



## **Women About Women in 17th-century Comic Theatre**

### **Towards a Nuanced Understanding of the Representation of Female Characters**

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**Abstract:** Scholarship on female characters in comic theatre has focused mostly on stereotypes such as chatterboxes, evil wives and horny old women. This paper will draw attention to alternative – and more positive – ways in which women figure on the Dutch stage in the seventeenth century. Especially comic theatre staged different kinds of women engaged in conversation during ‘women’s meetings’ such as birth meals and tea parties, but also during their daily chores. Women were used by playwrights to address feminine daily concerns, such as pregnancy and breastfeeding. Since they were mainly active in the household, they could credibly voice critical opinions on increasing food prices and the difficulties of managing a household during times of crisis. Moreover, female characters were often used to voice criticism on ongoing discussions on the exuberance of the rich and famous in Amsterdam. In this way, an alternative analysis of female characters in such plays can contribute to a new view of seventeenth-century female identity.

**Key words:** stereotypes; female characters; comic theatre; seventeenth century; Low Countries / stereotypes, vrouwelijke personages, komisch theater, zeventiende eeuw, Lage Landen

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In a farce by Gerrit Cornelisz. van Santen, *Babbling Siitgen* [*Snappende Siitgen* (1620)], a character introduced as ‘My nosey nose’ [‘Meyn bemoeyal’] sends her handmaiden, ‘Lying May’ [‘Leugenachtige May’] out to gather news and spread more gossip:

[...] Try to  
 Speak to ‘Heyl-wants-to-know’  
 And ask her whether she has heard  
 When the feast will be given at ‘Daring Nell’  
 And if she doesn’t know, have her tell me the instant she does  
 If not, she will regret it.  
 Tell her at once, that ‘Toothless Stijn’, the old hag,  
 Is going to marry ‘Young Jaap In the Rummer’  
 They’ll make a fine pair, Winter and Summer  
 He’s a fine lad of twenty-six, she an old toad of seventy.<sup>2</sup>

The woman introduced here is extremely curious and seems well aware of anything new in the gossip going around town. Because of these traits, ‘My nosey nose’ is a good example of the popular seventeenth-century caricature of a babbling and foul-mouthing woman who passes her time trading secrets. Dutch seventeenth-century comic theatre stages a myriad of similar female characters who gossip and chat over ‘women’s meetings’, such as birth meals and tea parties, and during their daily chores such as cleaning or spinning. The gossiping woman is part of a set of well-known caricatures – evil women, vicious and treacherous wives, unreliable servant girls or horny old spinsters – that can already be found in medieval text material.<sup>3</sup> The tradition was continued in early modern literature. In seventeenth-century farces, these types are abundantly present. Scholarly research on these negative stereotypes can be said to have been almost equally

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<sup>1</sup> This article is partly a reflection of research performed for my PhD-thesis, which has been published by Verloren as *Heklen met humor. Maatschappijkritiek in het zeventiende-eeuwse komische toneel in de Nederlanden* (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Gerrit Cornlisz. van Santen’s *Lichte Wigger, en Snappende Siitgen: zeventiende-eeuwse gesprekken in Delfts dialect*, ed. by Adrianus Cornelis Crena de Iong (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959), pp. 335-337, vs. 570-579: ‘[...] je selt sien / Ofje Heyl-verneem-kleed, niet te spraeck kent comen, / Vraeght heur (maer alleen) ofse niet heeft vernomen / Wanneer men tbly-mael geven sal, van onbesuyste Nel, / Weet sy’t niet, dat syt mijn dan past te segghen asment doen sel / Of de roe sou in de pis legghen, want syt niet en dee, / Segter met een, dat tandeloose Stijn, de ouwe quee / Sal trouwen met jongh-Jaep-inden-Romer / ‘Trechte paertje, salt wesen, de Winter met de Somer / Hy is een fray quant van sesentwintich, en sy en ouwe tad van tseventich jaer.’ All translations in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> Giesela van Oostveen, ‘It takes all sorts to make a world. Sex and gender in Bredero’s Farce of the Miller’, in *Women of the Golden Age. An International Debate on Women in the Seventeenth-Century Holland, England and Italy*, ed. by Els Kloek et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), pp. 59-60.

abundant.<sup>4</sup> Until now, however, scholars have insufficiently taken into account that in going about their daily business, female ‘stereotypes’ often give insight into a broad range of subjects that do not appear on stage otherwise.

In this article, I will draw attention to alternative ways in which women figure on stage. Female characters, often in the background of the principal plot, talk about their daily lives, casually voicing their opinions on ‘feminine themes’ such as pregnancy, breastfeeding and the household. Playwrights also used female characters as mouthpieces to discuss news and gossip in the actual world, or to address broader issues relevant to society outside the stage – debates in which women were not normally supposed to actively engage.<sup>5</sup> I propose a new way to look at female characters in seventeenth-century farces, raising the question what these comical plays can teach us about the perception of women in seventeenth-century society and about the views and opinions of the women themselves. Looking at the representation of female characters inevitably involves tackling a number of methodological issues. First, there is the question whether theatre, and especially comic theatre, can be seen as a reflection of the societies in which it was conceived and performed. Indeed, the genre is characterised by a high degree of exaggeration for comical effect, which undermines its referential character. Secondly, early modern plays were exclusively written and performed by men, which adds complexity to trying to reconstruct the image of contemporary women through their representation on stage. In the following paragraphs, I will address these issues in providing an overview of scholarship to date, before diving into the incredibly rich material of Dutch comic theatre.

## Common attitudes towards female behaviour

While in the seventeenth century, women were becoming ever more active in trade and commerce, they were still considered to be primarily responsible for managing the household. Formally speaking, they had to be subservient and listen to their husbands, but in running their households, they were relatively autonomous.<sup>6</sup> Leading a household incorporated many tasks: cleaning, doing the laundry, catering for and preparing decent meals, sometimes leading female staff, spending the family income well and raising the children.<sup>7</sup> Women were considered essential for a good household, and were praised when they did well in managing their tasks. In comic theatre, the positions of men and women within the household was a common theme. Scholars agree that cuckolds, drunks and evil women presented a mirror to the audience, warning against unwanted behaviour in a playful way. Along these lines, exaggerated comical behaviour

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<sup>4</sup> A/o. Marlies Caron, *Helse en hemelse vrouwen: schrikbeelden en voorbeelden van de vrouw in de christelijke cultuur* (Utrecht: Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, 1988); Van Oostveen, ‘It takes all sorts’; Lène Dresen-Coenders, *Helse en hemelse vrouwenmacht omstreeks 1500* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988); Patrycja Poniatowska, ‘As you are well pronounced by all external warrants’. *Women’s Bodies and Women’s Places in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch and English Drama* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu, 2006); Els Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes. Een cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2009), pp. 86-89.

<sup>5</sup> Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> Leendert Frans Groenendijk, *De nadere reformatie van het gezin: de visie van Petrus Wittewrongel op de Christelijke huishouding* (Dordrecht: van den Tol, 1984), p. 115.

of female characters is often believed to convey a moral message.<sup>8</sup> By comically propagating the right way to behave through characters that acted the exact opposite, farces drew on the age-old theme of the inverted world, which is also often represented in contemporary paintings for example.<sup>9</sup> A woman dominating her husband, then, comically showed that in regular practice, women were supposed to be subservient. In an implicit way, these comical depictions plead for socially accepted behaviour. It can be argued, therefore, that playwrights echoed and propagated moralistic and patriarchal ideas that were the subject of a broader discussion in society, as is evidenced by other types of sources, for example moralistic literature such as *Pegasides Pleyn* (1583) by Johan Baptista Houwaert, the popular work *Marriage [Houwelick]* (1625) and *Wedding Ring [Trou-ringh]* (1637) by Jacob Cats, *The wise household keeper [De Verstandige huys-houder]* (1660) by Johan Coler, *Paper World [Pampiere Wereld]* (1681) by J.H. Krul, and many others. At the same time, Els Kloek has shown that the representation of stereotypes such as ‘evil women’ is not to be taken all too seriously in terms of the moral message they conveyed. The exaggerated evil characteristics of these women and the all-too-obvious moral messages could be said to have been evident to the point of becoming almost an irony, their effect being more comical than moral. In every-day practice, women were probably not as disobedient as the caricatures staged, and the audience – among whom many women – were well aware that women had to be resolute to get their households in order.<sup>10</sup> This contrast mirrors an ongoing discussion in scholarly debate, with one school of literary historians believing that comic theatre was mainly intended as humorous,<sup>11</sup> while another school stresses the didactic function of the genre, in trying to educate the audience.<sup>12</sup> To be able to get the message across effectively, seventeenth-century drama theory prescribed that a farce ideally showed the shortcomings of ordinary people in a recognisable way.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, historical research has shown that there is a great difference between the moralist discourse on the behaviour of women and their actual roles in early modern society. Women in reality did not comply with the image in moralist treatises, and often had great societal influence and impact. For example, when social norms were being transgressed (extramarital sexuality,

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<sup>8</sup> Maria-Theresia Leuker, ‘Schelmen, hoeren, eerdieven en lastertongen. Smaad en belediging in zeventiende-eeuwse kluchten en blijspelen’, *Volkskundig bulletin* 18 (1992), pp. 314-315.

<sup>9</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> Willem Ornée, ‘Het kluchtspel in de Nederlanden’, *Scenarium* 5 (1981), pp. 107-121; Willem Ornée, ‘P.C. Hooft als komedieschrijver’, in *Uyt liefde geschreven, studies over Hooft*, ed. by Eddy Grootes et al. (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1981), pp. 117-130; Inneke Grootegoed et al., [‘Inleiding’], in Jilles Noozeman, *Beroyde student en Bedrooge Dronkkaart, of Dronkke-Mans hel*, ed. by Inneke Grootegoed et al. (Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU, 2004), pp. 24-25; Johan Pieter Snapper, ‘The seventeenth century Dutch farce: social refractions of a gilded age’, in *Barocker Lust-Spiegel Studien zur Literatur des Barock. Festschrift für Blake Lee Spahr (Chloe)*, ed. by Martin Bircher (Amsterdam: s.n., 1984), pp. 55-74; Mark Bakker, ‘Humor voor Henk. Over de interpretatie van zeventiende-eeuwse kluchten’, *Moxi* 9 (2002), pp. 103-111.

<sup>12</sup> Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, ‘Samuel Costers Teeuwis de Boer: “vol soetichydt van sin en woorden”’, *Spektator* 5 (1975-1976), pp. 668-711; Jan Henk Meter, ‘Amplificatietechnieken in Bredero’s “Moortje”’, *Spektator* 14 (1984-1985), pp. 270-279; Jeroen Jansen, ‘Aulularia-Warenar, adaptatie in contrast’, *Spektator* 18 (1988-1989), pp. 124-151.

<sup>13</sup> Gustaaf van Eemeren, ‘Van fictie naar realiteit. Beschouwingen bij bepaalde aspecten van de communicatie- en referentiële status van personages in enkele stukken van Bredero’, *Spektator* 14 (1984-1985), p. 295.

theft, violence), the female gossipers in the neighbourhood shared what happened, recording the events in a collective memory. They performed a type of social control, punishing and eventually preventing unwanted behaviour. While not being silent and retracted, as they are prescribed to behave in moral treatises, gossiping women performed an essential role in early modern communities.<sup>14</sup> Also, in the past few decades, economic and social historians have increasingly stressed that women contributed to the early modern economy outside their households.<sup>15</sup> Studies by Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Martha Howell, for instance, have presented a far more nuanced picture of women's labour and their activities in trade and commerce, albeit predominantly in low-income functions or in less well-regulated sectors.<sup>16</sup> Specifically for the city of Amsterdam, where the bulk of preserved comic theatre in Dutch was written and staged, it is well known that women were merchants, both in local markets as well as overseas trade, even without being formally registered as such.<sup>17</sup> Widows and unmarried women over the age of 25, were allowed to engage in commercial activities without the oversight of a man, and married women often played important roles in the trade of their husbands.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that several early modern women had considerable economic independence and freedom of movement.<sup>19</sup>

In literary studies, a more nuanced analysis of female characters has mainly been looked attempted for early modern England. It has been shown that seventeenth-century popular texts (plays, songs, pamphlets and the like) cannot merely be seen as expressions of patriarchal morals. These texts were at the same time aimed at the interests of a growing female audience, and should be looked at as forms of contemporary comments on a society in which women were increasingly playing key parts. Despite the fact that texts were most often written by men, Sandra Clark has argued that 'broadside ballads' often explicitly targeted female audiences by involving women into their narratives. Dialogue songs, for example, feature men and women in discussions on themes such as marriage and love. By including a feminine perspective, the dominant patriarchal discourse was nuanced or plainly negated. While previous research looked at these songs as expressions of a uniquely patriarchal vision, and explained the presence of women as a rhetorical game or a way to increase audiences, Clark argues that authors were actively trying to break away from the dominant ideology of patriarchal marriage.<sup>20</sup> Taking the argument a step further, Susan

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<sup>14</sup> Leuker, 'Schelmen, hoeren, eerdieven en lastertongen', pp. 326-327.

<sup>15</sup> Danielle van den Heuvel, *Women and entrepreneurship: female traders in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1580-1815* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), pp. 22-24.

<sup>16</sup> Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *De draad in eigen handen: vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), pp. 132-134; 163-170; 186-200; Martha C. Howell, 'Women's Work in the New and Light Draperies of the Low Countries', in *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England, 1300-1800*, ed. by Negley Harte (Leeds: Pasold Research Fund, 1997), pp. 197-216.

<sup>17</sup> Danielle van den Heuvel, 'De Openbaar Koopvrouw. De handelingsbekwaamheid van gehuwde vrouwen in de Republiek', *Historica* 28.3 (2005), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Van den Heuvel, 'Women and entrepreneurship', p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Kim Overlaet, 'Gehouden ende gheacht voor een coopwif in Antwerpen rond 1600. Een vloek of zegen voor Antwerpse handelsvrouwen en hun handelspartners?' *Historica* 34.2 (2011) p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Clark, 'The Broadside Ballad and the Woman's Voice', in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England 1500-1700*, ed. by Christina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuk (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 103-116.

Gushee O'Malley noted that women in English gossip pamphlets are depicted as intelligent and independent enough to publish in their own right on the foolishness of their husbands.<sup>21</sup>

David Pennington concluded that the representation of market women and tavern hostesses in popular literature, was more nuanced than is often thought. These women are in fact powerful and very verbal characters, performing their every-day trades in a resolute way, with commercial insight, be it on the markets or in the taverns. And importantly: by working, they are actively contributing to the household's finances.<sup>22</sup>

Research along these lines for the Low Countries is lacking. In her thesis of 1992, Maria-Theresia Leuker studied the role of women and the concept of female honour in seventeenth-century farces. She analysed the behaviour of women in these plays, charting the image of the woman they conveyed to their audiences, to better grasp the role of the woman in seventeenth-century society. More specifically, she looked at the portrayal of marriageable girls, the ways in which marriages were organised and the role of women in conflicts within the marriage and in extramarital relations. One of her conclusions was that the evolution towards a more 'decent' or 'civilised' tone in plays in the second half of the seventeenth century, developed in parallel with similar evolutions in society as a whole, towards self-discipline, sobriety and virtue. Leuker argued that a medieval culture of shame was gradually being replaced by an early modern culture of guilt. In comical theatre, she traced an evolution in plays dealing with extramarital relationships: while the early examples show mainly men being ridiculed because their wives cheat on them, later plays set an example by punishing the adulterous wives and providing moral closure.<sup>23</sup>

While Leuker's analysis was nuanced in sketching evolutions in the depiction of female characters, most literary historians of Dutch material have looked at women on stage mainly in terms of negative portrayal and comical stereotypes. A more nuanced analysis is needed to do justice to the increasing role of women in early modern Low Countries, and how this was reflected on the stage. Foreign visitors to these regions were generally surprised by the power Dutch women wielded in the household, uncommon in their home countries.<sup>24</sup> If their independence was so evident to travellers, I hypothesise that their representation in Dutch literature will have been as nuanced, if not more nuanced and complex, than it was in England.

I propose to look more broadly at the representation of women in Dutch comic theatre. While Leuker has primarily focused on the role of women within the constraints of marriage or romantic relationships, taking a moralist approach of guilt and honour, I aim to give more attention to the day-to-day lives of women as they are depicted on stage. I will take into account all ways in which female characters engage with theatrical reality – and through it, with contemporary societal issues within as well as outside the marriage – in the comical genre.

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<sup>21</sup> Susan Gushee O' Malley, "'Weele Have a Wench shall be our Poet': Samuel Rowlands Gossip Pamphlets', in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England 1500-1700*, ed. by Christina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 121-134.

<sup>22</sup> David Pennington, "'Three Women and a Goose make a Market': Representations of Market Women in Seventeenth-Century Popular Literature', *The Seventeenth Century* 25/1 (2010), pp. 40-44.

<sup>23</sup> Maria-Theresia Leuker, 'De last van 't huys, de wil des mans...' Frauenbilder und Ehekonzepte im niederländischen Lustspiel des 17. Jahrhunderts (Münster: Regensberg, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, pp. 81-83.

## Opinions on stage: playwrights and their audiences

While moralist discourse, such as the extensive work of Johan Baptista Houwaert and Johan Coler, reached a relatively small readership, plays were performed for large audiences and were read in printed form. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the old chambers of rhetoric professionalised and opened their performances to a paying audience, heralding a new form of professional theatre. Later on, we see the appearance of professional theatres in the true sense of the word: the *Nederduytsche Academie* (1617) and the Amsterdam Theatre (1638) were commercial institutions that worked for profit to be invested in charity. Drawing large audiences was in their best interest. The public was socially heterogeneous, ranging from simple labourers to members of the city council.<sup>25</sup> In reflecting this variety, theatre represented a kaleidoscopic range of perspectives, incorporating the viewpoints of men as well as women, rich and poor, young and elderly, all in speaking roles. The form of dialogue allowed for the juxtaposition of opposite or contrasting opinions, often for comical effect. While generously using stereotypical characters and exaggerations, playwrights also ensured their plays to be recognisable for their audiences, mirroring their concerns and every-day lives on stage. This recognition will have been present in the background of the theatrical action, in details of characters' actions, their clothing, the setting in which they are found, their afterthoughts and so forth, just as much as – or even more than – in the development of the plot itself. These details can easily be overlooked, but will form the basis of my analysis. It is precisely in these details that theatre is able to reflect popular opinion on certain groups, for example women. Moreover, even the stereotypes could have worked differently in any given context. In their actions and their representation, these 'stock characters' of course follow the conventions of the genre, but they could also interact with events that were recognised by the contemporary audience, and thereby address issues that were relevant in the specific societies in which these 'universal' stereotypes were staged.

