



Writing the Living and the Dead. The Dutch Writer Hella S. Haasse as (Auto)Biographer

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Abstract: This article is about Hella Haasse as a life writer. It considers her life writing in the context of her work as a whole before focusing on her experimentation with biographical and autobiographical writing as textual performances of selves. I argue that the relationship between the writer and her historical, biographical subject is affected by her attempts to grapple with her own life, past and present, in autobiographical texts. More specifically, I analyse Haasse's literary experiment in terms of multiple, nomadic subjectivity with an emphasis on Haasse's textual representation of processes of becoming.

Keywords: Hella Haasse, Life Writing, Biographical and Autobiographical Writing, Nomadic Subjectivity

Introducing Hella S. Haasse

Hella S. Haasse (1918-2011) is one of the most important Dutch writers of the twentieth century. She died on 29 September 2011 and in the (re)assessments of her work that will surely follow, her reputation will continue to grow. I mean to suggest that the Dutch literary establishment was slow to appreciate the innovative nature of her contribution and there is still some way to go before her extensive oeuvre is fully valued given that the most recent history of Dutch literature by Hugo Brems is the first to discuss Haasse's writing in any detail and across genres. While it is true that Jaap Goedegebuure devotes short essays to her in his own *Nederlandse literatuur 1960-1988* and in *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis*, edited by M. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, these focus on the historical work. Haasse certainly did find recognition in the form of prizes and honours, not only in the Netherlands but also in France and was, finally, awarded the 'state' prize for literature in Dutch – de Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren – in 2004 at the age of eighty-six.¹ [25]

Hella Haasse was her own woman: in the realm of literature she undermined genre boundaries, destabilised the historical novel, conducted a sustained exploration of the nature of history and fiction, and wrote readable contemporary fiction about recognisable lives, as well as a large number of essays and some plays. However, her first publication was a volume of poetry, *Stroomversnelling* (Rapid Current), that appeared in 1945. In this article I have chosen to focus on Haasse's representation of the exceptional lives of self and others as part of a wider project to explore her life writing² In her autobiographical work she unflinchingly examines herself, particularly the relationship between her own past and present, or between on the one hand her colonial childhood and early youth in Indonesia and on the other her life as a woman, wife and mother in the Netherlands after the Second World War. And in the biographical historical

writing she presents the lives of others for whom emancipation in some form or other was at the heart of their endeavours.

Hella Haasse is not one of those twentieth-century Dutch writers whose work has been much translated into English, although she has been translated into a large number of languages: twenty-five in total.³ The five English titles do not give English readers a sense of the range and varied nature of Haasse's oeuvre, though her earliest work is well-represented with two translations: her first work of fiction, a novella called *Forever a Stranger*⁴ and *In a Dark Wood Wandering*,⁵ the first and most traditional of her historical novels. At its centre is the figure of the French aristocrat and poet Charles Duke of Orléans (1394-1465). He is presented not only as a man of the world, but also as a family man, political prisoner and creative individual. While the novel is traditional in that it relies heavily on historical research and displays its knowledge in descriptive passages, its multidimensional portrait of the life of this French aristocrat is quite new in Dutch literature. Haasse emphatically shows Charles to have a strong feminine side and brings female concerns such as childbirth and childrearing to the foreground, aspects of the lives of great men excluded from biographical narrative at the time. In an autobiographical account of the genesis of this novel, Haasse judges it to be the product of 'the naïve mind of a childish romantic dreamer.'⁶

The Scarlet City,⁷ on the other hand, published in Dutch only three years after *In a Dark Wood Wandering*, is a more experimental narrative. It is set in sixteenth-century Rome and features a character unrecorded by history, though with the familiar family name of Borgia, leaving the way open for an imaginative exploration of cultural identity rather than a historical reconstruction. *Threshold of Fire*,⁸ published in English in 1993, first appeared in Dutch in 1966. It is also set in Rome, this time in the fifth century, so that historical facts are even harder to come by. The central character is the banished poet Claudian who displays great mobility – social and cultural as well as geographical. This character struggles to come to terms with his Egyptian background, having reinvented himself as a Roman poet and later as an outlaw. [26]

