs (previously Vijverberg-prijs)	0%	0%
7	Herman Gorter-prijs (previously Poëzieprijs van de gemeente Amsterdam)	20%	7%
8	Jan Campert-prijs	0%	0%
9	Henriette Roland Holst-prijs	0%	15%
		12%	10% on average

⁵⁸ See for the ways in which these top 10s have been identified Boudewijn, “Alleen vette prijzen doen ertoe”. De receptie van literatuurprijzen in de literaire dag- en weekbladkritiek’, pp. 27-31.

1980s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	P.C. Hooft-prijs	29%	17%
2	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	20%	16%
3	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	0%	7%
4	Multatuli-prijs	10%	23%
5	L.B. en C.W. van der Hoogt-prijs	20%	10%
6	Jan Campert-prijs	20%	16%
7	Herman Gorter-prijs	0%	7%
8	F. Bordewijk-prijs	10%	16%
9	AKO Literatuurprijs	33%	27%
10	Anna Bijns Prijs	100%	81%
11	Anton Wachter-prijs	25%	0%

19%	17%	on average
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1990s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	P.C. Hooft-prijs	20%	17%
2	AKO Literatuurprijs (between 1997 and 1999 Generale Bank Literatuurprijs)	20%	23%
3	Libris Literatuur Prijs	17%	23%
4	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	10%	37%
5	VSB Poëzieprijs	17%	33%
6	L.B. en C.W. van der Hoogt-prijs	40%	5%
7	C. Buddingh'-prijs	30%	35%
8	F. Bordewijk-prijs	10%	37%
9	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	33%	16%

21%	27%	on average
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2000s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	AKO Literatuurprijs	10%	28%
2	P.C. Hooft-prijs	10%	30%
3	Libris Literatuur Prijs	10%	28%
4	VSB Poëzieprijs	10%	38%
5	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	30%	49%
6	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	25%	41%
7	C. Buddingh'-prijs	30%	41%
8	F. Bordewijk-prijs	20%	49%
9	Anton Wachter-prijs	20%	4%

18%	37%	on average
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2010s	Name	% Female Laureates	% Female Jurors
1	Libris Literatuur Prijs	10%	50%
2	P.C. Hooft-prijs	40%	44%
3	AKO Literatuurprijs (between 2015 and 2018 ECI Literatuurprijs, since 2018 renamed BookSpot Literatuurprijs)	20%	53%
4	Constantijn Huygens-prijs	30%	48%
5	VSB Poëzieprijs (since 2019 renamed De Grote Poëzieprijs)	44%	52%
6	C. Buddingh'-prijs	80%	40%
7	Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren	33%	57%
8	Opzij Literatuurprijs (previously Annie Romein-prijs)	100%	100%
9	Anton Wachter-prijs	80%	36%

47%	53%	on average
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About the author

Petra Boudewijn works as a researcher and teacher in higher education. She regularly publishes on modern Dutch literature. She is inspired by the critical dimensions of literature and literary culture, in particular by postcolonial and gender-related questions. She has obtained her doctorate from the University of Groningen for her research on the representation of Eurasians (*Indische Nederlanders*) in Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature. The present article has been written as part of a postdoctoral project at the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, where she has conducted research on Dutch literary awards.