Theatre was dominated by men, both in terms of the authors of the plays and in terms of the actors performing them. Again, it should be stated that playwrights actively sought recognition among their audiences, so they will have tried to portray their female characters in a well-informed way. Unless authors explicitly addressed their intentions in forewords or epilogues, the characters' representation is the only way to gauge their opinions, as Dutch comic theatre does not include an overarching narrator's voice. Moreover, the question is whether authors presented their own opinions, rather than aimed to mirror or reflect that of their audiences. There is no single opinion that can be traced to the individual author. Indeed, the multifaceted representation of differing views is precisely the power of theatre. Audiences were challenged to confront their own views with the opinions represented on stage, and were left to their own judgements.

While theatre as a medium of course is performative and visual, plays were often made available in print. Book printers and publishers quickly saw potential in selling printed versions of the ever growing amount of new plays that were being written to satisfy the taste of the

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<sup>25</sup> Wiebe Hogendoorn, *De schouwburg in beeld. Amsterdamse toneelscènes 1665-1772* (Houten: Hes and De Graaf, 2012), p.20.

audiences, who craved new material.<sup>26</sup> The Nederduytsche Academie as well as the Amsterdam Theatre worked together with specific printers, who obtained the privilege to publish the plays performed at these venues.<sup>27</sup> Certainly when authors had acquired a name for themselves, audiences were interested in buying their work in printed form. In this way, the act of performance and the publication in print were mutually reinforcing: printed plays relied on the success of the performance, but at the same time advertised for renewed performance.<sup>28</sup> For playwrights, the medium of print allowed them to reach broader audiences, and increased the longevity of their work.<sup>29</sup>

## The daily lives of women?

A look at the Dutch comic theatre material of the seventeenth century shows that playwrights attempted to represent their characters – often ordinary people – and all their shortcomings in a realistic way, which can be said to mirror society.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, not all women on stage were common stereotypes taken over from comic theatre tradition. On the contrary, many female characters are well-balanced and realistic, going about daily routines, over which tasks they casually discuss themes such as sexuality, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and their households.

In Mattheus Gansneb Tegnagel's *Frik in the front house* [*Frik in 't veurhuys*] (1642), the lead roles are two craftswomen. The title of the play, itself a metaphor for sexual intercourse,<sup>31</sup> mirrors its central theme: Grietje and Saartje both have a child fathered by Frik, who spends his time mainly in taverns and brothels, but who is now to marry a distinguished girl. To save their honour, they go to Frik's house, bringing to light his previous actions and demanding compensation. While Grietje and Saartje are portrayed in an exaggeratedly comical way – in the confrontation with Frik's mother, for example, they behave as vulgar fish wives – and while their naive behaviour constitutes a warning against loose morals, they cannot simply be considered stereotypical characters. Tegnagel stages Grietje – who strikingly works in a sewing school, with

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<sup>26</sup> Wim M. H. Hummelen, '1637: Jacob van Campen bouwt de Amsterdamse Schouwburg: inrichting en gebruik van het toneel bij de rederijkers en in de Schouwburg' *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden: tien eeuwen drama en theater in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. by Rob Erenstein (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996), pp. 202-203.

<sup>27</sup> Hogendoorn, *De schouwburg in beeld*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> In order to transcend the material evidence of printed plays, modern-day scholars can rely on extensive databases that chart the performances and publications of seventeenth-century plays. The most comprehensive overview is Ton Harmsen's database Ceneton (University of Leiden), which provides data for over 12.800 plays, from the earliest beginnings of Dutch theatre until 1803, in manuscript and print, including plays translated into Dutch. ONSTAGE, on the other hand, a database hosted at the University of Amsterdam, collects data on the performances of plays in the Amsterdam Theatre (1637-1772), shedding light on changes in repertoire, popularity of individual plays and the revenues of the Theatre in the relevant period.

<sup>29</sup> Hubert Meeus, 'Titelbladen van toneeldrukken in de Nederlanden vóór 1700', in *E Codicibus Impressique: opstellen over het boek in de Lage Landen voor Elly Cockx-Indestege*, ed. by Hubert Meeus and Johan Hanselaer (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 307-310.

<sup>30</sup> Van Eemeren, 'Van fictie naar realiteit', p. 295.

<sup>31</sup> 'Frik' or 'Prick' is the male member, 'voorhuis', or 'front house' the vagina.



sewing having a sexual connotation still in modern-day Dutch – as a hard-working and stern teacher in her school, and as a good and tender mother:

There there there! My little baby. Why are you crying? Shush shush shush, my lamb.

Lord! To wake up as angry as you! Are you thirsty? Does the little baby want a nipple?

Give mommy a kiss. How come you are sweating? Was your little bed too hot, or are you tired of crying?<sup>32</sup>

While the popularity of *Frik in 't veurhuys* is evident from the fact that it was reprinted several times, there is no evidence of the play having been performed on the stage of the Amsterdam Theatre.<sup>33</sup> Possibly, the play was refused because Tegnagel had criticised the regents of the Theatre in a satirical poem. In the 1640s, Tegnagel was both celebrated and feared as a notorious critic of the private lives of well-known members of the Amsterdam society. His satirical poems, an example quickly followed by other authors, caused real upheaval in the city: several authors, printers and publishers were arrested and punished, while Tegnagel himself was placed under house arrest.<sup>34</sup> His example illustrates poignantly how successful – or indeed: well-known – authors sold well in print.

In Thomas Asselijn's *Birth bed or Caudle meal of Zaartje Jans* [*Kraam-bedt of Kandeel-Maal van Zaartje Jans*] (1684), some women explicitly discuss their daily lives, including feminine subjects such as motherhood, pregnancy and breastfeeding:

It is so painful, and my nipples are soar, so that when he has fed, blood is running from them

[...]

I've had cracks in my breasts so soar that my nipples were dangling from them, as Elsje Lubberts can testify.<sup>35</sup>

The women not only openly discuss intimate physical matters, they also address their roles and duties as mothers. Giertje Pieters describes the pleasure of feeding a child, and thinks 'that no good mother sends her children out to be fed'.<sup>36</sup> Elsje Lubberts responds that paying a wet nurse

<sup>32</sup> Mattheus Gansneb Tegnagel, *Alle werken* ed. by Jacob Jan Oversteegen (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 1959), p. 336: 'Nou! nou! nou! mijn kleyntje. Hoe zoume dus krijten! sus! sus! sus, mijn lammetje. / Heer! dus gemelijk uyt zijn sleepje te komen! het het dorst? Wil het kijntje een prammetje / Geef Memmetje dan ien zoen. Hoe is het dus beswiet? is het te warm edekt eweest, of is het van 't huylen so moe? [...].'

<sup>33</sup> ONSTAGE.

<sup>34</sup> Karel Porteman and Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), p. 409.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Asselijn, *17e Eeuwsche Treur- en Blijspelen*, ed. by Eelco Verwijs and A. De Jager (Amsterdam: Lobo, 1907), p. 294: 'Sulken pyn als het is, en daar by ist rondom de Tepel open, soo dat als hy gesogen heeft, soo loopter 'et bloed by neer [...] / Ik heb kloven in myn Borsten gehad offer de Tepel by neer hing, gelyk Elsje Lubberts kan getuygen'.

<sup>36</sup> Asselijn, *17e Eeuwsche Treur- en Blijspelen*, p. 295: 'dat 'et gien recht Moederlyk hart en is, die 'er Kinderen soo ligt uyt ten huys doen.'

is sometimes necessary, and discussion leads to a consensus about when it is appropriate to have a paid wet nurse feed your children, and when it is not.

The staged conversation aligns with ongoing discussions in seventeenth-century society. Generally, it was believed that a woman should breastfeed her own children. The moralist Jacob Cats, for example, avidly propagated the opinion that breastfeeding was an integral part of motherhood. This, however, was not self-evident. Many women died in labour leaving their children without a natural mother, and at the same time, a high infant mortality rate meant that many women were producing breast milk without children to feed. Especially in more elite circles, breastfeeding was often left to a paid wet nurse.<sup>37</sup> Contemporary voices such as the diary of ordinary craftsman Herman Verbeecq (1621-1673) show that paying a wet nurse was frowned upon, even when circumstances called for this measure. Verbeecq's wife Clara suffered repeated inflammations of her breasts, causing the malnutrition and death of a few of their children. Still, their friends and family judged it ill-spent money to hire a wet nurse.<sup>38</sup>

Seventeenth-century comic theatre mirrors these ongoing discussions in society and allows women to speak out on stage about their roles as mothers and their opinions on other women. The women present in the birth meal end up agreeing that a real mother feeds her own children, unless any physical condition makes it impossible. Their consensus nicely fits with opinions circulating among the commoners in the intended audience of the plays. Quite like Tegnagel, Thomas Asselijn was as infamous as he was well-known. His first comical play, *Jan Klaasz of Gewaande Dienstmaagt* (1682), caused upheaval on the occasion of its premiere. Asselijn was accused of having criticised contemporary events and specific people, notably the Mennonite community of Amsterdam. The city's mayors prohibited the play and advised its author to leave the city until commotion had settled.<sup>39</sup> The prohibition of his play, conversely, made it increasingly popular, and ensured the success of several sequel plays he wrote to the original *Jan Klaasz*.

## Women in a time of crisis

Women's pivotal role in the household is an explicit theme in farcical plays, especially when managing the household becomes increasingly difficult, in times of crisis. After the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621) with Habsburg Spain, the Republic entered harsh times. Despite an economic boom during the Truce years, unemployment continued to be a problem. A harsh winter in 1622 made things worse, and the crisis continued throughout the 1620s, with especially tough times between 1628 and 1630.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, p. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Rudolf Dekker, 'Moeders en kinderen in de zeventiende eeuw. Opvattingen over moederschap in de autobiografie van Hermannus Verbeecq', in *De vrouw in de Renaissance*, ed. by Arie-Jan Gelderblom and Harald Hendrix (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pp. 68-69.

<sup>39</sup> Marijke Meijer Drees, *De treurspelen van Thomas Asselijn (ca. 1620-1701)* (Enschede: Offset-drukkerij FEBODRUK, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Arie van Deursen, *Mensen van klein vermogen. Het kopergeld van de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1992), p. 61; p. 244.

The crisis is explicitly present in comic theatre of the period. While male characters discuss their inability to find employment or complain about having to work for little pay, women address questions in their households. It is mainly the women who shed light on the difficulties of ordinary people's daily lives during the crisis. As washing maids, spinsters or shopkeepers, they look for additional employment to bring in a little extra money, but at the same time, they have to cope with their every-day household tasks.<sup>41</sup> Plays show how inventive and creative women had to be to bring food to the table and raise their children in these harsh times.

In Gerrit Cornelisz. van Santen's *Babbling Siitgen*, poverty is an important theme. The play, which only has female characters, depicts women in different constellations and on different locations – the streets, the market place etc. – discussing the daily gossip of the neighbourhood: marriages, thievery, adultery, illegitimate children etc. At first sight, the farce seems to contain only gossip. The only story line is that Siitgen unjustly accuses her neighbour of theft, only to cover up her own wrongdoing. Her lie is discovered, and she is banished from the city, leaving the audience with a moral lesson that speaking evil about others can cause one's own downfall. Behind the stereotypes, however, this farce deals with serious themes. The first part almost only discusses impoverished people in the neighbourhood and families that have been struck by the crisis: a woman who has just given birth to her sixth child, but who sleeps on hay, an old couple too poor to pay for firewood that eats peals and coal leaves out of garbage, the children of a widowed father who are cold and hungry. In discussing the scenes of misery, the women in this play address the issues of rising food prices, the difficulty of raising children and finding adequate housing:

[...] Lord, how expensive is everything!

Peas, beans, barley, flour, carrots, coal, meat and fish

One does not know what to buy these days

If you are paid little money, there is no way

To avoid poverty

In short: if you have a house full of children

Everything is expensive, while nothing is cheaper than labour.<sup>42</sup>

The play contains so many of these contemplations, discussions about morals and bad behaviour, that it seems to have been written precisely to address these issues. As a play, it contains a very limited amount of theatrical action, despite its considerable length, which prevented it from being performed as a comical addition to a serious play. Considering the fact that the Leiden

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<sup>41</sup> Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes*, p. 102.

<sup>42</sup> Van Santen, *Lichte Wigger, en Snappende Siitgen*, p. 297, vs. 7-12: '[...] Heer hoe dier is oock alle ding tis wattet is / Erreten, boonen, gort, meel, peen, en kool, vlees, en vis / Men weet niet huydensdaegs wat datmen coopen sal / Die kleyne dag-huyren wint raeckt altemael op sijn achter-stal / 'Tcomter op an die een huys vol kinderen heyt / Alle ding is kostelijck, daer is niet goe cooper dan den Arrebeyt.'

printer of the play, Bartholomeus van der Bild, was mainly known as a printer of pamphlets, one could assume that *Babbling Siitgen* was intended to be read rather than performed. There is no indication that Van Santen's plays were ever performed in Delft, or that he was a member of the local chamber of rhetoric 'De Rapenbloem', which society performed the only theatre in the city. On the other hand, the play does contain stage directions and scenes that will undoubtedly have had a comical effect when performed. Its structure in five acts, reminiscent of classical theatre, might point in the direction of Van Santen's intention to write a 'classical' comedy, following the example of Bredero's *Spaanschen Brabander*.<sup>43</sup>

Another example of a playwright explicitly addressing female concerns is the Amsterdam author Willem Dirckzs. Hooft, contemporary to Van Santen, who staged women coping with financial and economic crisis. Hooft's plays were very popular in his time, and were performed on numerous occasions in the *Nederduytsche Academie* and the Amsterdam Theatre.<sup>44</sup> By far his most successful play was *Styve Piet*, which was performed after a serious play in the Amsterdam Theatre no less than 117 times.<sup>45</sup> In his *Cunning Melis* [*Door-trapte Melis*] (1623), a play for which no performance data has been preserved,<sup>46</sup> female character Griet shows how lower-class women possibly responded to the crisis. She buys whale oil instead of regular oil to save money. In an attempt to avoid having any more children to feed, she refuses her husband's advances every night. Another problem she encounters is adequate housing. Well-aware of the going rates for houses, she lives with her family near the city walls, literally in the margins, because houses there are cheaper.<sup>47</sup> Merchants living more in the centre of the city in the seventeenth century paid exceedingly high prices for their rents.<sup>48</sup>

One is nearly eaten whole by the prices for rent

Certainly anyone who is in trade, and who needs to live in a central location

For a little space, prices are as high as a hundred crowns

That's why we simple folk live here near the bulwark of town.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> René van Stipriaan, *Leugens en vermaak. Boccaccio's novellen in de kluchtcultuur van de Nederlandse Renaissance* (Amsterdam: University Press, 1996), p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Elise Oey-de Vita and Marja Geesink, *Academie en schouwburg. Amsterdams toneelrepertoire 1617-1665*. (Amsterdam: Huis aan de Drie Grachten, 1983), p. 41; 48; 53-55.

<sup>45</sup> ONSTAGE.

<sup>46</sup> ONSTAGE.

<sup>47</sup> Willem Dirckzs. Hooft, *Door-trapte Meelis en Jilles Noozeman*, *Lichte Klaartje*, ed. by Arjan van Leuvensteijn and Jeanine Stuart (Münster: stichting Neerlandistiek VU, 1999), p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Clé Lesger, *Huur en conjunctuur. De woningmarkt in Amsterdam, 1550-1850* (Amsterdam: Historisch Seminarium van de Universiteit Amsterdam, 1986), p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Willem Dirckzs. Hooft, *Door-trapte Meelis*, pp. 74-76, vs. 162-165: 'Daer by wort ien mench schier op e geten vande huys huer: / By namen die neeringh doet, die soo wat voor de hant woonen, / Moet als hy yet ruyms wil hebbe int jaer gheven hondert kroonen, / Daer van woone wy slechte luytjes hier op het nieu werck after of.'

Playwrights apparently had their female characters voice different opinions than their male counterparts. By taking on a position sympathetic to the suffering of others, they raise awareness of the crisis among the audience. In *Babbling Siitgen*, the characters even explicitly call for a charitable attitude towards poverty, and sharply criticise those who fail to share their wealth:

For a poor man, it is difficult to keep his children from begging at richer doors  
 And those who do beg, don't get enough – the rich people's compassion has waned  
 How many of them do not simply bury their money in the ground?  
 And have nothing to spare for a poorer man, keeping everything to themselves  
 It's Saint Mark's Day,<sup>50</sup> they even dare say  
 But don't think, you uncompassionates, that you will get off easy in the afterlife  
 And be able to please the Lord with such talk  
 In Heaven, the Lord is more difficult to fool  
 Don't imagine getting away with that, for you are mistaken  
 And betrayed by your godless thoughts  
 Don't be led by your hubris and vanity  
 Poor people are made of flesh and blood, like you  
 And often better people at that, even if they are poor or look bad.<sup>51</sup>

## Women as criticasters of wealth

The above example showed that women are not only staged as compassionate to poverty, but also sharply critical of the attitude of the wealthy. During 'women's meetings', in an exchange of ideas that transcends ordinary gossip, the characters comment on the behaviour of the contemporary audience, spreading individual stories and anchoring them in the shared consciousness of the

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<sup>50</sup> I.e. the ascetic; a day to spare money.

<sup>51</sup> Van Santen, *Lichte Wigger, en Snappende Siitgen*, p. 297, vs. 13-25: 'Hy doet al veel die sijn kinderen van de goe luy haer deuren hout / En die der comen krijghen weynich ghenoech de rijcke luy haer liefde is al verkout / Hoe veel sijnder die haer geldt in de aerde bedelven / En voor een arm mensch niet en hebben, tis elck voor hem selven / Tis Sinte Marcus dach dat durvense noch wel segghen / Maer onbarmhertige denck niet dat ghyt hier naemaels soo sult of leggen / En datje met een praetje ons lieven Heer sult payen / 'Tselder soo niet te doen sijn, je selt hem gheen vlasschen baert an nayan / Beeld jou dat niet in of je sout u bedrieghen / En van u godloose ghedachten in slaep laeten wieghen / Wat deusen rijcken bruts, wat laetje u voorstaen door u hoochmoet / 'Tsjijn mee menschen en soo goedt als ghy van vleys en bloedt / En dicmael degelijcker, al ist somwijl een arme(n) bloed ofte een slechte sleur.'

community.<sup>52</sup> They keep a close eye on the behaviour of individuals and specific groups in urban society, such as the rich and wealthy,<sup>53</sup> voicing the middle-class opinion of thriftiness and simplicity.