Haasse's experimentation with ways of constructing and representing the past continues through a series of historical writings of uncertain genre ranging from the purely fictional epistolary sequel to Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons: Een gevaarlijke verhouding of Daal-en-Bergse brieven* (A dangerous liaison or Valmont letters)⁹ to the largely factual account of the life of Charlotte-Sophie von Aldenburg or Mrs Bentinck, published under the title *Mevrouw Bentinck (Mrs Bentinck)* in 1990.¹⁰ This is one of the biographical works I shall be discussing in greater depth in the main part of this article. Another important historical and biographical work is *Heren van de Thee* (1992; *The Tea Lords*)¹¹ which studies the entwined lives of a husband and wife on his plantation in Indonesia around the turn of the twentieth century. Similar to *Mrs Bentinck* in its use of egodocuments, it nevertheless also tells a story around these factual elements, which means that it is closer to fiction than history, unlike *Mrs Bentinck* which resists the move into fiction.

Haasse's contemporary fiction appears comfortingly domestic and small-scale, dealing as it does with the everyday lives of Dutch men and women and their families. But these small worlds harbour dramas and dilemmas, so that the stability and calm of everyday life are threatened. These short novels have not attracted a great deal of critical attention, nor have any of them been translated into English. Like the novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Elizabeth Taylor, Haasse's novels are sharply observed portraits of marriages and friendships with their attendant disappointments and ironies. The novels' subtlety has tended to mask their sexual politics and critique of the literary establishment, *De wegen der verbeelding* (1983; Roads to

Imagination) with its triumph of female creativity over male careerism being a prime example.¹² They are concerned with human subjectivity, the growing awareness of self which leads many characters, male and female, to go off in search of lost or hidden events and relationships. The novel *De verborgen bron* (1950; The Hidden Source) narrates the story of Jurjen Siebeling, who withdraws from everyday life in search of something missing from his life and begins to uncover the truth about his mother-in-law, Elin Breskel. In the prequel to this story, *De ingewijden* (1957; The Initiated), the transgressive Elin is seen staging her own death by drowning, abandoning husband and child. She escapes the small world of family. Since the norms of society rendered this behaviour unthinkable, for decades she escaped suspicion and was able to lead a new life. She eventually lives completely independently, that is, outside traditional society, as a wise woman on Crete.

Haasse is also a pioneer of the essay in Dutch, leaving a large body of work that engages with European literature and history, with particular attention to the colonial legacy, the position of women, psychoanalytical thought and the aftermath of the Second World War. All her reflections stress the values of tolerance and emancipation. Again, it seems to me that this part of her oeuvre is in need of reassessment. Dutch journalist and fellow-biographer, Elsbeth Etty, puts this down to the fact that Haasse and her publisher have not provided readers with a [27] well-presented, well-structured body of essayistic work: the essays have appeared piecemeal, prompted by commissions or occasions.¹³ Two years after Etty's comments appeared, the first volume of Haasse's collected essays was published in 2008, bearing the title *Inzicht* (Insight). Etty's main point is that as a result of this haphazard publication history, many important observations made by Haasse had gone unnoticed. Part of her explanation for this, however, is that Haasse was frequently ahead of her time; to give a small example, she was the first literary commentator to point out that menopausal women were all but invisible in Dutch literature.¹⁴

In keeping with Haasse's defiant approach to genre boundaries, the essayistic writing contains some prose works that are openly personal and autobiographical. *De tuinen van Bomarzo* (1968; The Gardens of Bomarzo) is ostensibly an essay on the origins of the renaissance gardens near Viterbo, yet it is frequently read as a personal search for the origins of Haasse's own sources of inspiration and themes.¹⁵ In this article I shall focus on an early autobiographical prose work: *Zelfportret als legkaart* (1954; Self-Portrait as Jigsaw-Puzzle).