While male characters of course voiced similar criticism, theirs is grounded less in concerns over the household. They criticise rich women who are more occupied by their vanity than by their families, who have expensive tastes and spend their husbands' money on useless items of luxury. The difference between female and male characters' opinions shows that playwrights consciously staged female characters to comment on one of the most ardently discussed ongoing themes in seventeenth-century Amsterdam: the increasing wealth of a certain class, which until about 1672 led to great excesses.<sup>54</sup> In *Birth bed or Caudle meal of Zartje Jans*, one of the women present recounts the scandalous luxury in a previous birth meal at which she was present:

But I have attended another birth meal of late, that was something, I dare not say the place.

First, the child, Diwertje, was hilariously dressed, with a tie, you know, of the kind with flowers and lace, *point de Venise*, or *point de Paris*.<sup>55</sup>

Yes, I assure you, that the tie cost 'just' twenty Ducatons, not too expensive.<sup>56</sup>

[...]

And the mother, in a Japanese skirt,<sup>57</sup> sat in a chair and the mother-in-law at her side.

And on the table, there was a porcelain dish, mounted with an assortment of sugar.

People drank nothing else than Rhine wine with sugar, and talked of nothing else but important subjects.

She [the mother] was wearing a costly diamond ring, and other gold rings were lying around.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Leuker, 'Schelmen, hoeren, eerdieven en lastertongen', pp. 325-326.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Horodowich, 'The gossiping tongue: oral networks, public life and political culture in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies* 19 (2005), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *1650: bevochten eendracht* (Den Haag: Sdu, 2000), pp. 30-31.

<sup>55</sup> I.e. both types of expensive lace.

<sup>56</sup> I.e. irony.

<sup>57</sup> I.e. Japanese latest fashion.

<sup>58</sup> Asselijn, *17e Eeuwse Treur- en Blijspelen*, p. 297: 'Maar ik heb lest op een Kinder-maal e weest, dat was wat te zeggen! doch ik sel de plaats niet noemen; / Daar was het ierst kostelijk, Diwertje, het Kind had een Das aan, van dat verheven rankagiewerk met bloemen, / Soo van de point de Veniese, of point de Paris, ja wel sie daar, ik seg je dat Diwertje buur, / Hadse voor twintig Ducatons, se hadse veur al niet te duur. / [...] / En Moer zat selfs met 'er Japonse Rok in 'er stoel, en 'er Mans Moeder an 'er zy, / En op de Tafel stont een postelijne Lampet-schotel, opgehoopt met naarse van

A similar criticism is voiced in a conversation between Marry Monckjes and Giertje, an old and a younger female character in Jilles Noozeman's *Hans van Tongen* (1644)<sup>59</sup>. Both keep a close eye on their fellow townsmen and are critical of the vanity of young women:

[...] the girls nowadays are haughty

They rather look nice than eat properly

And the men are no better

No one is content with what they have,

Everything has to be the latest novelty

It was nobility who set this example

But not to be followed by the commoners,

That they should wear coats this long [Giertje shows the length]

[...]

And such is the way of the world, those who cannot wear the latest fashion

Are set behind and can't get a decent marriage.<sup>60</sup>

## Sexuality<sup>61</sup>

Because of their professions, some women were in a position to disclose stories from the private sphere. Explicit, critical comments on specific events in the private life of early modern people, are difficult to trace. Peoples' public appearance and their private lives were very well separated,

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Kandy, / Men schonker niet als Rijnse-wijn met Zuyker, en men praten 'er niet als van groote dingen, / Sy had selfs een kostelyke Diamant Ring aan 'er Pink, en dan lagender noch andere Gouden Ringen.'

<sup>59</sup> First performed in the Amsterdam Theatre on 12 December 1644, after which it was repeated several times (ONSTAGE).

<sup>60</sup> Jilles Noozeman and Nil Volentibus Ardumm, *Hans van Tongen Razende-liefdens-eynd en De wanhébbelyke liefde*, ed. by Arjan van Leuvensteijn (Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU, 2012), pp. 110-111, vs. 491-500: '[...] de meysjes sijn huydendaeghs soo met Luysefaers sieckte beseten, / Dat sy liever moy gaen en een stick te minder eten. / Oock is dit ghebreck onder 't man-volck al mee, / 't Is al van 't hof, blaes of, 't moet mit elck nae de nieuwe snee: / Maer den Adel hebben rechtevoort wel voor gheslagen, / Op dat het de Gemeent niet me doen souwen, datse duske langhe roo manghtels dragen, / [...] / En so gaet het inde werrelt, die niet kan sijn selfs moytjes op maken, / Wort achter de banck geschoven, en kan niet licht aen een groot hylick raken.'

<sup>61</sup> Parts of this paragraph are based on: Johanna Ferket, 'De eenen kijvage is soo ras niet gedaen, of de andere die vanght weer aen': bejaarde vrouwen en maatschappijkritiek in het Nederlandstalige komische toneel', *Jaarboek de Zeventiende Eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017), pp. 75-90.

and texts dealing with intimacies were kept out of the public eye.<sup>62</sup> In a culture dominated by honour, it was important for people to guard over their public image. Any mistake or transgression quickly led to gossip and could taint a person's honour.<sup>63</sup>

In more common circles, people freely entered each other's homes, and closed doors during the day immediately raised suspicion, as doors and windows were only closed at sundown.<sup>64</sup> Among the rich, there was more privacy, as they could often afford houses with different rooms. All of these could have different functions,<sup>65</sup> but a second room was often used for the private or intimate life. Period paintings often show women using a spare room to get dressed, to breastfeed a child or to receive friends, family and neighbours after having given birth.<sup>66</sup> The house generally was a female domain, which explains why stories on the private sphere (or criticism thereof) almost exclusively deals with women, or is recounted by women.

Handmaidens, for instance, were often ascribed the stereotypical trait of curiosity, and playwrights widely criticised the fact that they publicly gossiped about the private lives of their employers. At the same time, they were able to relate events from the private spheres through these characters. Handmaiden May, in *Babbling Siitgen*, tells how sloppy and dirty her mistress was, and about the effect this had on her relationship with her husband.<sup>67</sup> The handmaidens in Jacob de Rijk's *The broker for handmaidens and wet nurses [De Besteedsters van meisjes en minnemoers]* (1692)<sup>68</sup> gossip about the visitors to the households they serve in, about extramarital liaisons of their employers, and comment on the way their mistresses run their households.<sup>69</sup>

The old former handmaiden Sybrich in Willem Dirckzs. Hooft's *Andrea de Piere* (1634) knows from 'her sources' that many handmaidens have illicit relationships with their employers. She knew a handmaiden who was pregnant three times. Each time, she allegedly received a letter telling of how her parents were very ill. Only the third time, the mistress of the household realised that this was a ploy to cover up the pregnancy, and the handmaiden was forced to tell the truth. The whole matter was dealt with in secrecy, and the maiden married off.<sup>70</sup> Stories such as these, of handmaidens engaged in extramarital relations with their employers, were commonplace in

<sup>62</sup> Orest Ranum, 'Toevluchtsoorden van de intimiteit', in *Figuren van de moderne tijd*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Amsterdam: Agon, 1993), p. 184.

<sup>63</sup> Yves Castan, 'De politiek en het persoonlijk leven', in *Figuren van de moderne tijd*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Amsterdam: Agon, 1993), p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Castan, 'De politiek en het persoonlijk leven', p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Julie De Groot, 'At home in Renaissance Bruges: material and domestic culture in a city in decline, 1438-1600', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Antwerp (2017), pp. 157-158.

<sup>66</sup> Ranum, 'Toevluchtsoorden', pp. 190-192; De Groot, 'At home', pp. 157-158.

<sup>67</sup> Van Santen, *Lichte Wigger, en Snappende Siitgen*, pp. 313-315, vs. 253-283.

<sup>68</sup> First performed on the Amsterdam Theatre on 30 October 1692, after which it was repeated a number of times in 1692 and in 1693 (ONSTAGE).

<sup>69</sup> [Jacob de Rijk], *De besteedster van meisjes en minnemoers, of school voor de dienstmeiden* (Amsterdam: Erven Jacob Lescaijle, 1692).

<sup>70</sup> Willem Dirckzs. Hooft, *Cluchtigh spel, Andrea de Piere, Peerde-kooper* (Amsterdam: Dirck Cornelisz Houthaeck, 1634), fol. B3v.



seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Because of their weaker position, they were often unable to resist their employers, tempting them into sexual relations by offering them a promise of marriage or paying them.<sup>71</sup> There are only few stories of abortion or infanticide, but most of them feature handmaidens desperate to protect themselves, as a pregnancy could mean an immediate end to their position.<sup>72</sup>

Other characters that disclose part of the private life and the sexuality of women in seventeenth-century society are procuresses. In genre painting and popular images, these women are generally portrayed negatively. They are shown tempting young and innocent women into uneven marriages, and sometimes worse – into prostitution, through the promise of a maiden's position in a good household. In the stereotypical image, they are often old women, sometimes prostitutes that have grown too old and worn to make a living, and therefore turn to the business of trapping young girls into prostitution. In reality, the stereotype of old age seems not to be in line with historical evidence.<sup>73</sup> Often, these procuresses were poor women for whom these activities were one way to escape from poverty.<sup>74</sup> Prostitutes of course were easy scapegoats for any immoral situation in society. Accusing prostitutes of undermining not only the traditional family, but society as a whole, was a way to channel real fears in every-day life. Prostitutes threatened the social balance by tempting men into extramarital sex, and by having them spend great parts of the household budget. In a way, these women were independent from the patriarchal system, and therefore constituted a threat.<sup>75</sup>

As can be expected, comical plays rather follow the stereotypical representation of procuresses, making the characters hypocritical and greedy.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, their criticism on the state of love and sexuality must not be dismissed all too easily. The procuresses were fully aware of the personal lives and the positions of their clients, and were confidantes of sorts, carriers of secrets and intimate information. Through their profession, they learned about the latest love affairs, while also seeing the downside of high society. They are in the peculiar position of being well aware of the moral decline in the city, while being an integral part of it themselves. In comical plays, they are subjects as well as voices of criticism: their profession and behavior are believed to be immoral,<sup>77</sup> but at the same time they are in a position to criticise the excesses they meet and moral issues they are entrusted with. Willem Dirckzs. Hooft used his arrangers to sketch an image of the sexual excesses in Amsterdam. In his *Jan Saly* (1622), the old arranger

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<sup>71</sup> Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw: processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1985), pp. 76-77.

<sup>72</sup> Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>73</sup> Mario DiGangi, *Sexual types. Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 161.

<sup>74</sup> Lotte van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore. Prostitution in early modern Amsterdam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Frédérique Fouassier-Tate, 'Fact versus Fiction: The Construction of the Figure of the Prostitute in Early Modern England, Official and Popular Discourses', in *Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain. Literary and Historical Explorations*, ed. by Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 87.

<sup>76</sup> Madeleine Lazard, *La comédie humaniste au 16e siècle et ses personnages* (Paris: s.n., 1978), p. 303.

<sup>77</sup> Anouk Janssen, *Grijsaards in zwart-wit. De verbeelding van de ouderdom in de Nederlandse prentkunst (1550-1650)* (Zutphen: Walburg, 2007), p. 202.

Trijn Ratels knows the reason why so many young women turn to prostitution: their husbands are too lazy to work and spend all their household money in taverns, allowing their wives to sell themselves to keep the money flowing. An ordinary position therefore is not enough:

Because today, one does not make much money,

Even by spending day and night spinning thread

It is not enough, I haven't even attempted

How ever hard I worked in my life

It was never enough, I stayed as poor as always

Only now, praise God, I have a shilling to spare.<sup>78</sup>

Trijn Ratels also explicitly voices the duality in her criticism. After just having slandered dishonest and fraudulent craftsmen and having criticised the jealousy in 'this time', she concludes:

But how am I trying to criticise all these things

I should first change my own shortcomings

Even if all that I have done in my life

I can proudly step forward with and show

Even if people do not think much of my profession

It is only normal and everyone in the end gets married.<sup>79</sup>

Trijn apparently is aware that her criticism should also extend to her own walk of life. This insight adds meaning to her opinion on society.

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<sup>78</sup> Willem Dirckzs. Hooft, *Jan Saly* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Willemsz., 1622), fol. A3r: 'Want daer is huydaechs niet veel te winnen, / Al deetmen al sijn best met nacht en dach te spinnen, / T' brengt gien soon anden dijck, heb icket selfs niet besocht. / Ja wat heb ick vanme leven wel ien wercken ewrocht, / T' was altijd after 't net, 'k was altijd even pover: / In nou gort sy gelooft schieter wel ien stuyvertjen over.'

<sup>79</sup> Hooft, *Jan Saly*, fol. A3r: 'Dan wat wil ick oock alle dinghe bedisselen, / 'k mocht mijn eygen quaet selfs wel ierst verwisselen, / Doch 'k en heb mijn leven niet bedreven of edaen, / Of 'k wilt voor de wijdelicke werrelt wel in 't licht staen: / Al wort van mijn neering dien ick doe niet veel ehoue, / Nochtans ist menschelijck want men sieter veel om trouwe.'

## Conclusion

Scholarship on female characters in seventeenth-century farces has focused mostly on caricatures and stereotypes of evil wives, untrustworthy servants and horny old women. The characterisation of women on stage, however, is more nuanced than that. Many seventeenth-century farces stage women whose function in the play is far more complex. While they may still have stereotypical traits and are staged doing stereotypical things, such as talking excessively and gossiping, they do refer to the reality of seventeenth-century society. As good comical characters, they had to be recognisable and discuss recognisable subjects. The pattern of recognition, however, has its limits. Despite the fact that historians have pointed towards the importance of economically active and independent women, representations of this type do not appear all too often in comic theatre. While Grietje in *Frik in't Voor-huys* runs her own sewing school, and some female characters speak about their daily work in spinning or sowing, or serving as a handmaiden, we are far away from the picture drawn by historians of the Early Modern period. Quite surprisingly, shopkeepers, market women or women engaged in (overseas) trade do not appear in Dutch comical plays, in the way they have been encountered in English theatre.<sup>80</sup> Apparently, even if a quarter of small trade was performed by women, playwrights – and their audiences – continued to associate the profession with men, and did not portray women as merchants.<sup>81</sup> Certainly in theatre from the first half of the seventeenth century, the female trader will have been in conflict with the common imagination of the audience, as women would only engage more numerous in trade from 1650 onwards.<sup>82</sup> The minority of economically independent women, at least to an audience in the first half of the seventeenth century, will not have been recognisable enough for playwrights to include them in their plays. In later material, the explanation for the lack of economically active women may well lie in the fact that characters in general – male or female – were not often portrayed as having a specific profession.

The nuance in picturing women on stage in seventeenth-century comic theatre, therefore, does not lie primarily in the women's professional activities, but in their private lives. Female characters in seventeenth-century farces were used by playwrights to discuss feminine daily concerns, such as pregnancy and breastfeeding. As caring mothers, hard workers and pivotal figures in family and household, they come across as trustworthy reflections of actual society. Especially in times of crisis, families depended greatly upon women to be able to feed the children and make ends meet. Female characters therefore credibly voiced opinions on rising food prices, impoverished families and the difficulties of managing a household during the crisis. Their comments in this matter clearly differ from the comments voiced by male characters, who are exclusively occupied by problems related to labour and commerce.

Stepping outside the realm of their own private lives, female characters were often used to voice criticism and comments on ongoing discussions. While early modern women were not supposed to voice their opinions publicly, playwrights used their female stage representations to

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<sup>80</sup> Pennington, “Three Women and a Goose make a Market”; Keri Sanburn Behre, “Look What Market She Hath Made”: Women, Commerce, and Power in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair*, *Early Theatre* 21/1 (2018), pp. 127-144.

<sup>81</sup> Van den Heuvel, *Women and entrepreneurship*, p. 322.

<sup>82</sup> Van den Heuvel, *Women and entrepreneurship*, p. 325.

position themselves implicitly in discussions on excessive wealth and the exuberance of the rich and famous in Amsterdam. Female characters criticise the vanity of rich women who in their quest for luxury, fail to properly look after their households and their families. The representation of old women arranging marriages as well, is more nuanced in comical plays than it is in early modern iconography. These women are also staged as negative stereotypes – they are often greedy old prostitutes – but their role extends beyond giving dangerous advice on love and sexuality. Being well aware of the state of things, they sharply judge lazy and drunk husbands, fraudulent craftsmen and other ill-doers. Their view of society is critical and even cynical, and at the same time they are cunning enough to capitalize on the very immoralities they address. This makes them a subject of criticism as well.

In trying to nuance the perception and portrayal of women on stage, we of course have to bear in mind that most of the farces were written by men, and that female roles, well into the seventeenth century, were played by male actors.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the representation of women on stage and the discourse they use can teach us a great deal about contemporaneous discussions and opinions on women in early modern society. Playwrights apparently used their female characters to contribute to ongoing debates on the role of women, not only within the household, but in society as a whole. Because these, often popular, plays reached large audiences, both through repeated performances and in prints and reprints, the farces will have been an important medium to influence – or at the very least mirror and voice – public opinion. The way in which women were staged, as independent characters who were able to form and voice their own opinions, might have had a liberating effect on some women in the audience who in their daily lives, were restricted by the patriarchal society.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the lacking of professionally active women on stage, in a society with a high degree of these independent women in real life, is surprising.

Of course, it is difficult for us today to assess the way in which some of the texts were staged, the tone or gestures used when voicing certain dialogues, and indeed the way in which the audience responded. The opinions of female characters may well have been channels for the views of the playwrights, and attempts to influence the audience's opinion, but the line between voicing opinions and ridiculing the character for them is often thin. Still, the examples show that if we are able to pierce through the surface layer of stereotypes and caricatures, the seventeenth-century farces open the view to a rather more nuanced and interesting picture of the woman in early modern society. Comic theatre, looked at in this nuanced way, is more telling about seventeenth-century opinions than any archival sources can be.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Martine van Elk, “Before she ends up in a brothel”. Public Femininity and the First Actresses in England and the Low Countries’, *Early Modern Low Countries* 1 (2017), p. 34.

<sup>84</sup> Fouassier-Tate, *Fact versus Fiction*, p. 86.

<sup>85</sup> See also Paola Pugliatti, “Shakespeare and the ‘Military Revolution’”. The Cultural and Social Weapons of Reformed War’, in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners. Digesting the New Social History*, ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 151.

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## Persian as Mystery and Arabic as the New Dutch

### Heterolingualism in Kader Abdolah's *Salam Europa!* and Fikry El Azzouzi's *Drarrie in de nacht*

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**Abstract:** *Salam Europa!* (2016) by the Dutch-Iranian writer Kader Abdolah and *Drarrie in de nacht* (2014) by the Belgian-Moroccan novelist Fikry El Azzouzi are novels written in Dutch, but they are interspersed with elements from other languages. This article examines how these forms of 'heterolingualism', defined by Rainier Grutman as the presence of foreign languages in a text, correspond to their authors' public positioning. The literary analysis draws on Myriam Suchet's concept of heterolingualism as a 'continuum of alterity' and her study of 'heterolingual dynamics', as well as on Philippe Blanchet's work on linguistic boundaries. The effect produced by such heterolingual strategies will subsequently be examined in relation to the authors' posture. Finally, I will determine to what extent the heterolingual strategies used by Abdolah and El Azzouzi evoke a blending or a juxtaposition of cultures and whether they contribute to a potential rapprochement between different (sub)cultures and social groups in the Netherlands and Flanders.

**Keywords:** Heterolingualism, authorial posture, intercultural literature, language change, writers with migration background / Heterolinguïsm, auteurspostuur, interculturele literatuur, taalverandering, schrijvers met migratieachtergrond

## Introduction

According to sociolinguist Philippe Blanchet, one of the most complex questions about language is how to define its limits, or how to define the boundaries between languages: ‘Where does a language begin and where does it end?’<sup>1</sup> This question is not just fundamental to linguistics, but probably to everyone living in a multicultural and multilingual environment, and especially to intercultural authors.

Indeed, Lise Gauvin argues that writers in multilingual contexts often experience a kind of ‘linguistic over-awareness’.<sup>2</sup> Such ‘over-awareness’ also applies to Kader Abdolah (1954) and Fikry El Azzouzi (1978), two ‘exophonic’ writers, and it is evident from their literary texts, written in Dutch while being interspersed with other languages.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, both writers frequently discuss language and interculturality in the Netherlands and Flanders in columns, opinion pieces and interviews. These sources show that both authors regularly reflect on the limits and boundaries of language. While Abdolah describes his writing language as ‘een huwelijk tussen twee rassen’ [an interracial marriage] that brings about ‘gezonde kinderen’ [healthy children], El Azzouzi observes that contemporary Dutch has changed under the influence of Arabic street slang and he advocates to include Arabic words in Dutch dictionaries.<sup>4</sup>

Even though the writing style and public positioning of Kader Abdolah has been academically researched, such research does not focus on the use of foreign languages in his novels nor on the relationship between his particular use of heterolingualism and his literary posture.<sup>5</sup> To my knowledge, no scholarly articles about Fikry El Azzouzi have been published so far. In this contribution, I will therefore investigate how foreign languages are presented in the Dutch main text in the novels *Drarrie in de nacht* (2014) and *Salam Europa!* (2016). In order to do so, I will draw on Myriam Suchet’s (2014) study *L’Imaginaire hétérologue*, in which she assesses heterolingualism among other things as more or less visible ‘discursive mechanisms’ (p. 75) on a ‘continuum of alterity’ (p. 77) and as more subtle ‘processes of differentiation’ (p. 111) resulting

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<sup>1</sup> ‘L’une des questions les plus complexes et pourtant largement tenue pour évidente en matière de langues est celle qui consiste à définir les limites d’une langue, ou autrement dit les frontières qui séparent les langues. Où commence et où s’arrête une langue?’, Philippe Blanchet, ‘Seuils, limites et frontières de langues’, in *D’un seuil à l’autre: Approches plurielles, rencontres, témoignages*, ed. by Jacqueline Bergeron and Marc Cheymol (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2017), pp. 65-79 (p. 65). All translations in this article are, unless indicated otherwise, mine.

<sup>2</sup> ‘surconscience linguistique’, Lise Gauvin, *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> ‘[...] an exophonic writer – that is to say, a writer who is not a native speaker of his or her chosen literary language’, Chantal Wright, ‘Exophony and literary translation: What it means for the translator when a writer adopts a new language’, *Target* 22.1 (2010), 22-39 (p.24).

<sup>4</sup> Frank Van Laeken, ‘Een vluchteling is nooit thuis’, *De Tijd*, 19 April 1997, <<https://www.tijd.be/algemeen/algemeen/Een-vluchteling-is-nooit-thuis/5207453>> [accessed 23 December 2020]; Fikry El Azzouzi, ‘Elke zichzelf respecterende zuurpruim zou straattaal moeten kennen’, *De Morgen*, 17 December 2012, <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/elke-zichzelf-respecterende-zuurpruim-zou-straattaal-moeten-kennen~b5a83715/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>5</sup> For Abdolah’s posture, see Bongers 2010, Moenandar 2013 & 2014, Dynarowicz 2015 & 2018; for Abdolah’s writing style, see Heynders & Paasman 1999, Schyns 2000, Van Kempen 2004 & 2010, Beernaert 2009, Van der Velden 2010.

from four ‘heterolingual dynamics’ (p. 111).<sup>6</sup> Relevant heterolingual passages in *Salam Europa!* will be described according to the discursive mechanisms that influence the perceived alterity of the foreign language in question. In *Drarrie in de nacht*, the heterolingual passages will be analysed according to two ‘heterolingual dynamics’ that result from language contact. Finally, I will examine how the use of heterolingualism and the reading experience it generates relate to both writers’ public positioning and discourses about three interrelated topics: the languages in their writing, their place in the Dutch literary field, and the social relevance of their novels.

## Theoretical framework

The presence of foreign languages in the main language of a text is a phenomenon that has been defined as ‘heterolingualism’ by Rainier Grutman.<sup>7</sup> The same term is also used by Suchet (see p. 19), who argues that the perceived alterity of foreign languages appearing in a text can differ greatly depending on the discursive mechanisms involved. Indeed, according to Suchet, the alterity of foreign languages in a literary text is not a given, but a discursive construction: ‘the difference between languages is a matter of discourse – of text [...] which draws dividing lines and makes distinctions’<sup>8</sup> (see p. 75). In other words, foreign languages are not strange or foreign as such, but can be presented as such in a text, depending on the discursive mechanisms used. Even though the perceived alterity of a foreign language also depends on the interpretation and linguistic competences of the individual readers (p. 76), the form in which they appear in a text influences this perception. In a Dutch text, a French passage can, for example, be ‘typographically marked’ as different from the main text by the use of italics or quotation marks, indicating that French is supposed to be seen as foreign, even when some readers might very well understand this language.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, discursive mechanisms are indicators of which languages are supposed to be known or unknown to the implied reader (see p. 90).

Apart from discursive mechanisms, Suchet argues that more subtle ‘processes of differentiation’ (p. 111) affect languages: language contact does not leave languages unaltered, but influences them in various ways through ‘heterolingual dynamics’ (p. 111). For the analysis below, two dynamics will be relevant: ‘the dynamic of inherent variation’ (p. 111) and ‘the dynamic of creolisation’ (p. 115).<sup>10</sup>

In what follows, I will analyse heterolingualism and its potential reading effects regarding the perception of alterity in *Salam Europa!* and *Drarrie in de nacht*. The results of this heterolingual analysis will then be examined in light of statements by Kader Abdolah and Fikry

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<sup>6</sup> Myriam Suchet, *L’imaginaire hétérologue: Ce que nous apprennent les textes à la croisée des langues* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014); ‘des stratégies discursives’, ‘un continuum d’altérité’; ‘des processus de différenciation’, ‘le travail hétérologue’.

<sup>7</sup> Rainier Grutman, *Des langues qui résonnent. Hétérolinguisme et lettres québécoises*, revised ed. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> ‘la différence des langues relève du discours-du texte [...], qui trace des lignes de partage et établit des distinctions’.

<sup>9</sup> ‘le balisage’ (p. 90).

<sup>10</sup> ‘processus de différenciation’; ‘le travail hétérologue’; ‘le travail de la variation inhérente’; ‘le travail de créolisation’.

El Azzouzi in columns, opinion pieces and interviews about their writing language(s), their role and position as a writer and the social relevance of their work.

## **Kader Abdolah**

### **Heterolingualism in *Salam Europa!* Maintaining the mystery**

In *Salam Europa!* we find no less than six foreign languages in the Dutch text: Russian, German, French, English, Persian and some Arabic. Most discursive mechanisms used to present these foreign languages make their alterity striking: several of the below heterolingual fragments are ‘typographically marked’ in italics. Further on, we find ‘the use of a non-Latin alphabet’ (p. 78), i.e. Cyrillic, and transliterations of Cyrillic and Persian script into Latin. Several heterolingual fragments are accompanied by an ‘intralingual translation’ (p. 84). These translations are usually introduced by distinct markers, such as commas, brackets or explicit explanatory phrases like ‘dat/wat betekent’ (that/which means). In several instances, ‘the name of the foreign language is mentioned’ (p. 86): ‘in Russian’, ‘in French’, ‘in German’ etc. Furthermore, we find large passages of intertexts in the original language. Although Suchet mentions the use of heterolingualism in ‘mottos’ (p. 81) and brings up that heterolingual passages can serve as an ‘intralingual switch’ (p. 93) referring to a hidden or hardly visible intertext, she doesn’t distinguish the use of intertextual quotes in the original language as a discursive mechanism in itself. In this contribution, however, I will consider such intertextual passages as heterolingual strategies.<sup>11</sup>

All of the five discursive mechanisms mentioned above can be found in combination with each other, clearly demarcating the other languages in the text from the main language Dutch, thus making the presence of foreign languages in the text abundantly visible.

### ***Non-Latin alphabet and transliterations***

In the fragment below, the Cyrillic alphabet appears when the shah is greeting a Russian train driver. He is doing this rather awkwardly by literally reciting information about the working of a steam engine from an informational booklet, that has been read to him by his favourite wife Banoe.

a) De sjah bracht plechtig een saluut en zei in het Russisch tegen de machinist: Котел заполнен водой. С дерева, угля или мазута огонь горел. Это было задачей кочегаром. Это была тяжелая работа, потому что они должны были держать в теплом во время поездки. Огонь приносит воду до кипения и создает пар. Все больше и больше пар там просыпается создает давление. Пар из пара проходит через трубопроводы до поршня....

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<sup>11</sup> ‘le changement d’alphabet’; ‘le rembourrage ou la glose intratextuelle’; ‘la mention du nom des langues’; ‘la citation en exergue’; ‘le commutateur intratextuel’.

Het was ongeveer de tekst uit het informatieboekje over de werking van de stoomlocomotief, dat Banoe zo vaak aan hem had voorgelezen. De machinist, die nog in verwarring was, begreep helemaal niet waar de sjah het over had.<sup>12</sup>

[a] The shah solemnly saluted and said in Russian to the train driver (...) It was more or less the text from the informational booklet about the working of the steam engine, which Banu had read to him so many times. The train driver, who was still confused, did not understand at all what the shah was talking about.]

On a narrative level, the heterolingual fragment is a scene of failed intercultural communication: although the shah is speaking Russian, the content of his words is rather inappropriate as a greeting or small talk during a first encounter. Reciting technical information without any introduction is so unexpected in this situation that the train driver is left utterly confused. The absurdity of the situation highlights the cultural and societal gap between the unworldly shah and the down-to-earth train driver. For readers, the incongruity between what is expected from the social situation and what is really said by the shah potentially has a humorous effect. On the other hand, this particular use of heterolingualism with a for most Dutch readers incomprehensible Cyrillic might create an 'effect of linguistic alienation' that resonates with the train driver's confusion and estrangement due to the failed communication in the story.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from fragments in Cyrillic, we also find transliterations from Cyrillic and Persian. In the next fragment, the shah is visiting the *Prinsenhof* in Amsterdam, where Willem the Silent was assassinated and spoke his last words (in French). Sitting in the same spot where the prince was murdered, the shah is anticipating his own death and is practicing his last words:

b) Nog hurkend op de trap oefende hij zijn eigen laatste woorden: 'Mon Dieu, ayez pitié de moi et de ce pauvre peuple.' In het Perzisch klonk dat als '*Godaje man, be man wa be in mardome faghir rahm kon.*' (p. 281).

[b] Still crouching on the stairs, he practised his own last words: 'Mon Dieu, ayez pitié de moi et de ce pauvre peuple.' In Persian this sounded like '*Godaje man, be man wa be in mardome faghir rahm kon.*']

In the text, the Persian transliteration of these French words is introduced as follows: 'In het Perzisch klonk dat als' ['In Persian this sounded like']. This introduction seems to indicate that the transliteration has been added to convey the sound of Persian to readers. However, a transliteration is not a phonetic transcription and therefore doesn't provide the exact pronunciation of the Persian phrase. In this sense, it is not very clear where the added value of the transliterations lies.

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<sup>12</sup> Kader Abdolah, *Salam Europa!* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2016), p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> 'un effet d'étrangeté linguistique' (Suchet, p. 78).

### ***Mentioning the name of the foreign language***

Even without inserting the foreign language in the text, there is a possibility to make its presence visible. By the discursive mechanism of mentioning the name of the foreign language it can be made clear that a character is speaking another language, even when there is no trace of this language in the text. However, there are many instances in *Salam Europa!* in which the use of this particular discursive mechanism is rather redundant. In the fragment below, for example, the mentioning of the name of the foreign language is immediately followed by a passage in the mentioned foreign language.

c) In het oorverdovende lawaai dat de muzikanten maakten pakte de sjah daarna Bismarck bij zijn arm en zei in het Frans: '*Nous pensons que vous êtes l'histoire elle-même.* We denken dat u de geschiedenis zelve bent.'

Bismarck boog zijn hoofd beheerst voorover en verraste de sjah met een perfecte dubbelzinnige zin in het Frans: '*Nous avons pensé que vous étiez l'histoire.* Wij dachten dat u geschiedenis was.' (p. 160).

[c] In the deafening noise made by the musicians, the shah took Bismarck by the arm and said in French: '*Nous pensons que vous êtes l'histoire elle-même.*' We think you are history itself.

Bismarck bent his head in a composed manner and surprised the Shah with a perfectly ambiguous sentence in French: '*Nous avons pensé que vous étiez l'histoire.*' We thought you were history.]

In this part of the story, French is used as a lingua franca between the character Bismarck, a German speaker, and the shah, who is said to speak 'gebroken Duits' [broken German] (p. 169). Even though French serves here as a bridge language to overcome linguistic differences, it is opposed to other languages in the text by the discursive mechanisms of typographical marking by italics and the mentioning of the name of the language: it is explicitly stated that the shah and Bismarck are speaking 'in French'. This information seems unnecessary, as the French words appear immediately after. On top of that, the French passages are immediately followed by Dutch translations, making the whole fragment quite repetitive.

### ***Embedded translations***

In *Salam Europa!* the use of translations is not very consistent. Except for Persian, which is always translated, and English, which is never translated, we can find French, Russian, and German passages with and without embedded translations. It might seem counterintuitive, but the use of translations can actually enhance the alterity of the foreign language that is being translated. Although translations convey the semantic meaning of a potentially incomprehensible heterolingual passage, the presence of the translation also suggests that readers don't have access to the other language without the mediation of this translation. In this sense, embedded translations might affect the foreign words with a 'stronger strangeness

coefficient'<sup>14</sup> than foreign words without glosses. After all, there are more subtle ways to convey the meaning of foreign passages in a text, for example through the use of 'contextualizing' – a discursive mechanism described by postcolonial scholar Chantal Zabus as 'providing areas of immediate context' that make the foreign words self-explanatory. In contrast to embedded translations (called 'cushioning' in Zabus' terminology), contextualizing is less explicit or pedantic, thus reducing the 'strangeness coefficient' compared to the 'cushioning' strategy.<sup>15</sup>

The next fragment shows a Persian (also Arabic) word, accompanied by an extensive translation:

d) Salam. En salam betekent groeten, gezondheid en vrede, dus proost. (p. 13)

[d] Salam. And salam means greetings, health and peace, so cheers.]

The explicative phrasing '*En salam betekent*' ['and salam means'] leaves no room for other interpretations about the semantic meaning of the word *salam*. However, '*salam*' appears no less than ten times in the novel and is part of the title and the first word of the first chapter. As the word emerges in contexts that offer enough information about its meanings, the translation doesn't seem strictly necessary. Yet, the presence of the translation suggests that the word *salam* is unfamiliar and needs explanation. However, as will be shown in chapter four, *salam* has become more or less assimilated into Dutch.

The next heterolingual fragment contains a Dutch translation of a French passage, which is mainly noteworthy for the unidiomatic use of French:<sup>16</sup>

e) Nadar pakte ongevraagd de kin van de sjah beet en draaide die zachtjes naar links en naar rechts: '*Un visage royal oriental, un visage que je ne l'ai jamais dépeint. Restez dans cette position, ne pas déplacez.*' Een oosters koninklijk gelaat, zo'n gezicht heb ik nog nooit geportretteerd. Blijf zo staan, niet bewegen.' (p. 416)

[e] Unsolicited, Nadar grabbed the shah's chin and gently turned it to the left and to the right: '*Un visage royal oriental, un visage que je ne l'ai jamais dépeint. Restez dans cette position, ne pas déplacez.*' An oriental royal face, I have never portrayed a face like that before. Stay like this, don't move.]

The French sentence is uttered by a character that is presumably fluent in the language of Molière: French photographer Félix Nadar. When Nadar asks the shah not to move while making his portrait, the mistakes in his French are multiple. First of all, 'dépeindre' is an unidiomatic verb for 'portraying through photography' while 'déplacer' is an inept translation for 'moving oneself', that is moreover wrongly conjugated and should be reflexive if used in this context. In

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<sup>14</sup> 'un coefficient d'étrangeté plus fort' (Suchet, p. 84).

<sup>15</sup> Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: indigenization of language in the West African euphone novel*, 2nd enl. edn. (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> This is not the only passage showing unidiomatic use of the foreign language. However, in the other passages, the mistakes and awkward formulations could potentially be explained by the fact that they are uttered by characters who are not native speakers of these languages in the story.

the constituent ‘un visage que je ne l’ai jamais dépeint’, the ‘l’ is not needed and grammatically wrong. Although the French sentences are followed by a Dutch ‘translation’, it rather seems like the French phrases are bad translations from the Dutch sentences supposed to explain them. This is remarkable, as the French phrases have probably been embedded in the text to add some ‘couleur locale’ or authenticity to the story. Indeed, as mentioned by Grutman (p. 293) and Horn, the use of a language different from the language of the narration often underlines or increases the authenticity of the story.<sup>17</sup> However, one can wonder in how far such unidiomatic French, that seems to be a translation of Dutch instead of the other way around, can fulfil a mimetic function or enhance the credibility of these fictitious passages.