From this overview of Haasse's writing, it is clear that autobiography and biography have a central place in her body of work. Spanning the last sixty years, her writing can be seen as a huge project to engage with lives as lived, felt and acted out by individuals. Her fascination for past lives is expressed through the biographical work and the historical novels, which do not form two distinct categories or genres. At the same time, the life with which she is most intimately acquainted – her own – is also the subject of a number of published reflections. Both forms of life writing can be thought of as textual performances of selves as well as static representations of lives. In this article, I want to explore two interrelated aspects of the two forms of life writing produced by Haasse: first as performances of selves, and second as categories of writing that are separated by a porous boundary enabling a dynamic relationship between them. In particular I want to argue that the relationship between the writer and her historical subject is affected by her attempts to grapple with her own life, past and present, in autobiographical texts.

Women and Life Writing

That there is a relationship between autobiography and biography is recognised by the widespread use of the term life writing, which according to the Editor's Note to the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* has been the case since the 1980s. This emphasis on the common focus is connected to the growing numbers of women active in the field. Most commentators agree that traditional auto/biography deals with male writing about a successful public persona, and that women's contribution has affected every aspect of the tradition, including the attenuation of the boundaries between public and private, between genres, and possibly even between [28] past and present.¹⁶ Hella Haasse has made a significant contribution to the development of life writing in the Netherlands, particular to the acceptance of personal life as an indispensable element of biography.

The power of the personal is confirmed by many of the contributions to *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*, a collection of essays by women biographers discussing the impact of writing biography on the biographer herself and on the institution of biography.¹⁷ As the introduction points out, far from shying away from the notion that 'any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it',¹⁸ these women biographers embrace the involvement of their own self with that of their subject. This takes biography far away from what Lois Rudnick calls the 'myth of the heroic individuated self.' She continues: 'Integral to the myth is the distanced authorial voice that provides the illusion that the life actually was as it is presented.'¹⁹

Hella S. Haasse and Life Writing

In the Netherlands, Hella Haasse most certainly participated in this kind of cultural shift away from the biographer as distanced creator of illusory and heroic 'real' lives. She published her first autobiographical work in 1954 and biographical work in 1949, if a biographical historical novel is included under the life-writing umbrella. The following overview gives a sense of the balance between autobiography and biography in Haasse's life writing:

1. Main autobiographical works in the order in which they were first published:

- *Zelfportret als legkaart* (1954; Self-Portrait as Jigsaw-Puzzle)
- *Persoonsbewijs* (1967; Proof of Identity)
- *De tuinen van Bomarzo* (1968; The Gardens of Bomarzo)
- *Krassen op een rots* (1970; Scratchings on a Rock)
- *Een handvol achtergrond* (1993; A Handful of Background)

2. Key biographical works in the order in which they were first published: Only the last of these is translated into English. The titles are followed by Haasse's own description of the sub-genre to which each belongs:

- *Mevrouw Bentinck of Onverenigbaarheid van karakter: een ware geschiedenis* (1978; Mrs Bentinck or Incompatibility of Character – 'A True History')
- *De groten der aarde, of, Bentinck tegen Bentinck: een geschiedverhaal* (1981; The Great and the Good or Bentinck contra Bentinck – 'A Historical Narrative')
- with Arie-Jan Gelderblom, *Het licht der schitterige dagen. Het leven van P. C. Hooft* (1981; The Glittering Years. The Life of P.C. Hooft)

- *Schaduwbeeld of Het geheim van Appeltern. Kroniek van een leven* (1989; Silhouette or The Secret of Appeltern. Chronicle of a Life)
- *Heren van de Thee: Roman* (1992) (The Tea Lords. A novel of Java, 2010) [29]