### ***Intertextuality: heterolingual quotations***

In *Salam Europa!* there are many references to titles from classic novels, such as David Copperfield (p.378), War and Peace (p.66), Oblomov (p. 119) and namedropping of famous authors: Tolstoy (p. 66), Chekhov (p. 78), Gorki (p. 78), Goncharov (p. 120), Khayyam (p. 120), Akhmatova (p. 127), Grass (p.168), Dickens (p. 378), Engels, (p. 360) Marx (p.360), Hugo (p. 386), to name only a few. Furthermore, we find several quotes from novels and poems from the mentioned authors, sometimes in Dutch translation, but often in the original language. To readers, recognizing these intertextual references might create a sociological effect of belonging to the group who understands, as stated by Yra van Dijk and Maarten de Pourcq in the foreword to *Intertekstualiteit in theorie en praktijk* (2013): ‘Imponerend is intertekstualiteit ook opzettelijk: als er wordt verwezen naar highbrow teksten is het de bedoeling om de lezer het exclusieve gevoel te geven dat hij of zij ‘erbij hoort’. This distinctive function of intertextuality might even be enhanced when the intertexts are quoted in the original language, as this seems to suggest that intercultural knowhow can only be achieved by erudite, intellectually inclined and multilingual readers. On the other hand, not being able to read or understand the intertexts might instil a feeling of inadequacy among less multilingual readers and result in a feeling of exclusion by elitism: ‘Naarmate de cultuur waarnaar een tekst verwijst verder verwijderd is, kan het effect op de lezer des te meer zijn dat hij of zij er niet bijhoort en de context mist die nodig is om een tekst te begrijpen.’<sup>18</sup>

This becomes particularly clear in the next fragment, in which the shah quotes some verses of Pushkin’s poem *To Chaadaev*, rendered in the text in a potentially undecipherable Cyrillic:

f) De trein naderde Sint-Petersburg en onwetend over dat precedent sprak de sjah de woorden van Poesjkin hardop: Любви, надежды, тихой славы|Недолго нежил нас обман,|Исчезли юные забавы,|Как сон, как утренний туман... (p. 99)

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<sup>17</sup> András Horn, ‘Ästhetische Funktionen der Sprachmischung in der Literatur’, *Arcadia* 16 (1980), 225–241 (p. 227).

<sup>18</sup> [‘Intertextuality is also intentionally imposing: when referring to highbrow texts, the intention is to give the reader the exclusive feeling of ‘belonging’/ ‘The more the culture to which a text refers is distant, the more the effect on the reader can be the feeling that he or she doesn’t belong and lacks the context needed to understand a text.’] *Draden in het donker: intertekstualiteit in theorie en praktijk*, ed. by Yra Van Dijk, Maarten De Pourcq and Carl De Strycker (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), pp. 12-13.



[f] The train was approaching St Petersburg and, ignorant of that precedent, the Shah spoke Pushkin's words aloud: Любви, надежды, тихой славы|Недолго нежил нас обман, |Исчезли юные забавы,|Как сон, как утренний туман...]

In the next fragment, the shah is once more reciting famous verses, this time from the German poet Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. Interestingly, reciting these verses is the shah's way of greeting Ernst Werner Siemens, whose factory he is about to visit.

g) De sjah, die geen verstand had van techniek en licht en telegrafie, probeerde op een andere manier een indruk op Siemens te maken. Zonder enkele inleiding zegde hij een paar strofen op uit *West-östlicher Divan*, het wereldberoemde boek van Goethe:

Hans Adam war ein Erdenkloß|Den Gott zum Menschen machte|Doch bracht' er aus der Mutter Schoß|Noch vieles Ungeschlachte.

Siemens, die niet begreep waarom de sjah een gedicht opzegde, dacht dat het een oosterse manier van begroeten was. (p. 181- 182)

[g] The shah, who didn't know anything about engineering and light and telegraphy, tried to impress Siemens in a different way. Without any introduction he recited a few verses from *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe's world-famous book: Hans Adam war ein Erdenkloß|Den Gott zum Menschen machte|Doch bracht' er aus der Mutter Schoß|Noch vieles Ungeschlachte. Siemens, who didn't understand why the shah recited a poem, thought this was an eastern way of greeting.]

*West-Östlicher Divan* is a collection of lyrical poems about cultural exchanges between Germany and the Middle East. However, the shah's attempt to impress Siemens through this poem is futile as he is not making the Persian culture more accessible to Siemens – quite the contrary. Citing Goethe gives cause to false assumptions about eastern habits. Based on this encounter with the shah, Siemens erroneously concludes that reciting poems must be an eastern way of greeting. This heterolingual passage is once more a scene of awkward misunderstandings that underline the shah's lacking intercultural communication skills.

### Posture: pars pro toto for Persia

My heterolingual analysis demonstrates that the discursive mechanisms used in *Salam Europa!* underline the alterity of the foreign languages in the text by making them illegible or by the ostentatious use of translations and explanations. The heterolingual strategies in the novel thus seem to maintain the mystery of other cultures by presenting them as foreign or exotic. This is also what Abdolah is doing when he describes his home country Iran, that he invariably calls by its exonym 'Persia', as a foreign, magical fairy tale place. In an opinion piece in *De Morgen* in 2019, he refers to today's Iran as

een historisch land, de wieg van de mensheid. Het gaat om oude magische literatuur waar Sheherazade, de vertelster van de Duizend-en-een-nacht-vertellingen, Ali baba en zijn veertig

rovers vandaan komen. Het gaat om het land van Meden en Perzen waar spijkerschrift en vliegende tapijten deel van uitmaken.<sup>19</sup>

[A historic country, the cradle of humanity. It is about old magical literature where Sheherazade, the storyteller of the Thousand and One Nights, Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves come from. It is about the country of Medes and Persians of which cuneiform writing and flying carpets are part.]

While shrouding his native Iran in mystery, Abdolah presents himself as the person par excellence to allow readers a glimpse ‘achter vreemde gordijnen’ [‘behind unfamiliar curtains’] and to unveil the secrets of the east to the west.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Abdolah claims to know the orient from within through his eastern origins makes him ‘[...] function as a pars pro toto for the orient: to listen to him and to read his work is to encounter the East in its entirety.’<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Abdolah claims to have a deep understanding of the west as well, thanks to his migration to and life in the Netherlands: ‘Mijn Perzische geschiedenis in combinatie met mijn ervaringen hier in Nederland maken mij een bevoorrecht schrijver.’<sup>22</sup> The combination of his origins and migration background thus allegedly provide the writer with a privileged position in between cultures. Abdolah draws on this position to appoint himself as a mediator who is capable of providing answers to challenges caused by intercultural dynamics. One of these challenges, according to Abdolah, is the migration from Islamic countries to Europe, as he states in an interview in 2006 in the Belgian Newspaper *De Tijd* about his novel *Het huis van de Moskee*:

De afgelopen twee decennia is Europa ingrijpend veranderd door de komst van islamitische migranten [...] De komst van die migranten leidt tot grondige geestelijke veranderingen, die grote vragen doen rijzen. En schrijver Kader Abdolah, die de Islam kent, maar hier in Europa leeft, is door de plek waar hij woont en de tijd waarin hij leeft, rijp om naar het antwoord op zoek te gaan.<sup>23</sup>

[In the past two decades, Europe has radically changed due to the arrival of Islamic migrants [...]  
The arrival of those migrants leads to profound spiritual changes, which raise big questions. And

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<sup>19</sup> Kader Abdolah, ‘Trump moet gek zijn om Iran te bombarderen.’ *De Morgen*, 22 June 2019, <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/trump-moet-gek-zijn-om-iran-te-bombarderen~b6be25c9/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>20</sup> Rob Gollin, ‘Voor een blik achter vreemde gordijnen’, *De Volkskrant*, 28 October 2008, <<https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/voor-een-blik-achter-vreemde-gordijnen~bd3c544d/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>21</sup> Sjoerd Jeroen Moenandar, ‘Transmitting Authenticity: Kader Abdolah and Hafid Bouazza as Cultural Mediators’, *Journal of Dutch Literature*, 5.1 (2014), 55-73 (p. 61).

<sup>22</sup> ‘The combination of my Persian history and my experiences here in the Netherlands make me a privileged writer’ Kader Abdolah wil het liefst terug naar Iran’, *Trouw*, 12 March 2011, <<https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/kader-abdolah-wil-het-liefst-terug-naar-iran~bf76ac21/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>23</sup> ‘Kader Abdolah: ‘Het huis van de moskee’, *De Tijd*, 23 February 2006, <<https://www.tijd.be/cultuur/algemeen-recensie-boek/kader-abdolah-het-huis-van-de-moskee/2135052.html>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

writer Kader Abdolah, who knows Islam but lives here in Europe, is, because of the place where he lives and the time in which he lives, ripe to search for the answer.

In the above quotation, Abdolah talks about himself in the third person singular and assigns himself a function as intermediary: he considers it his duty to inform his Dutch readership about a foreign and potentially frightening world. According to Moenandar, this literary positioning ‘fits the role that Abdolah takes upon himself in the public debate [...]: that of a cultural mediator whose descent enables him to provide the Dutch with an insight into the fundamentally different culture of the Orient.’<sup>24</sup>

However, there seems to be a partial dissonance between Abdolah’s claim of being a mediator who is bridging the gap between cultures and the use of heterolingualism in *Salam Europa!* The (in)accessibility of the foreign languages in the novel and their presentation as different and unfamiliar accentuates the disparities rather than the similarities between them, thus widening the gap between languages and cultures. This gap creates a need for mediation, which is filled by translations. In this sense, the writer, who provides the translations, takes on the role of cultural mediator. However, it should not be forgotten that it is also the writer who initially underlined the languages’ alterity through other discursive mechanisms. Seen in this light, Abdolah’s claim of being a cultural mediator seems somehow contradictory to his use of rather alienating heterolingual strategies.

A similar paradox can be observed in the use of heterolingualism through intertextuality in *Salam Europa!* As shown in the heterolingual analysis, the already distinctive function of intertextuality is intensified by the quotation of intertexts in the original language, which inevitably excludes readers from the select group who is able to both recognize *and* to read and understand the intertexts. As a result, this particular heterolingual strategy too is rather widening than bridging the gap between readers from different backgrounds and thus seems inconsistent with Abdolah’s posture as cultural mediator. However, the use of intertextuality does seem to support his posture as a famous Dutch-Iranian writer who earns a place among the big names of literature. Ewa Dynarowicz, who investigated references in Abdolah’s work to classical Persian literature, has pointed out that Abdolah uses intertextuality to enhance his prestige within the Dutch literary field: ‘Door intertekstuele verbanden te leggen, gebruikt Abdolah de statuur en het prestige van de Perzische klassieke literatuur om zijn eigen positie binnen het Nederlandse literaire veld te versterken.’<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in earlier as well as in more recent interviews, Abdolah accentuates his descent from a cultivated and intellectual Persian family: ‘Mijn overgrootvader was een vermaard dichter’ (1997, [My great-grandfather was a famous poet]); ‘Ik kom uit een traditionele literaire familie’ (2008, [I come from a traditional, literary family]), ‘Ik kom uit een goede, oude, culturele familie die me alles meegegeven heeft’ (2019, [I come from a good, old, cultural family that gave me everything]).<sup>26</sup> In *Salam Europa!*, this positioning is also

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<sup>24</sup> Sjoerd Jeroen Moenandar, *Depraved Borderlands. Encounters with Muslims in Dutch Literature and the Public Debate* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> [‘By making intertextual connections, Abdolah uses the stature and prestige of Persian classical literature to reinforce his own position within the Dutch literary field.’] Ewa Dynarowicz, ‘Intertekstualiteit als positioneringsstrategie. Perzische soefidichters in het werk van Kader Abdolah’, *Internationale Neerlandistiek*, 53.1 (2015), 29-46 (p. 43).

<sup>26</sup> Van Laeken; Ann Jooris & Fernand Van Damme, ‘De vragen van Proust: Kader Abdolah’, *De Morgen*, 27 January 2019 <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/ik-heb-de-code-van-het-leven-begrepen~b89c3ba2/>> [accessed 23 December

highlighted by the many references to ‘old’ Persian literature, for example through the structuring of the novel in ‘hekajats’: ‘Voor het vertellen van de gebeurtenissen heb ik voor een oude oosterse vertelvorm gekozen: de hekajat. Het moet een reeks vertellingen over Europa worden in de stijl van oude Perzische vertellingen’ (p. 7 [For the narration of the events, I have chosen an old oriental narrative form: the hekajat. It should become a series of stories about Europe in the style of ancient Persian tales]). Abdolah thus presents his work as a ‘mixing of eastern and western literary traditions’.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the fame of Persian literature, and by extension of Kader Abdolah, who claims to be directly connected to this literary tradition, is emphasized in *Salam Europa!* by mentioning that well-known historical characters grew up with translated Persian folk tales: it is said that Stalin was very interested as a child in *The Arabian Nights* (p. 45) and that the young Dutch princess Wilhelmina read Persian fairy tales, such as *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (pp. 363-364) in French translation.

According to Abdolah, his personal affinity with this ancient literary tradition also affects his writing style and his Dutch:

Mijn manier van denken is nog altijd Perzisch, maar ik giet mijn gedachten in Nederlandse grammatica [...] Het resultaat is geen Nederlands, maar ook geen Perzisch. Het is een huwelijk van twee rassen en dat brengt vaak gezonde kinderen voort.<sup>28</sup>

[My way of thinking is still Persian, but I pour my thoughts into Dutch grammar [...] The result is not Dutch, but it is not Persian either. It is a marriage of two races and this often brings about healthy children.]

Further on, Abdolah considers his works as a ‘geschenk aan de Nederlandse taal’ [‘gift to the Dutch language’] that is different than the contributions of ‘autochthonous’ authors:<sup>29</sup>

Ik doop mijn Nederlandse woorden en thema’s in mijn Perzische gedachten. Ik geef de smaak, kleur en geur van de oude Perzische literatuur aan mijn Hollandse teksten. Dat maakt de literatuur van Abdolah anders dan die van bijvoorbeeld Harry Mulisch.<sup>30</sup>

[I dip my Dutch words and themes into my Persian thoughts. I give the taste, colour and smell of the old Persian literature to my Dutch texts. This makes Abdolah’s literature different from for instance Harry Mulisch’s.]

According to Abdolah, this writing in-between cultures does not mean, however, that he does not deserve a place among the established Dutch authors. In the above quotation, Abdolah indeed

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2020]; Meryem Kanmaz, ‘Kader Abdolah over zijn vertaling van de Koran’, *De Standaard*, 26 April 2008 <<https://www.standaard.be/cnt/7s1r96tj>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>27</sup> Borderlands, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Van Laeken.

<sup>29</sup> Jolly van der Velden, ‘Interview met Kader Abdolah. Over de wendingen van het leven en zijn geschenk aan de Nederlandse taal’, *Neerlandica/Nederlands van Nu*, 114 (2010), 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> Odile Heynders & Bert Paasman, ‘De ziel van dit volk komt goed in gedichten naar voren, maar in proza niet. Een interview met Kader Abdolah op 18 oktober 1999’, *Literatuur*, 16 (1999), 365-369 (p. 366).

compares himself to and thus claims a place on the same level as Harry Mulish, said to be one of the ‘Big Three’ of Dutch literature. Later on, he puts his novel *Papegaai vloog over de IJssel* (2014), that has not been nominated to any literary price, on a par with the famous Flemish author Hugo Claus’s much-acclaimed masterpiece *Het verdriet van België* (1983): ‘Het verdriet van België van Hugo Claus was in 1983 voor België wat Papegaai vloog over de IJssel nu is voor Nederland. Zowel Claus als ikzelf schetsen een caleidoscopisch beeld van ons land.’<sup>31</sup> (*The Sorrow of Belgium* by Hugo Claus was in 1983 to Belgium what *Papegaai vloog over de IJssel* now is to the Netherlands. Both Claus and I sketch a kaleidoscopic image of our country.)

## Fikry El Azzouzi

### Heterolingualism in *Drarrie in de nacht*: Arabic is the new Dutch

The discursive mechanisms in *Drarrie in de nacht* are less diverse and less varied than in *Salam Europa!* Although we do find the use of italics in most heterolingual excerpts, mentioning the name of the foreign language appears only once, and there are hardly any translations accompanying the foreign words that frequently appear in the many lively dialogues. However, examples of what Suchet calls ‘heterolingual dynamics’ (p. 111) can regularly be observed in *Drarrie in de nacht*. Below, I will analyse how the dynamics of ‘inherent variation’ and ‘creolization’ are at work in the novel.

#### ***Inherent variation: Teen and street slang as a tool for inclusion and exclusion***

According to Suchet, the ‘dynamic of inherent variation’ involves that variation is a normal characteristic of any language: ‘language is fundamentally heterogenous’.<sup>32</sup> Grutman equally states that internal variations of language, such as dialects or sociolects, should be considered as a form of heterolingualism, as any language is ‘always already plural, always already hybrid’.<sup>33</sup> In *Drarrie in de nacht*, such hybridity is omnipresent in the dialogues between the main characters: four youngsters from various origins and backgrounds who call themselves ‘drarrie’, an Arabic plural term that signifies ‘young people’. In Dutch street slang, the term is also used as a singular and it means ‘street kid’ or ‘friend’. According to El Azzouzi, *drarrie* is considered a positive label, associated with cool and rebellion among those street kids.<sup>34</sup> In *Drarrie in de nacht*, the four main characters converse in an idiom that consists of a mixture of youngster and street slang and dialectic variations on the standard language, littered with abuse in Dutch and Arabic. The Arabic words in the *drarrie*’s dialogues mainly consist of Moroccan Arabic exclamations, interjections, swear words and insults, such as ‘*chataar*’, ‘*kardasj*’, ‘*kifash*’, ‘*safi*’, ‘*shmetta*’, ‘*tarnon*’, ‘*taz ya*

<sup>31</sup> ‘Een asielzoeker moét wel liegen’, *De Morgen*, 4 October 2014, <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/een-asielzoeker-moet-wel-liegen~b6ff7b60/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>32</sup> ‘la langue est fondamentalement hétérogène’ (p. 111).

<sup>33</sup> ‘des entités toujours déjà plurielles, toujours déjà ‘hybrides’ (p. 62).

<sup>34</sup> Michaël De Cock, ‘Als ik vandaag zestien was, zou ik waarschijnlijk ook naar Syrië vertrekken’, *Knack*, 15 October 2014, p. 90.

*taz*, ‘*zehma*’, ‘*zemmer*’ and ‘*zina*’. As can be seen in the fragments below, the Arabic words are never explained in the text and their meaning cannot readily be deduced from the context:

h) *Tfoe*, wat een *tarnons* zijn we toch. We zetten andere *Drarries* voor schut. (p. 24)

Brilletje, Italiaanse helm en leren jas. *Zehma Chataar*. *Zehma stijl*. Jammer van die jas die je blijkbaar op de groei hebt gekocht. (p. 13)

*Taz ya taz*. *Zehma* slim doen. Als je iets doet, doe het dan goed. Je kunt bijvoorbeeld de kasten weer dichtdoen, zegt Maurice. (p. 37)<sup>35</sup>

[h] *Tfoe*, such *tarnons* we are. We make fools of other *Drarrie*. (p. 24) / Shades, Italian helmet and leather coat. *Zehma Chataar*. *Zehma style*. Shame about that coat. Looks like you bought it to grow into. (p. 13) / *Taz ya taz*. *Zehma* genius. If you do something, do it properly. You can close the cupboards, for instance, says Maurice.]

Readers who don't understand the idiom might, on the one hand, feel 'excluded' and left out from the conversations between the four *drarrie*. On the other hand, reading their dialogues also gives those readers a chance to get acquainted with them: via the idiom, they are allowed a glimpse into a world that is meant to be hidden, potentially resulting in a better understanding between different layers of society. Young readers with an affinity to the street life, however, might feel included, as they do understand the *drarrie*'s idiom. Individuals understanding the idiom will be identified as insiders, whereas those who don't understand it will be banned as outsiders. Indeed, simultaneous inclusion and exclusion is the social purpose of slang.<sup>36</sup> Using this kind of slang in a novel might therefore appeal to an 'insider' readership of young people with affinity to street life. That this is the case for *Drarrie in de nacht* can be inferred from a video starring an interview with Fikry El Azzouzi in a secondary school in Ghent.<sup>37</sup> While discussing the Arabic street slang in *Drarrie in de nacht*, the author asks the audience of teenage students if they know the meaning of the following words from the novel: *zehma*, *kardasj*, *tarnon*, *chataar*, *taz ya taz*, *schmetta*, *rwina*, *zina*, *kifash*, *ewa*, *yallah* and *tfoe*. His question is met with hilarity among the youngsters, who, as it turns out, understand the words very well and seem to be proud about this fact.

### ***Language creolization as a consequence of increased diversity***

Despite the initial outsider status of the *drarrie*'s idiom, many of its Arabic words have started to be more widely used. The word '*drarrie*', for example, has been elected as word of the year by Flemish youngsters in 2020. According to Ruud Hendrickx, Van Dale's editor-in-chief and language specialist for the Flemish broadcasting company VRT, the choice for "ewa drerrie" laat zien dat kinderen één grote diverse en inclusieve groep vormen. Kinderen pikken woorden en

<sup>35</sup> Fikry El Azzouzi, *Drarrie in de nacht* (Antwerpen: Vrijdag, 2014), e-book.

<sup>36</sup> Heinz Sieburg, 'Ebenen der Sprachstandardisierung', in *Literatur und Mehrsprachigkeit: ein Handbuch*, ed. by Till Dembeck and Rolf Parr (Tübingen: Narr, 2020), pp. 69-76 (p. 73).

<sup>37</sup> Avv Gent. (2016, April 20). *Fikry El Azzouzi*, online video recording. YouTube, 20 April 2016; <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUdedWFVSGw>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

uitdrukkingen van elkaar op en breiden zo de Nederlandse omgangstaal uit met taalelementen uit de hele wereld.’<sup>38</sup> This integration of words from one language into another through cultural contact is an illustration of what Suchet (p. 115) calls the ‘dynamic of creolization’, which implies that languages evolve as extralingual conditions change: Suchet’s interpretation of ‘creolisation’ stresses the process of progressive transition that happens to any language over time: ‘a becoming different of ‘language’, independent from the existence of a creole based on that language.’<sup>39</sup> This corresponds to what Blanchet describes as

[...] inventing the means of expressing a way of being in the world here and now, of expressing a changing environment, of expressing and characterising new human and social relations, etc. In fact, we are caught up in a permanent process of a kind of general creolisation.<sup>40</sup>

That language transforms over time due to intercultural dynamics, is exactly what El Azzouzi described in an open letter to Van Dale’s editorial team in 2012, in which he advises to adjust the content of the dictionary to the new reality: ‘Het wordt tijd dat je aanpast. Heb je er nooit aan gedacht iets anders te proberen? Een taalbad in de straten van een grote stad? Een inburgeringscursus?’<sup>41</sup> While reproaching the editorial staff of being old-fashioned and narrow-minded, El Azzouzi points out that youngsters from all backgrounds are using street slang and are mixing Dutch with other languages on a regular basis since quite a while. In 2015, he stressed again that it is about time that not only English loan words enter Dutch dictionaries and that Arabic loan words get accepted as part of the Dutch language as well: ‘Vlaanderen evolueert in taal. Leenwoorden moeten niet meer alleen uit het Engels komen. Schattige blonde meisjes gebruiken die woorden uit het Arabisch overigens ook.’<sup>42</sup>

El Azzouzi’s words proofed to be prophetic: as it turns out, quite some Arabic words appearing in *Drarrie in de nacht* have recently been added to the dictionary: ‘*drarrie*’ and ‘*tfoe*’ in 2015, ‘*ewa*’ and ‘*wajo*’ in 2017, ‘*salaam*’ in 2019 and ‘*rwina*’ in 2020. It is not clear if the novel’s

<sup>38</sup> [shows that children form one large diverse and inclusive group. Children pick up words and expressions from each other and extend the Dutch colloquial language with linguistic elements from all over the world], see Ruud Hendrickx, “Ewa drerrie” en “simp” zijn Kinder-en Tienerwoord van het Jaar’, *Vrtnieuws.be*, 14 December 2020 <<https://vrttaal.net/nieuws/ewa-drerrie-en-simp-zijn-kinder-en-tiener-woord-van-het-jaar>> [accessed 14 December 2020]; The spelling ‘drerrie’ is slightly different from ‘drarrie’. Written Arabic is not vocalized, which can cause diverging transliterations in Dutch.

<sup>39</sup> ‘un devenir autre de “la langue” indépendamment de l’existence d’un créole basé sur cette langue’ (Suchet, p. 117). Suchet interprets creolisation in a different way than the definition prevailing in postcolonial studies, which describes creolisation as the merging of two languages into a new one: a creole language.

<sup>40</sup> [...] inventer les moyens de dire une façon d’être au monde ici et maintenant, de dire un environnement changeant, de dire et de caractériser des relations humaines et sociales nouvelles, etc. En fait, nous sommes pris dans un processus permanent d’une sorte de créolisation générale [...]’ (Blanchet, p. 79).

<sup>41</sup> It’s time for you to adjust. Never thought of trying something different? Language immersion in the streets of a big city? An integration course? Fikry El Azzouzi, ‘Elke zichzelf respecterende zuurpruim zou straattaal moeten kennen’, *De Morgen*, 17 December 2012 <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/elke-zichzelf-respecterende-zuurpruim-zou-straattaal-moeten-kennen~b5a83715/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>42</sup> ‘Flanders is evolving in terms of language. Loan words are no longer from English only. Cute blond girls use those Arabic words too, by the way’ Guinevere Claeys, ‘Fikry El Azzouzi protesteert niet, hij schrijft’ *De Standaard*, 18 April 2015 <[https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150416\\_01633515](https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150416_01633515)> [accessed 23 December 2020].

publication had anything to do with the spread of these words, but Hendrickx's statement about Van Dale's 'opnamebeleid' [addition policy] for new words, seems to suggest it might have: 'Lezers van *Drarrie in de nacht*, die roman van Fikry El Azzouzi, moeten kunnen opzoeken wat een drarrie is.'<sup>43</sup> According to Van Dale's policy, new words are included in the dictionary once they have become 'gangbaar Nederlands' [current Dutch], i.e. when the editors find them regularly in journals, magazines and books and on the internet in many different texts. Still, according to this policy, new words are only accepted when they are 'algemeen bekend' [commonly known] and have become 'ingeburgerd' [assimilated].<sup>44</sup> The fact that many Arabic words appearing in *Drarrie in de nacht* are nowadays included in Van Dale therefore indicates that they have become current in Dutch. Somehow, the integration of Arabic into Dutch following the migration of Arabic speakers in Flanders and the Netherlands, could be interpreted as a 'reversed' creolisation. After all, the term creolization originally meant that 'indigenous languages' changed under the influence of European languages due to colonization and slave trade.<sup>45</sup> However, from the use of Arabic words in *Drarrie in de nacht*, the European language Dutch seems to be changing under the influence of the 'indigenous' language Arabic. The following fragments illustrate this reversed creolisation in more detail:

i) *Salaam aleikum.* 'Aleikum salaam.' 'Broeder Ayoub, alles goed?' 'Met mij niet. Met jou blijkbaar wel, Abu Karim. (p. 118)

[i] *Salaam aleikum.* 'Aleikum salaam.' Brother Ayoub, are you alright?' 'I'm not, but apparently you are, Abu Karim.]

Ik kende ze allemaal, ik ben zelfs met hen opgegroeid. Oké, ze zijn wat ouder dan ik en het is niet dat ik met hen optrok of gesprekken met hen voerde, hoogstens een knik of een *salaam* als ik ze tegenkwam. (p. 114)

[I knew them all, I even grew up with them. OK, they're a bit older than me and it's not like I hung out with them or had conversations with them, at most I gave them a nod or a *salaam* when I met them.]

In these fragments, the word 'salaam' appears when two of the *drarrie*, Ayoub and Abu Karim, greet each other, and when Ayoub mentions that he greets people he encounters in the street with a nod or a 'salaam'. In contrast to the examples from *Salam Europa!* (see 3.1), where the meaning of the word 'salam' is elaborately clarified, there is no explanation or translation provided in

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<sup>43</sup> 'Readers of *Drarrie in de nacht*, that novel by Fikry El Azzouzi, need to have the possibility to look up the word *drarrie*'. Marnix Verplancke, 'Hoofdredacteur Ruud Hendrickx over de Dikke Van Dale 2.0: 'Ik weet niet of er nog een papieren editie komt' *Knack Extra*, 17 October 2018 <[https://www.knack.be/nieuws/boeken/hoofdredacteur-ruud-hendrickx-over-de-dikke-van-dale-2-0-ik-weet-niet-of-er-nog-eeen-papieren-editie-komt/article-longread-1381095.html?cookie\\_check=1623000042](https://www.knack.be/nieuws/boeken/hoofdredacteur-ruud-hendrickx-over-de-dikke-van-dale-2-0-ik-weet-niet-of-er-nog-eeen-papieren-editie-komt/article-longread-1381095.html?cookie_check=1623000042)> > [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>44</sup> Van Dale, 'Wanneer komt een nieuw woord in het woordenboek?', <[https://www.vandale.nl/klantenservice/meestgestelde-vragen-van-dale-redactie#ow\\_1](https://www.vandale.nl/klantenservice/meestgestelde-vragen-van-dale-redactie#ow_1)> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>45</sup> For more elaborate information on this definition, see *Pidgins and Creoles: an introduction*, ed. by Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, & Norval Smith (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994).



*Drarrie in de nacht* at all. There is no need, as the context makes the meaning of the word sufficiently clear. Without a translation, the word ‘salaam’ blends more easily with Dutch and is thus much less presented as foreign.

Words from street slang are not the only Arabic words from *Drarrie in de nacht* that can be found in Van Dale. Most Arabic words related to the Muslim religion appear in the dictionary as well: ‘*allahu akbar*’, ‘*halal*’ and ‘*haram*’, ‘*mujahedin*’, ‘*shahada*’, ‘*sharia*’, ‘*soennah*’. These words have been part of the dictionary since longer, in contrast to the Arabic words from street slang mentioned above, that were only recently added. However, they can still be seen as evidence of the increased interculturality in Dutch speaking countries. This is nicely illustrated by the following fragments, in which we find different renderings of the *adhan*, the Islamic call to prayer:

j) Wie niet horen wil, zal deze keer wel moeten luisteren,’ zegt Karim terwijl plots door de megafoon de oproep tot het gebed klinkt: ‘*allahu akbar, allahu akbar/allahu akbar, allahu akbar/ash’hadu an la ilaha ila-llah/ash’hadu an la ilaha ila-llah/ash’hadu anna muhammadan rasulu-llah/ash’hadu anna muhammadan rasulu-llah/hayya ala-s-salaat/hayya ala-s-salaat/hayya ala-l-falah/hayya ala-l-falah/allahu akbar, allahu akbar/la-ilaha illa-llah*’. (p. 95)

[j] Those who don't want to hear, will have to listen this time,' says Karim as the call to prayer suddenly blasts through the megaphone.]

When Ayoub and Maurice, two of the four *drarrie*, are trying drugs at a junkie’s place, another *drarrie*, Karim, storms in with a megaphone that calls to prayer like a full-fledged muezzin. Karim, alias Kevin, is a neglected Flemish teenager who desperately tries to belong somewhere and finds meaning in the fundamentalist form of the Islamic religion. For the now fiercely fanatic Karim, drugs are shockingly *haram*. Later on, Karim, who doesn’t know Arabic very well, makes a personal interpretation from the *adhan* and calls it a ‘poem’:

k) ‘O moslimman|Zet jezelf in de martelaar zijn plaats|Waarom heb je geen haast?|O moslimman |Hoeveel raketten zijn er op jou gericht|Moslimman, waarom blijf je uit het zicht?|*Allahu Akbar/Allahu Akbar*|O moslimman|strijdend gaan we ten onder|Wie toekijkt, begaat een zware zonde|O moslimman|Hou op met in alle richtingen te kruipen|en zeker niet voor degene die graag pinten zuipen|*Allahu Akbar/Allahu Akbar*. (p. 120)

[k] O Muslim man|put yourself in the martyr's place|why are you not in a hurry?|O Muslim man |How many missiles are aimed at you|Muslim man, why do you stay out of sight?|*Allahu Akbar/Allahu Akbar*|O Muslim man|we will go down fighting|those who stand around watching commit a grave sin|O Muslim man|Stop crawling in all directions|and certainly not for those who like to drink pints|*Allahu Akbar*.

In his ‘poem’ Karim complains about the suppression of the Islam in western countries and he summons his Muslim Brothers not to bow to western heathens. This ‘poem’ is, just like the character Karim, a demonstration of the fluidity of cultural identity. The Flemish Kevin, who zealously tries to become the Muslim Karim, mixes Dutch and Arabic in this personal interpretation from the call to prayer, resulting in a hilariously hybrid ‘poem’.

## Posture: Fikry the drarrie

Although it was feared that the use of street slang might turn off adult readers and that it wasn't the best marketing, El Azzouzi insisted on introducing this idiom in *Drarrie in de nacht*.<sup>46</sup>

Toen ik begon te schrijven, wilde ik per se dicht bij de taal schrijven die ik gewoon was. Het moest verstaanbaar zijn, maar ik wilde me niet te veel aantrekken van de codes waarin een zogenaamd fatsoenlijk boek geschreven moest zijn. En het bleek nog te marcheren ook.<sup>47</sup>

[When I started writing, I definitely wanted to write close to the language I was used to. It had to be understandable, but I didn't want to worry too much about the codes in which a supposedly decent book had to be written. And it turned out to be working.]

In this quotation, El Azzouzi states that he wanted to write in the idiom he was used to. Indeed, in several interviews, the writer mentions that he has been a 'drarrie' himself. 'Ik was zelf ook een clichéjongere [...] Ik hing maar wat rond en had geen flauw idee wat ik met mijn leven zou aanvangen. Net zoals mijn hoofdpersonages dus.'<sup>48</sup> In his teenage years, El Azzouzi dropped out of school, loitering on the streets and having no idea whatsoever what to do with his life. In this respect, the author presents his social background as a guarantee of authenticity for the story and characters in *Drarrie in de nacht*.

Moreover, El Azzouzi states that the real-life versions of his characters are also his intended readers. According to the writer, there is no literature for and about people like the *drarrie*. He is of the opinion that the contemporary Flemish literature does not represent the *Zeitgeist* nor the diversity of today's Flanders: 'Alleen Vlaamse witte familieromans, dat toont niet het Vlaanderen van vandaag. Ook de verhalen van homoseksuele gezinnen en migranten moeten beschreven worden.'<sup>49</sup> Hence, El Azzouzi aspires to tell stories for and about so far underrepresented social groups, especially 'jonge gasten van vreemde origine' and argues that there is only one book that will make readers understand this world: 'Drarrie in de nacht: het toont een wereld van jongeren die nooit wordt getoond, nooit wordt gehoord.'<sup>50</sup> Except for showing an unknown world to the 'established' readership, El Azzouzi aims to write novels about

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<sup>46</sup> Margot De Boeck, 'Interview met Fikry El Azzouzi', *Veto*, 7 December 2015, <<https://www.veto.be/artikel/interview-met-fikry-el-azzouzi>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>47</sup> Ivan Put, 'Fikry El Azzouzi: "De straat heeft me gemaakt tot wie ik ben"', *Bruzz*, 25 January 2018 <<https://www.bruzz.be/podium/fikry-el-azzouzi-de-straat-heeft-me-gemaakt-tot-wie-ik-ben-2018-01-25>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>48</sup> 'I was a cliché-youngster myself [...] I was just hanging around and I had no idea whatsoever about what to do with my life. Exactly like my main characters.' 'Ik was zelf ook een hangjongere', *De Morgen*, 5 November 2014 <<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/ik-was-zelf-ook-een-hangjongere~b41051f6/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

<sup>49</sup> 'Family sagas about white Flemish only don't show today's Flanders. There need to be stories about homosexual families and migrants as well.'

<sup>50</sup> 'Young people of foreign origin', Fikry El Azzouzi, 'Het einde van Fikry El Azouzi', *De Standaard*, 19 September 2019 <[https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190418\\_04339510](https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190418_04339510)> [accessed 23 December 2020]. 'Drarrie in de nacht shows a world of youngsters that is never shown, that is never heard.', Ewald Pironet, 'Het verdriet van België en 14 andere essentiële fictieboeken over Vlaanderen', *Knack*, 11 July 2018, p. 62.

characters with whom young people with a migration background, and more specifically *drarrie*, can identify:

Ik heb dit boek voor hén geschreven, niet voor 'de Vlaming'. Ik wou niets uitleggen, niemand vergoelijken. Ik had maar één doel: ik wou dat drarrie dit een cool boek vinden. Dat ze zich erin zouden herkennen. Dat ze het grappig zouden vinden, ermee lachen. Dat er een boek te lezen zou zijn, in het Nederlands, hier in Vlaanderen, over hén. Hun leefwereld.<sup>51</sup>

[I wrote this book for them, not for 'the Flemish'. I did not want to explain anything, or condone anyone. I had only one goal: I wanted the drarrie to think this was a cool book. That they would recognize themselves in it. That they would find it funny, laugh about it. That there would be a novel, in Dutch, here in Flanders, about them, about their world.]