Staging Selves

Returning to my theme of performing the self, the relationship between life writer and life writing is frequently expressed in theatrical terms in the literature on autobiography and biography. For example, in their introduction to *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* the editors refer to biographical subjects as the '*dramatis personae* of history'.²⁰ And in an article on women's autobiography in France, Nancy K. Miller reflects on the specificity of female autobiography in which the self becomes a kind of theatrical production: 'To the extent that autobiography [...] requires some strategy of self-dramatization' and 'contains, as in fiction, a crisis and a denouement', what conventions, we might then ask, govern the production of a female self as *theatre*? How does a woman writer perform on the stage of her text?²¹ Miller here emphasises the life as material for a public performance of self shaped by the autobiographer for the audience, and given that this is autobiography, the performer coincides with the writer. If this is applied to the case of biography, the question will be: who performs which self? Alice Wexler, writing about the actress Emma Goldman, stresses the similarities with acting. 'Goldman's metaphor of the autobiographer as actor, rehearsing – and performing – a variety of roles, also suggests other critical approaches to her highly theatrical style. Certainly she regarded the autobiography as a dramatization rather than an exploration of her life [...]'.²²

So the elements that I shall be reviewing in Haasse's work are:

- I the subjects of life writing as its *dramatis personae*, which implies that Haasse in some way directs or stages the action and the text functions as the stage;
- II who performs the *dramatis personae*.

It so happens that Hella Haasse is no stranger to performance: she trained and worked as an actress during the Second World War. By the time she stopped performing in 1946, she had written cabaret texts and a play which was never put on. A number of plays were written and performed in the years that followed.

Performing Multiple Subjectivity

In 1954, when she was only 36, she published her first book in which she placed herself centre stage: 'Self-Portrait as Jigsaw-Puzzle'. This was the first of the five overtly autobiographical works listed above. The 'Self-Portrait' interweaves vivid scenes of Haasse's life as a mother of young children who has writing ambitions with a childhood memoir of growing up in colonial Indonesia and with abstract reflections on the writing process. Clearly this is not a conventional retrospective account of the writer's life. And I see it as much more than what Nancy K. Miller calls 'the inscription of a female self'. Haasse uses the term 'I' to refer to herself as subject; this subject is multiple, and she comes to realise that the search for a [30] coherent whole is an impossible one. What the three distinct strands of the text together do is perform Haasse's transformation from a 'neurotic' (her word), frustrated, escapist mother to a self-aware, mature, accepting woman. It is the process of writing that enacts the metamorphosis:

'Literature is reality (both tangible and illusory – appearance playing a no less real part in a human life) plus something more, and together they result in authenticity, that is to say, in what is experienced as true, as applicable to humanity.'²³ So Haasse places multiple selves on this stage: the nomadic young girl who moves temporarily to the Netherlands at the age of seven after an early life in colonial Indonesia; the self who responds to the confrontation with a new homeland by taking refuge in stories and fantasy; the young mother who willingly accepts her role which foregrounds the body; her understanding of the impact of marriage on her subjectivity; and the self as reader and writer with intellectual ambitions. The drama being staged here is that of a woman who has undertaken to work on herself.

At the start of the 'Self-Portrait' Haasse positions herself explicitly in a humanist tradition with her ambition to write 'het verhaal van de mens' (the story of man). However, she soon comes to the realisation that this master narrative is questionable because she knows so little of '[d]e mens en zijn werkelijkheden' (the human and his realities). Her next step is to acknowledge that she should first examine her own realities.²⁴ She goes on to describe a process in which she becomes aware of her own self-positioning as viewer of her life and in which she learns to experience multiple selves by inner growth, or movement.²⁵ This process can be seen as anticipating nomadic philosophies of becoming in which the remembered past plays an active part in the process of transformation, particularly as expounded by Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects*²⁶ and her subsequent writings. I would argue that Haasse's discontinuous, or rhizomic, style of writing and empathic approach to her biographical subjects also can be seen as nomadic elements. As Braidotti says in her book *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*: '[...] the steps of "becoming" are neither reproduction nor imitation, but rather empathic proximity and intensive interconnectedness. It is impossible to render these processes in the language of linearity and self-transparency [...].'²⁷ And like nomadic philosophy, Haasse's performance of her own 'becoming' is vitalistic in the sense that she embraces the whole of life and sees the process of growth as unending:

I believe that this unending growing is the sense and the point of being human. Forswear the 'world'? Deny 'illusion'? Why? Everything is included. The more we regard as 'included', the less we will repress. A restricted, hermetically sealed, encapsulated 'I' implies an unknown space surrounding it charged with suppressed things, an enormous danger. So, life, but how to live it?²⁸ [31]

It was a daring move in the early 1950s to display one's private selves in public, and her staging aspires to something larger: she is reinventing the medieval figure of everyman and offers herself in the role. Everyman is played by a woman in 'Self-Portrait'. It is hardly surprising that critics did not know how to respond. For example, the established literary critic Jan Greshoff declares himself at a loss because his knowledge, the fact of his being widely read and his critical judgement are all rendered useless by this text.²⁹ Haasse's theatrical presentation of her multiple selves, however tastefully and intellectually performed, challenged the very act of reading.

The Dynamic between Living Self and Dead Others

What are the connections between this experimental presentation of the writer's self and her preoccupation with past lives? For a start, Haasse does not accept that the past is altogether dead and gone:

The writer who feels himself attracted to particular people or periods from the past, has encountered in them as in a parable, his own problem or a problem of his own time. His relationship to the historical material is not one of 'what can I do with these facts?' but can better be formulated as 'what is this material, what does it mean, what reality is concealed in that rough chunk of history, in that chaos of facts and names and dates that so fascinates me.'³⁰

In what follows, I will discuss in more detail the ways in which Haasse stages the lives she is concerned with, paying particular attention to the dynamic between the present and the past. Haasse wrote only one short traditional biography in collaboration with the literary historian Arie-Jan Gelderblom: *The Glittering Years* which took as its subject a poet of the Dutch Golden Age, P.C. Hooft. This is a brief and conventional representation of a life, written to mark the 400th anniversary of the poet's birth. As Haasse's own designations of the other biographical works attest, each one approaches biography in a different way. This is related to and in keeping with Haasse's staging of herself as being in constant transformation, particularly since she sees writing as one of the means of acting upon the self.

The 'true history' *Mrs Bentinck. Incompatibility of Character* and the 'historical narrative' *The Great and the Good* both feature the eighteenth-century north-German aristocrat who married into the Anglo-Dutch Bentinck family. The two volumes about Charlotte-Sophie Bentinck follow her from girlhood through marriage to her abandonment of husband and sons for a literally nomadic, independent life. During the nomadic years, she has two more sons by her lover, sets up an unconventional household with her own and other illegitimate children – her 'colony' – lives for a time in Leipzig where the Gottscheds temporarily look after the colony [32] and intends joining her good friend Voltaire in Switzerland. She has spells at the courts of Frederick II of Prussia and Empress Maria Theresia and is even sent by the latter as an ambassador to Italy. She was a prolific letter-writer and wrote and published poems, essays and a book on coins of the ancient world.³¹

Haasse's *Mrs Bentinck* is also a dramatic account of the marriage to Willem Bentinck who, though born in England, inherited his father's Dutch estates and settled rather unwillingly in The Hague, eventually becoming an adviser to the Prince of Orange. The couple are placed at the centre of the stage, with other family members, staff, children and historical figures of the eighteenth century brought on stage as the story progresses. The narrative focuses on the couple's divorce and its aftermath. Charlotte-Sophie is outraged by the injustices of the system of marriage that gives women so few rights. In particular, she fights for the ownership of her family estates which become Willem's upon divorce. She seems to accept that she forfeits her rights to see her two sons, although she does make various attempts to contact them, even paying them a visit incognito at one point. In this briefest of summaries, I have narrated this woman's life from a bird's eye perspective, but this is emphatically *not* what Haasse does. Having placed Charlotte-Sophie centre-stage, Haasse allows her to speak for herself. The text is a kind of collage of documents – letters from and to Charlotte-Sophie, and her own writings starting with a self-portrait written in 1729 when she was fourteen. Charlotte-Sophie performs her anguish, her passions, her self before the reader's eyes. Other characters are also given speaking parts with Haasse providing linkages which are often paraphrased documents. These are sometimes 'embroidered upon' as Haasse notes in an afterword explaining her working method. *Mrs Bentinck* demands real engagement from readers, because of the multiplicity of both the text and the self being performed here. Haasse is actually generous towards Willem

Bentinck so that he, too, speaks for himself and cannot simply be dismissed or demonised, and readers are pulled in different directions as their sympathies shift.