One way to strike a chord with this implied *drarrie* readership, was to go off the beaten track by staging for them recognizable characters and to make use of their idiom in the dialogues. Despite the doubts about the intelligibility of this idiom, El Azzouzi choose not to fall back on ready-made successful writing recipes, like some authors with migration background allegedly do in order to become successful: 'Soms hebben schrijvers met migrantenroots de neiging om de gevestigde, oudere literatuur te copy-pasten. Als je ook op die manier schrijft, dan hoor je erbij. Maar dat is niks voor mij.'<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The heterolingual strategies in *Salam Europa!* and *Drarrie in de nacht* are quite divergent. In *Salam Europa!*, the many foreign languages appearing in the novel are presented as different through discursive mechanisms underlining their alterity: they are typographically marked by italics, appear in non-Latin alphabet or transliterations and are often accompanied with extensive translations or explanations clarifying their semantic meaning. These discursive mechanisms indicate that the foreign languages in the Dutch text are supposed to be 'foreign' or 'unknown' to the readers. The foreign languages and the cultures they represent are staged as clearly demarcated, distinct monolithic entities that cannot easily be understood. The heterolingual strategies in *Salam Europa!* thus rather seem to widen than to bridge the gap between cultures. This is somehow contradictory to Kader Abdolah's public positioning in opinion pieces, columns and interviews as a writer in-between, a mediator striving to bring people closer together by making foreign cultures more intelligible to his readers.

Although Fikry El Azzouzi assumes an engaged posture in opinion pieces, columns and interviews as well, he is more realistic in his aspirations. El Azzouzi doesn't claim to represent whole cultures, but mainly strives to write novels for and about youngsters with a migration

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<sup>51</sup> Claeys.

<sup>52</sup> ['Sometimes writers with a migration background are inclined to copy-paste the established, older literature. If you write in this way, you belong. But that's not my thing'] Laura van Gelder, 'Fikry El Azzouzi: "Ik schrijf om jongens als Ayoub een stem te geven"', *Univers. The independent news source of Tilburg University*, 26 September 2018, <<https://universonline.nl/nieuws/2018/09/26/fikry-el-azzouzi-ik-schrijf-om-jongens-als-ayoub-een-stem-te-geven/>> [accessed 23 December 2020].

background. According to El Azzouzi, these youngsters constitute an overlooked social group in the Flemish literary scene. In *Drarrie in de nacht*, the writer therefore strives to include this group by the use of Arabic street slang, an idiom for insiders only spoken among the *drarrie*. In contrast to the often much explained and yet sometimes inaccessible and unidiomatic heterolingual fragments in *Salam Europa!*, the Arabic words in *Drarrie in de nacht* are never translated. Arabic is presented in the novel as an integral part of Dutch, showing that there is a more profound linguistic fusion going on than what emerges from the use of heterolingualism in *Salam Europa!* In *Drarrie in de nacht*, the Arabic words are staged as an inherent variation of Dutch and as proof of the natural change language undergoes as a consequence of increased multiculturalism in the Flemish society. With this particular use of heterolingualism, El Azzouzi thus demonstrates that times change and that it is about time that Flemish literature changes along.

Fikry El Azzouzi as well as Kader Abdolah claim to write differently from Dutch and Flemish authors of their generation. Where El Azzouzi attributes this originality to his social background by making use of an idiom he knows from his teenage years as a *drarrie*, Kader Abdolah attributes his personal writing style to his Persian origins, which allegedly enrich his Dutch with the flavour of the ancient Persian literary tradition. The many intertextual fragments in *Salam Europa!* not only refer to this oriental literary tradition, but also to the western one by quoting famous European authors in the original languages. This avid use of intertextuality might be a strategy to validate a place for the author himself among the big names of literature, but also risks to suggest that multiculturalism is mainly highbrow and a question of erudition and education. El Azzouzi on the other hand, does not seek approval by quoting famous authors. On the contrary, he consciously opposes the established 'writing recipes' that are supposedly a guarantee for success in the Flemish literary field.

Going back to Blanchet's question about where a language begins and where it ends, the answer might be very different, depending on the use of heterolingualism in *Salam Europa!* or in *Drarrie in de nacht*. Whereas the discursive mechanisms in *Salam Europa!* present languages as exclusive monolithic entities by setting clear boundaries between them, the heterolingual dynamics at work in *Drarrie in de nacht* present languages as inclusive tools for intercultural fusion.

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## How Culturally Diverse Are Text Selections in Dutch Literary Education? An Analysis of Reading Tips, Teaching Packs, and Student Choices

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**Abstract.** Internationally, the cultural diversity of secondary literary education is often analyzed by examining teachers' text selections. This article broadens this scope by exploring the cultural diversity of text selections in an educational system in which students have much autonomy to choose literary texts themselves. Using Dutch literary education as a case study, the article considers text selections from the perspective of both teachers, teaching packs, and student choices. Specifically, three dimensions of diversity in text selection are analyzed: gender, ethnicity, and national diversity (Netherlands versus Flanders).

Focusing on (1) reading tips given by teachers to students, (2) contents of frequently used teaching packs, and (3) book selections by students in upper-secondary education, the analysis reveals that Dutch literary education has much to gain in terms of diversity. Female and non-western authors are underrepresented, while Flemish authors are considerably less represented than Dutch authors. Almost without exception, this imbalance between male and female, western and non-western, increased when the number of unique authors in text selections was compared with the total number of selections of specific authors. Hence, the article argues that the cultural hierarchy in which 'literature' is automatically associated with male, western authors is very present in literary education.

**Keywords.** Literatuuronderwijs, culturele diversiteit, gender, canon, receptie; literary education, cultural diversity, gender, canon, reception

## 1. Research on Diversity in Secondary Literary Education

The contribution that literary education can make to the ideas of young people regarding literature and society is, to a large extent, determined by the texts they encounter at school. After all, the texts chosen influence the conversations teachers have with students about literature, the perspectives to which they are exposed, and the explored social-political issues inspired by literature. In recent years, the concern that western teenagers in secondary education encounter too few texts other than those written by (often dead) white men, has been repeatedly articulated. Such a male-centred, monocultural orientation is problematic, as the student population has become increasingly more diverse with regard to gender and ethnicity. If literature in education is not to be merely a 'mirror' of one's own culture, but also a 'window' into a myriad of cultural viewpoints (Banks, 2006; Galda, 1998; Glazier & Seo, 2005), then it is of paramount importance that a wide variety of perspectives is presented. This is also essential with regard to reading motivation: if students do not recognize any aspects of their personal cultural background or ideology, they might experience a lack of motivation, which then in turn hinders their development of literacy (Alexander & Fox, 2011).

The work of Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) is an important point of reference with regard to research into the diversity of students' reading lists. They studied the extent to which teachers at K-12 schools in Alabama use multicultural literature in their classes, as well as the reasons these teachers give for using, or not using, such texts. They come to the conclusion that one could not speak of a balanced and representative literature curriculum. Although in slightly different terms, Applebee's (1989) inventory of text selection at American schools in the eighties already observed a similar situation. Hence, over two decades there seems to have been little change, and more recent studies looking at the United States (Northrop, Borsheim-Black & Kelly, 2019), the United Kingdom (Dyches, 2017), Australia (Adam & Barrett-Pugh, 2020), and New-Zealand (Hughson, 2020) suggest that a diverse curriculum is still an ideal rather than a reality.

It is important to note that in such research, the primary object of study is the perspective of the teacher, who has the agency to determine what the students will read, and is thus also the one with the responsibility to provide a curriculum that is diverse while stimulating critical literacy. Many factors play a role in the selection of texts, such as the level of the text in relation to the school year, the perceived interests of the students, the accessibility of the texts, the match between the text and the learning goals, the exam culture of the school, and last but certainly not least, the interests and knowledge of the teachers themselves, whose selection mechanisms have now become a field of research in its own right. It is important to note that a large proportion of American teachers experience limited autonomy in the selection of texts, because they work with reading lists that have long been established and are determined on the departmental or district level (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015: 263-264). Darragh and Boyd (2019) reported that especially teachers with limited experience (<5 years) experience such limitations.

This focus on the teacher as the only factor featuring in text selection is, however, too limited. While Darragh and Boyd (2019) did report that teachers find student perspectives very important in the choices that they make, the researchers did not include this perspective in their research. This is also due to the educational setting in the United States, where teachers play a significant role in determining the literary program. With the help of the so-called Common Core State Standards, they establish a curriculum in which students have only limited input (see Boyd, Causey & Galda, 2015). This situation is less common in many European countries, where the

selection of literary texts is often not conducted top-down, but as a process in which students have a voice (Witte & Sâmihăian, 2013: 16). In order to study the diversity of the literary curriculum in such countries, the students' selections as well as the teaching packs through which they encounter the literary works of a large group of authors, have to be taken into account.

Another problem in researching text selections in literary education is of a methodological nature. Studies that examine the text selection process often make use of questionnaires that influence the research results. Two examples taken from the studies cited above illustrate this aptly. Darragh and Boyd (2019), for example, deploy a questionnaire in which teachers are asked three concrete questions about the selection of texts in general: they have to name (1) their favourite book to teach; (2) their least favorite book to teach; and (3) determine six factors – each on a five-point scale – that explain to what extent such preferences influence their text selections. Subsequently, five similar questions about young adult literature are posed. Because this genre is explicitly highlighted and receives more attention than literary texts in general, the respondents might get the impression that the researchers are especially interested in young adult literature, hence inducing socially desirable answers.

The second example is the study by Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006). In this research, they asked a group of teachers (n=142) to reflect upon the diversity of their text selections based on two guiding questions: '1) Do your selections include writers from diverse backgrounds and experiences and if so, how? 2) Do you include book-length works from authors of non-European descent?' (481). The concept 'diverse' is, however, not operationalized here, with leads to predictable outcomes: The respondents either come up with a variety of titles that do not concur with the conceptualization of the researchers (485), or – when they hold very different ideas of diversity (see Silverman, 2010) – overlook authors with particular diverse backgrounds.

In short, the diversity of text selections in secondary education could be brought into sharper focus by a) looking towards teaching systems in which students have the autonomy to choose texts themselves; and b) using a methodology that is less focused on teachers' self-assessment. This article reflects the results of a research that aims to meet these conditions. It examines the diversity of text selections made within Dutch literary education, analyzing three perspectives: (1) those of teachers, (2) those of frequently used teaching packs, and (3) those of students. The concept of diversity is understood here in line with the work of Taylor Cox, who defines cultural diversity as 'the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance' (1993: 6). The focus will be on three dimensions of diversity in text selection: gender, ethnicity, and national diversity.

## 2. Dutch Literary Education as a Case Study

In Dutch language education, literature is one of the six exam domains within general secondary education.<sup>1</sup> The domain is divided into three subdomains: literary development, literary concepts, and literary history. For the subject of 'literary development', exam candidates must be able to argumentatively report on their reading experience with regard to a selection of literary works of their choice. At the 'havo' education level, this concerns eight works, whereas at the 'vwo'

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<sup>1</sup> The other domains are (non-literary) reading skills, verbal language skills, writing skills, argumentative skills, and orientation towards studies and professions.

(the highest educational level), it concerns twelve works, of which at least three must have been written prior to 1880. In addition, candidates must show that they recognize and differentiate between different types of literary texts and that they are able to use literary concepts in the interpretation of literary texts (sub-domain 'literary concepts'). They must also be able to give an overview of the most important developments in Dutch literary history and be able to place the literary works they have read within a historical perspective (sub-domain 'literary history').

The Dutch exam program explicitly states that candidates must select their own titles from the reading list. However, in practice, a number of preselected texts—especially those from the literary historical canon—are being read in class (Oberon 2016). This means that most student reading lists are a combination of compulsory and self-selected books. Furthermore, the student choice is also limited, because the exam program prescribes that only 'literary' texts can be read. The concept of 'literature' is not conceptualized into further detail, as is the case in many literary didactical contexts (Schrijvers et al. 2019: 27). As a result, students tend to discuss their choices beforehand with their teacher, who functions as a gatekeeper (Dera 2020). Since there is no official curriculum upon which teachers can draw, Dutch literary education is characterized by a substantial heterogeneity, both in terms of content and text selection (Janssen 1998; Laan 2018). The number of unique titles reported during the most recent large-scale inventory provides evidence for this. The 1616 students who participated in the study jointly reported 1642 book titles (Dera 2019a).

The freedom to choose as well as the ensuing substantial heterogeneity pave the way for a literary curriculum in which text selection is guided by students' own interests, preferences, and life worlds. In theory, this means that there is also much space for diversity in the selection of authors. However, within the Dutch literary field—from which literary education is derived—such diversity cannot be taken for granted at all. This concerns all three aspects of cultural diversity that are central to this research. For example, a recent study into gender in the Dutch literary field shows that female authors are systematically appreciated less than male authors, both in consumers' buying behaviour and in terms of literary recognition by critics and juries (Koolen 2018). In terms of ethnicity, inequalities prevail as well. An analysis by Koren and Delhaye (2019) shows that publishers and other literary professionals promote aesthetic norms that position the work of non-white authors in an identity politics framework rather than a literary framework. In this way, relevant gatekeepers draw an ethno-racial line through the literature on offer, in which non-white authors are marked as less aesthetically relevant. On the level of national diversity, too, one finds an imbalance. While Dutch literary texts from the Netherlands, Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), and the Dutch Overseas Territories are traditionally all counted as 'Dutch literature', authors from the latter two areas are systematically underrepresented on literary prize nomination lists (Van Boven 2019).

Partly because of such tendencies, there are concerns within the Dutch media that secondary education has too little diversity as well. For example, the Turkish-Dutch writer Özcan Akyol (2016) articulated the concern that Surinamese Dutch people can hardly recognize themselves within the school canon, while the prominent young author Niña Weijers (2019) argued in favor of a reading list that contained more than merely dead, white, male writers. Preliminary research into the reading behaviour of teachers of literature and the reading tips that preservice teachers give to students suggests that such concerns are indeed correct. Teachers of literature read relatively few books by women and non-western authors (Dera 2018), while preservice teachers have a tendency to recommend books written by white men to students (Dera & Lommerde,

2020). For poetry in particular, it is known that teaching packs are dominated by white, male writers from the Netherlands—something that is also true for twenty-first-century poetry (Dera, 2019b; Dera 2022). This research will demonstrate how these relations play out across the breath of literary education.

### 3. Research Design

In this research, the diversity of the text selections made within Dutch literary education (gender, ethnicity, and nationality) is considered from three perspectives: the perspective of the teacher; the perspective of the teaching pack; and the perspective of the students themselves. The research engages with upper havo/vwo (equivalent to 10th-12th grade) and focuses solely on L1-education. Diversity in the text selections of foreign language teaching (traditionally English, German, France, and Spanish) will not be considered as part of this research.

This article focuses first of all on the perspective of teachers, because they perform a gatekeeping role and they often take on the role of advisor, giving students tips on suitable books that match the level of their literary competence (Witte 2008). Previous research has shown that approximately 60 percent of teachers of literature make use of a teaching pack that has been introduced by an educational publisher (Oberon 2016). Since such teaching packs expose students to texts and text excerpts by all kinds of authors that potentially influence their book selections, teaching packs comprise the second perspective. They offer a relevant source of research into diversity because, both textually and visually, they reflect current ideologies and hence often mediate cultural hierarchies (Risager 2018). Finally, this study takes the perspective of the students themselves into consideration, as they are the ones who ultimately determine which texts are included in their reading lists. For each of the three perspectives, the diversity of text selections was studied in separate parts, which will be discussed below.

#### Teachers' Perspective

In order to research teachers' gatekeeping role, a very brief questionnaire was disseminated in which teachers were asked to note eight book titles they recommend regularly to students in the fourth year of havo and vwo (10th grade). This year was chosen because Dutch students generally start reading for their exams in the fourth year and then also make the step from young adult literature to adult literature. At this moment, the guiding role of the teacher is especially important.

The respondents had to come up with these eight titles by themselves, (there was no list to choose from). In doing so, the active repertoires of the teachers were questioned, while simultaneously trying to increase the ecological validity of the research, because in practice, teachers also have to react on the spot when students ask them for reading tips. In order to limit the risk of socially desirable answers, the respondents were not told that diversity was to be the central focus of the research. Rather, they were told that they cooperated in a data collection for research into book choices in Dutch literary education.

The teachers were approached via the Facebook group 'Leraar Nederlands' (Teacher of Dutch), where teachers exchange ideas for classroom activities, discuss practical situations, and argue about the direction education as a profession is taking. Hence, one could speak of self-selective sampling. This approach possibly led primarily to reactions from teachers with an

affinity for literary education. However, in the context of this research, the potentially negative consequences of such a selection bias do not outweigh the advantages of self-selective sampling, because respondents who have an affinity with the subject generally provide more insights into the process that is being studied (Sharma, 2017).

In total, 104 teachers participated in the research, of whom 91 were women and 13 were men. Of these, 101 were formally authorized to teach Dutch language and literature in upper havo and vwo. On average, the participants had 13 years of teaching experience. In order to analyse the diversity of the titles put forward by the teachers, the gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors were coded.

### Perspective of the Teaching Pack

In order to study the diversity of text selections in teaching packs, a corpus was comprised of three literary teaching packs for the school course Dutch language and literature. The packs used for the research are respectively *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* (*Lowlands, literature, and reader*; Van der Meulen & Van der Pol, 2011), *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* (*Literature: history and theory*; Dautzenberg, 2009), and *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* (*New Dutch: literature*; Frank et al., 2018). In the most recent inventory research into Dutch literary education in upper havo/vwo, the first two packs emerged as the two most frequently used teaching packs by teachers (Oberon, 2016). While *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* appeared shortly after that research, it is quickly winning terrain on the Dutch literary-educative market. All three analyzed teaching packs comprise both a theory book and a workbook with assignments. *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* and *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* work with separate editions for havo and vwo, and thus differentiate between these two levels of Dutch secondary education. *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* is explicitly aimed towards vwo students and, hence, has no edition for students attending havo.

For this research, an inventory was made of all authors mentioned in the three teaching packs, for both the theory and the assignments books, not including anonymous authors (for example of medieval stories, the authorship of which is often shrouded in mystery). Authors from language areas outside of the Netherlands were also taken into account. The gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors included in the inventory were coded.

### Perspective of the Students

In order to research the diversity of the students' text selections, a questionnaire was distributed among exam classes at both havo and vwo level in the school year of 2017-2018. In the questionnaire, students were asked to give either eight (havo) or twelve (vwo) books that were on their reading list. For each book, students were asked to state the author and the title. In addition, they gave each book a quality score (on a scale from 1 to 10), and they had to estimate what percentage of the book they had actually read.