The question I want to ask here is whose (multiple, shifting) self is being performed here, that of the biographer's subject and/or the biographer? In a 1990 essay entitled 'Dubbelportret' (Double Portrait)³² on biography with reference to the lives of Charlotte-Sophie Bentinck and her near contemporary, the writer Madame de Charrière (known in Dutch as Belle van Zuylen), Hella Haasse is quite clear that there is a real dynamic between subject and biographer. This dynamic is of benefit to the biographer – the greater the intensity of the relationship, the more successful the biography, according to Haasse.³³ What she does not reveal, however, is the nature of that dynamic in her own case, though she does state that it must be based on some kind of 'overlap' between the two lives. Readers have the freedom to find their own connections.

In the last part of this article, I will explore this overlap, or dynamic, between the autobiographical and the biographical in more detail. Haasse maintains that [33] the personal involvement is particularly strong 'in the case of a biography by a creative writer about another creative writer. This is where subject and object overlap, often inextricably, even if only because in both lives, creativity in textual form plays such a crucial role.'³⁴ In Haasse's work this is true for Charlotte-Sophie, for P.C. Hooft and for the subject of 'Silhouette or the Secret of Appeltern', Dirk Joan van der Capelle tot den Pol, who were all published writers. But I wonder if it is the whole story. Not a great deal is known about Haasse's private life. What she includes in her autobiographical work reveals much about her thinking self, her writing self, and her emotional self, but next to nothing about her relationships, except that she has remained married to the same man since 1947, has two daughters and a number of grandchildren. Yet marriage is a major preoccupation of Haasse's oeuvre, and I want to conclude this article by looking at one small case of overlap between the autobiographical and biographical.

In 'Self-Portrait' Haasse speaks of a traumatic period in her childhood when her mother had to go to Davos from Indonesia because of illness. Hella and her brother also went to Europe, to the Netherlands, where she was sent to a boarding house, while her brother stayed with their grandparents. Hella was around seven years old at the time, and unable to understand fully this dramatic change in her life. She began to comfort herself by making up stories. A visit by her mother made things worse, because the women running the boarding house – the 'aunts' – did not approve of the mother and made Hella suffer: 'The aunts were not very comforting. They had expected a pale, suffering woman from Davos. My mother looked well, behaved in a lively manner and her appearance was decidedly unprovincial.'³⁵ When Hella was nine the children joined their mother in a hotel in Switzerland where they met uncle Cesar, an Argentinian. After a few months mother and children returned to Indonesia to resume their former lives. The actors perform their roles, the readers watch. The text never explains what anyone is feeling, but it is painfully clear how much the children suffered and it can be reasonably assumed that their mother was reluctant to return to her husband in Indonesia.

The Tea Lords is designated a novel but, in an afterword, Haasse explains that it is not fiction, since it is based on letters and other documents from the 'Indonesian tea and family archive'. It narrates the life of a Dutch tea planter, Rudolf van Kerkhoven, from his arrival at the virgin territory in 1873 to his departure in 1918. The second half of the book is devoted to his marriage to Jenny, who was born in Indonesia to an old colonial family. Jenny's isolated life as a tea planter's wife is interrupted when she goes to Europe in 1893 without her husband, to take two of her sons to the Netherlands. According to the memoirs of a cousin, after this Jenny could no longer settle in the dependent role that was expected of her by her husband. When one of

their sons married in 1905 in the Netherlands, they went to Europe, but Rudolf returned without Jenny who waited at least a year before returning to her husband and the plantation. When she did, she was embittered, [34] unhappy and gradually more unstable. In 1907 she took poison and died. The main part of the narrative ends with a letter from Rudolf to their son in the Netherlands in which he reasserts the patriarchal norm by insisting that she was really a good wife and mother who had been visited by a tragic illness that made her deviate from the 'proper' path:

Her loss is irreparable. We are left with a gaping void in our lives, because we all know how good and kind she was at heart, a true helpmate, indeed she personified almost every womanly virtue. We can only lament that her nervous illness robbed her of the ability to grasp the happiness that lay before her. It was beyond her powers. What is to become of us now, I cannot say.³⁶

Again, Haasse resists explanation, the overt expression of emotion, leaving her readers to make what they will of this tragic self – of a woman who loved her husband at first, but whose frustration and bitterness at her lack of opportunity for self-fulfilment undermined her resilience. By linking this biography to the episode in Haasse's childhood when her mother also appeared to be finding herself in Europe away from the colonial world with its very particular restrictions on colonial wives, I do not mean to suggest that Jenny's decline enacts an episode from Haasse's life. The dynamic between biography and autobiography is much more subtle than that, as I hope to have shown in this short discussion of key texts from Hella Haasse's large body of works.

Finally, as my last example makes quite clear, when reflecting on the relationship between the two forms of performing the self, autobiography and biography, it is not a simple matter of contrasting a living, writing self with the lives of dead others. The dynamic between them is created in part by the writer's refusal to treat the death of the body as the death of the subject who lives on in memories and documents. In the hands of Haasse, the biographer, who is directing these life stories, these materials allow her dramatis personae to speak. Haasse has selected not only the words, but also the characters in the first place. Those she has chosen resonate with her own preoccupations and indeed with the facts of her own life as staged in her autobiographical text 'Self-Portrait'. In taking responsibility for the lives of 'I' and others in this way, there is an ethical dimension to Haasse's life writing which is expressed in the epigraphs and 'verantwoording' (justification) to *The Tea Lords*. The narrative is preceded by a quotation from a letter written by Jenny's daughter Bertha who comments that subsequent generations sometimes find apparent side issues of the past can shed light on events. 'The family businesses are no more, but we can bring the people to life again by reading about their thoughts and feelings.' This responsibility extends beyond later generations of the biographical subjects to the readers of biographical narratives. Haasse apparently feels a duty to point out how truthfulness has been achieved. In the case of *The Tea Lords*, which is designated a novel, she explains [35] that novelistic considerations governed the inclusion of certain events and not others, but that the material is not fiction. As an autobiographer who believes that reading is a means for working on the 'I', Haasse knows only too well that the impulse to bring a life into the public domain needs to be carried out with care, since not only her own, but also her readers' lives are at stake.

Notes

1. The prize is actually interstate in the sense that it is awarded by the Dutch Language Union, an intergovernmental treaty organisation involving the Netherlands, Flanders and Surinam.
2. See, for example, Jane Fenoulhet, 'From Personal to Public Memory: Scandal in the Life Writing of E. du Perron and Hella S. Haasse', in *Dutch Crossing*, 34/3, November 2010 and my chapter on Haasse in *Making the Personal Political. Dutch Women Writers 1919-1970* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007).
3. According to the online database of the Nederlands Letterenfonds (Dutch Foundation for Literature), <http://www.nlpvf.nl/vertalingendb/search-results1.php?lang=&searchtype=simple&q=Hella+Haasse&naam=&genre=&taal=&vertaler=&uitgever=&otitel=&allejaren=&alletitels=&jaarvan=&jaartot=&limit=160&nrows=10>, accessed 14 October 2011.
4. Translated by Margaret M. Alibasah and included in *Forever a Stranger and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). A second translation by Ina Rilke is in preparation with the title *The Black Lake*. First published in Dutch as *Oeroeg* in 1948.
5. Translated by Lewis C. Kaplan (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1989). First published in Dutch as *Het woud der verwachting* in 1949.
6. Hella S. Haasse, *Het dieptelood van de herinnering* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2003), pp. 201-3.
7. Translated by Anita Miller (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1990). First published in Dutch as *De scharlaken stad* in 1952.
8. Translated by Anita Miller and Nini Blinstrub (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1993). First published in Dutch as *Een nieuwer testament* in 1966.
9. Where a title is not in italics, this indicates that there is no published English translation. All translations of titles or quotations from unpublished work by Haasse are by Jane Fenoulhet.
10. The work was originally published in two volumes, *Mevrouw Bentinck – Overenigbaarheid van karakter* and *De groten der aarde – Bentinck tegen Bentinck*. For an account of Haasse's experimentation with history and fiction, see Jane Fenoulhet, 'Hella S. Haasse and the Historical Novel Or: The Triumph of Fact over Fiction' in *The Low Countries. Arts and Society in Flanders and The Netherlands. A Yearbook 1995-96* (Rekkem: Stichting Ons Erfdeel, 1995).
11. It is translated by Ina Rilke, and published in London by Portobello Books.
12. For a detailed reading, see Jane Fenoulhet, *Making the Personal Political. Dutch Women Writers 1919-1970*, pp. 189-92.
13. Elsbeth Etty, 'Bewust en gewetensvol leven. De essays van Hella S. Haasse – jenseits van het mevrouwenschap', in Arnold Heumakers, Anthony Mertens & Peter van Zonneveld, [36] *Een nieuwer firmament. Hella S. Haasse in text en context* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2006) pp. 73-94.
14. Etty, p. 92.
15. See, for example, the comment on this text in the online Hella Haasse Museum: <<http://www.hellahaasemuseum.nl/objects/301.html>>
16. See, for example, Helena Grice, 'Gender and Life Writing' in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, ed. by Margareta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 359-61.

17. Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry and Ingrid Winther Scobie, *The Challenge of Feminist Biography. Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
18. Paul Murray Kendal, *The Art of Biography* (New York: Norton, 1965).
19. Sara Alpern et al., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography. Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*, p. 118.
20. Alpern et al, p. 3.
21. Nancy K. Miller, 'Writing Fictions: Women's Autobiography in France', in *Life / Lines. Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 45-61.
22. Alice Wexler, 'Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography', in Alpern et al., p. 42.
23. Hella S. Haasse, *Zelfportret als Legkaart ('Self-Portrait')*, cited from Hella S. Haasse, *Het dieptelood van de herinnering* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2003), p. 74.
24. 'Self-Portrait' pp. 22-3.
25. *Self-Portrait*, p. 38.
26. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
27. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 8.
28. 'Ik geloof dat dit onophoudelijk méégroeien zin en doel van het menszijn is. De "wereld" afzweren? De "illusie" verloochenen? Waarom? Alles hoort erbij. Hoe meer wij als "erbij horend" beschouwen, des te minder zullen wij verdringen. Een beperkt, hermetisch gesloten, ingekapseld "ik" impliceert een met repressies geladen onbekende ruimte daaromheen, een ontzaglijk gevaar. Leven dus, maar hoe?' Hella S. Haasse, 'Self-Portrait', p. 182.
29. See 'Reinventing the Family', chapter 6 of Jane Fenoulhet, *Making the Political Personal. Women Writing in Dutch 1919-1970*, p. 185.
30. 'De schrijver, die zich aangetrokken voelt tot bepaalde personen of perioden uit het verleden, heeft daarin, als in een gelijkenis, zijn persoonlijk probleem of een probleem van zijn eigen tijd ontmoet. Zijn verhouding tot de historische stof is er niet een van "wat zal ik nu van deze gegevens maken?", maar laat zich eerder formuleren als "wat is, wat betekent dit materiaal, welke werkelijkheid ligt er verscholen in dat ruwe brok geschiedenis, in die chaos van feiten en namen en jaartallen die mij zo fascineert.'" Cited from Hella S. Haasse, 'Self-Portrait', p. 78.
31. There is a portrait of Charlotte-Sophie on the Haasse Museum website:
32. Hella S. Haasse, 'Dubbelportret. Een en ander over de biografie, al dan niet "literair"' in *Uitgesproken, opgeschreven* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1996).
33. 'Dubbelportret', p. 73. [37]
34. Idem.
35. 'Self-Portrait', p. 62.
36. *The Tea Lords*, p. 320.

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