The students were given instructions to fill in the questionnaire via their teacher of Dutch. In order to find teachers who were prepared to do so, a call was disseminated via the website [www.neerlandistiek.nl](http://www.neerlandistiek.nl), the website of Stichting Lezen ('Foundation for Reading', a center to stimulate reading), the website of the Radboud University in Nijmegen, various newsletters for alumni of teacher training, and the aforementioned Facebook group 'Leraar Nederlands'.

Teachers from 132 schools applied to participate in the questionnaire with their students. Ultimately, the exam classes of 45 schools were included in the research. The remaining 87 teachers did not respond to follow-up messages or withdrew their application due to lack of time.

The teachers were given two months to distribute the questionnaire among their exam classes. They were filled in digitally via the application Lime Survey and on average took 10-15 minutes per student to complete. The teachers were instructed to give students the questionnaire only after all literature exams were finished. This ensured that the students' reading lists were complete and marked. Participating teachers were free to choose the moment of when to give the questionnaire: at the beginning of a lesson, or precisely at the end; in Dutch class, or outside of it. However, the supervising teachers were requested to prepare their students well for filling in the questionnaire. More specifically, the students had to be instructed to bring the titles of the books in their reading dossier to class, so as to limit the risk of forgetting titles.

Before the students were shown the official part of the questionnaires, they were informed that they would participate in a research study and they were asked to give informed consent. Students below sixteen years of age were excluded from participation by Dutch law. Exam candidates who decided to partake in the questionnaire could choose to stop doing so at any moment.

In total, 2489 exam candidates were given the questionnaires. 1886 students filled them in completely, which shows a relatively high non-response. For the data analysis 1616 completed questionnaires were used and 275 questionnaires were left out. Questionnaires mentioning less than four book titles and those that were obviously not filled in seriously, were eliminated. The benchmark of four book titles was used because some schools complete part of the reading dossier prior to the exam year, hence listing only four titles for the final year. Questionnaires deemed to be 'obviously not serious' were those in which students made up comically intended book titles.

The total population of Dutch exam candidates in general secondary education comprised 91,866 students (53,974 havo; 37,892 vwo) for the year 2017-2018. Hence, the number of respondents (1616) easily exceeds the minimum sample size (1055 students, based on a reliability rate of 95% and a fault margin of 3%). On average, the 1616 respondents were aged 17.2 years. Of these, 52.8% took their exams at havo level, compared to 47.2% at vwo level. 56.6% of the students self-identified as women and 43.4% as men. The gender category 'Other' occurred so frequently in questionnaires that had evidently not been filled in seriously, that the questionnaires with this gender indication were ultimately not taken into consideration.

For 1511 respondents it was possible to determine whether they had a western or a non-western background. Students were considered 'non-western' when they indicated that either one of their parents or grandparents originated in a non-western country, in accordance with the guidelines for determining a third generation by the Dutch institute for population studies (CBS). Based on these guidelines, of all respondents, 83.7% had a western background, while 16.7% had a non-western background. The book titles reported by the students were analysed in the same way as those in the other two sub-studies: gender, ethnicity, and nationality of the authors were coded.

## 4. Results

In this section, I will first discuss the results per perspective. After that, these results will be compared with one another.

### Teachers' Perspective

Together, the 104 respondents mentioned 829 book titles in response to the question asking them to name the eight titles they most frequently recommend to students (three teachers only mentioned seven titles). In fourteen cases, authors were mentioned without any specific accompanying book title. Because the research aims to chart diversity by coding author data, these items have still been included in the analysis.

Table 1 shows the top 15 of most frequently mentioned titles in the questionnaire. While the most frequently recommended book—which was mentioned by almost a third of the respondents—was written by a female author, the table shows that male authors are more strongly represented in the higher portions of the rating list. Only three of the sixteen authors are female. Non-western authors are also underrepresented. Only Bouzamour and Akyol have a non-western (respectively Moroccan and Turkish) background. In addition, while the top 5 contains two Flemish authors, authors from Belgium do not occur anywhere else in the top 15.

The remaining data confirmed the results within this top 15. The 829 books mentioned were written by a total of 296 authors. Of these authors, 185 were men (62.5%), 104 were female (35.1%), the gender of five (medieval) authors was unknown, and one author name revealed a writing couple. Roughly, the number of unique authors had a male-female-ratio of 2 : 1, which is concurrent with the ratio in Dutch literary book production after the Second World War (see Vos, 2008). This ratio becomes, however, a lot less advantageous when the total number of times a specific title has been mentioned is taken into account (for example, 31 times for *Alles was water was* by Hanna Bervoets, see table 1). Of the 801 items that could be attributed to a male or a female author, 567 were written by a man (69.57%) and 234 by a woman (28.71%). Hence, whereas the number of *unique* authors in the questionnaire resembled the ratio 2 : 1, the ratio for the *total* number of recommended authors more closely resembles 7 : 3. In short, with regard to gender diversity, female authors are underrepresented in the book tips provided by the teachers.

An opposite tendency can be seen with regard to Flemish writers and those with a non-western background. Eighteen unique writers (6.1%) are Flemish, however, of the total number of titles recommended, 12.8% have been written by Flemish authors. And among the 296 unique authors, ten have a non-western background (3.4%). Yet, when the total mentions of a specific title is taken into account, 6.3% of them stem from a non-western author. Hence, while Flemish and non-western authors as a group have a relatively weak representation in the reading tips provided by teachers of literature, the total number of mentioned titles attributed to those same non-western and Flemish authors is much higher.

### Perspective of the Teaching Pack

In the three teaching packs that were analyzed, a total of 674 unique authors were mentioned. The highest number of authors were mentioned in *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie* (405),



followed by *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* (284), and then *Laagland, literatuur & lezer* (183). Table 2 visualizes which authors were most frequently mentioned at havo- and vwo-level for all three teaching packs together. The table contains only male, western authors from the Netherlands. In the top ten of the most frequently cited authors in the teaching packs used at the vwo, one cannot find female, Flemish or non-western authors. Similarly, the top 50 does not demonstrate any greater diversity. In total, it contains three female writers, a single non-western (male) writer, and four (male) Flemish authors.

As was the case with the reading tips provided by the teachers, table 2 shows on a microlevel what the numbers on a macrolevel also indicate. Teaching packs are dominated by male writers with a western background and of Dutch nationality. Of the 674 unique authors mentioned in the three teaching packs together, 534 are male (79.2%) and 139 are female (20.6%) – one author name reveals a writing couple. 35 authors have a non-western background (5.2%), compared to 639 authors with a western background (94.8%). 354 of the authors mentioned are from the Netherlands (52.5%), compared to 37 from Flanders (5.5%). A salient detail is that the total corpus contains less unique authors from Flanders than authors from France (59), the United Kingdom (52), and the United States (48).

For gender as well as for ethnicity and nationality, the imbalance is even greater when we consider the total number of times a given author is mentioned (rather than the number of unique authors). The total number of mentions of authors in the three teaching packs together comprised 2920. 2509 of them are male (85.9%) and 405 are female (13.9%). With 114 mentions, non-western authors represent 3.9% of the total, compared to 96.1% for western authors. Dutch authors are mentioned 2079 times (71.2%), while Flemish authors are mentioned 187 times (6.4%). While for the Flemish authors, this percentage is higher than is the case for the number of unique authors, the percentage increases disproportionately for Dutch authors.

The imbalance observed concerning gender, ethnicity, and nationality applies to all of the three analysed teaching packs, although there are differences in emphasis. Table 3 visualizes these differences, showing that the most recent reading pack, *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur* is, relatively speaking, more balanced in the contexts of gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

## Students' Perspective

Together, the 1616 respondents mentioned 1642 unique book titles by 725 unique authors. Table 4 provides an overview of the most frequently read texts among the exam candidates at havo and vwo level, including the average rating they attributed to the text and the percentage they self-reported to have actually read. As shown by this table, the most frequently mentioned authors in students' selections are also predominantly male: The top ten only contains a single woman, while the top fifteen lists two. Non-western authors do not occur on the leading list at all; the non-western author highest on the list (Mano Bouzamour) with his novel *De belofte van Pisa* (2013) appears in 28<sup>th</sup> position. The only Flemish author on the leading list is Willem, a medieval author whose last name is unknown.

Once more, the table is indicative for the broader quantitative proportions of text selections. Among the 725 authors chosen by the students, 443 are men (61.1%), while 281 are women (38.8%). This makes the male-female ratio slightly more advantageous than the average ratio in Dutch literary production. However, here too there is an imbalance, when we take into account all of the separate selections. Together, the respondents named 15,743 selected titles, of which

11,412 are by male authors (76.1%) and 3579 by female authors (23.8%), indicating a profound shortfall in the representation of female authors in student text selections.

The same mechanism applies to non-western and Flemish authors. Among the 725 authors read by the students 683 are western writers (94.2%) while 42 are non-western (5.8%). Here too, the imbalance increases when all items are taken into consideration. Once this is done, the data reveals that 14,346 titles (95.7%) are by western authors, compared to 623 titles by non-western authors (4.2%). Although the relative percentages are less imbalanced when only books published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are considered. In this case, there are 6355 titles by western authors (92.3%) compared to 532 texts written by non-western authors (7.7%).

Out of the 725 authors read by the students, 652 originally wrote in Dutch. Of those authors, 65 originated from Flanders (10.0%), versus 587 Dutch authors (90.0%). When the total number of student selections is taken into account, the percentage of Flemish authors is smaller: Of the 14,600 items for which it could be determined whether an author originated in the Netherlands or Flanders, 1059 texts were Flemish (7.3%).

While the text selections of students also demonstrate an underrepresentation of female, non-western, and Flemish authors, students value the texts written by female authors significantly higher, and also finish reading the texts more often than those by male writers. On average, male writers scored a 6.8 ( $SD=1.47$ ), versus a 6.9 ( $SD=1.44$ ) for the female authors. Whereas texts by male authors were read in their entirety for an average of 74.89% ( $SD=38.42$ ), for the female authors, this amounted to 78.19% ( $SD=36.56$ ). In both cases an independent t-test reveals that the differences are significant (for the difference in rating:  $t(5493,701) = -4,011, p < 0.001$ ; for the difference in percentage:  $t(6375,304) = -4,453, p < .001$ ). Non-western authors too received higher ratings than western authors. Whereas western authors on average scored 6.8 ( $SD=1.46$ ) among the students, the non-western authors were rated 7.0 ( $SD=1.46$ ). An independent t-test reveals that the difference is significant: ( $t(577,359) = -4,011, p = .016$ ).

## Comparing the Three Perspectives

From the perspectives of the teachers, the teaching packs, and the students, we can conclude that cultural diversity in Dutch literary education is in need of improvement, and this on all three researched aspects. The results confirm once again the dominance of male, western authors from the Netherlands when tables 1, 2, and 4 are compared to one another. Five of the titles most frequently recommended by the teachers (table 1) also resurface in the top 15 of most frequently read books among students (table 4): *De aanslag* by Harry Mulisch; *Het diner* by Herman Koch; *Hersenschimmen* by J. Bernlef; *Het gouden ei* by Tim Krabbé; and *De donkere kamer van Damokles* by W.F. Hermans. Without exception, these are all books written by men from a western background and with a Dutch nationality. For the frequently mentioned authors in the teaching packs that also occur in the reading selections by the students, the same is true. The four authors from table 2 who reappear in table 4 (Harry Mulisch, W.F. Hermans, Multatuli, and P.C. Hooft) are all men from a western background with Dutch nationality.

Notably, the overlap between the teachers' perspective and the perspective of the teaching pack is minimal: Only two authors from table 1 appear in table 2 (Harry Mulisch and W.F. Hermans). As these authors also resurface among those highest on the list of students' selections, we can conclude that Mulisch and Hermans are the most prominent figures within the Dutch school canon.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

The goal of this research was to gain better insights into the diversity of text selections in secondary education, by studying a teaching system in which students have the autonomy to choose texts and by using a methodology that is less focused on self-reporting by teachers. Dutch literary education served as a case study for this research, in which the teachers' perspective was complemented with data from frequently used teaching packs and the perspectives of the students.

The results indicate that the concerns articulated in Dutch media concerning the lack of diversity in literary education are justified. Whether it concerns the reading tips given by teachers to students, the teaching packs used, or the book selections made by the students themselves, female and non-western authors are seriously underrepresented and Flemish authors are considerably less represented than Dutch authors. Furthermore, in an educational system in which students have the autonomy to choose books and in which there is no official reading list, there is little cultural diversity in the text selections being made. The pattern that has been observed time and time again ever since Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) within the English language area can thus also be extended towards the Dutch language area – specifically also in a system of literary education in which the teacher has a less decisive role.

This last conclusion points towards the idea that the cultural hierarchy in which 'literature' is automatically associated with male, western authors is very present in education too, apart from the choices by teachers and other educational professionals (such as the creators of teaching packs). This study shines a light on a mechanism that underwrites the power of that cultural hierarchy. Almost without exception, the imbalance between male and female, as well as between western and non-western authors even increased when the number of unique authors in the text selections was compared with the total number of selections of specific authors. In this case, minority groups become even more marginalized when more selections take place (whether in the form of mentions in teaching packs or in the form of students' book selections). This pattern points towards a strong bias in text selection, in which male and western authors surface before female and non-western authors do – and in the specific case of the Netherlands, Dutch authors also take precedence over Flemish writers.

It is important to note that part of this bias is caused by Dutch curricular requirements, in which it is specified that two-students should read at least three works from before 1880, and that they should also know the most important developments in literary history. This literary history is in itself predominantly male and western. Until well into the twentieth century, female authors were hardly represented in the standard version of literary history. In this respect, the Netherlands is no exception to other western societies (cf. Bel & Vaessens, 2010). Clearly, this is even more true for non-western writers, because authors with a non-western background only became more strongly involved in the literary field during the final decade of the twentieth century (Behschnitt, De Mul & Minnaard, 2013). For Flemish literature, the situation is more complex: While Dutch and Flemish literature have been entangled for centuries, research has repeatedly shown that the two systems do not overlap, and that Flemish writers are not automatically able to make it into the heart of the Dutch literary field (Grüttemeier & Oosterholt, 2008; Van Renssen, 2013). This research underwrites this: While there are indeed Flemish authors who make it into the bastion of Dutch literary education, the focus lies on Dutch writers.

So, rather than along linguistic lines, literary education seems organized along national delineations.

The research clearly shows that students—who in general tend to be initiated into literature and do not know the full background set out above—make choices that show little diversity. Possibly, this is because they encounter teaching packs that present limited diversity and teachers who recommend a disproportionate number of books by male, western authors from the Netherlands. A comparison between the most prominent texts in the three sub-studies already demonstrated that students choose precisely such authors, which are also put forward by both teachers and reading packs.

An important follow-up question is which direction such an interaction takes. To what extent do teachers allow themselves to be guided by what students often (and enjoy to) read (compare Dera & Van Doeselaar 2022)? We can conclude that more diversity would not obstruct such enjoyment. Indeed, quite the contrary is true. Female and non-western authors score significantly higher among students than male and western authors.

The methodology used in this research has the advantage of taking a broader view of the institution of 'literary education' than the singular perspective of only using teachers would allow, as is used in most studies into text selection. Because the data analysis employed a large number of text selections, coded by the researcher, the validity and reliability of the results are high. Nevertheless, three necessary follow-up steps should be taken to gain more insights into the cultural diversity of literary didactic practice.

First, this study does not include an analysis of the processes that lie at the foundation of text selection. It is not clear what considerations play a role in the reading tips that teachers give to their students; which selection criteria the creators of teaching packs adopt (and why); and what makes students choose a certain book for their reading list. Follow-up research should question the parties concerned in more detail regarding these processes, whether that is through a questionnaire, via (focus group) interviews, or think-aloud tasks. It is an interesting question here whether cultural diversity plays any role at all in their considerations.

Second, this research only provides insights into cultural diversity on the surface of literary education. The phenomenon is addressed by analyzing author data or, more specifically, by researching to what extent a certain group (female authors, non-western authors, Flemish authors) is represented within literary education, which is here conceived as a derivative of the literary field. It remains unclear what views on diversity and connected concepts such as misogyny, stereotyping, and cultural appropriation circulate within the literary didactic practice. What kind of ideas about diversity are mediated by the literary texts that are frequently read in high schools, and what type of moderating effect (if any) do teachers have when they discuss such texts? Such questions could be answered using popular texts from each of the researched perspectives. For example, Stefan Brijs's novel *De engelenmaker* (table 1) is not only about the boundaries of science, but also about life in the Flemish countryside. How do teachers and students deal with such a regional representation? Conversely, *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli (table 2) calls forth questions concerning the history of Dutch colonialism, specifically in relation to Indonesia, and could be used by teachers to encourage discussion on the Dutch colonial past—raising the research question how such discussions take shape. The most frequently read book among students, *Het gouden ei* by Tim Krabbé (table 4), also provokes interesting questions concerning diversity. The protagonist, for example, has a strongly sexist view on women, while the novel also contains cultural stereotypes of a racist nature (Dera, 2021). Whether teachers and

students actually engage with this, and hence whether a didactic method is applied that challenges sexist or monocultural bias based on the novel discussed, could be explored in further detail.

Finally, it would be a missed opportunity not to replicate a study of this sort in other countries, both within and outside of Europe, in order to gain a comparative perspective on text selections in literary education at high schools. In the long term, hopefully, this will not only benefit the diversity of literary education, but also the research practice of this topic.

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## Tables

Most frequently mentioned authors in three common Dutch teaching packs

Position	Author (gender, ethnicity, nationality)	Title	Number of times recommended
1	Hanna Bervoets (F, W, NL)	<i>Alles wat er was</i> (2013)	31
2	Stefan Brijs (M, W, FL)	<i>De engelenmaker</i> (2005)	28
3	Harry Mulisch (M, W, NL)	<i>De aanslag</i> (1981)	21
4	Thomas Olde Heuvelt (M, W, NL)	<i>Hex</i> (2013)	20
5	Lize Spit (F, W, FL)	<i>Het smelt</i> (2015)	20
6	Mano Bouzamour (M, NW, NL)	<i>De belofte van Pisa</i> (2013)	19
7	Herman Koch (M, W, NL)	<i>Het diner</i> (2009)	19
8	Kim van Kooten (F, W, NL)	<i>Lieveling</i> (2015)	18
9	Tommy Wieringa (M, W, NL)	<i>Joe Speedboot</i> (2006)	18
10	J. Bernlef (M, W, NL)	<i>Hersenschimmen</i> (1984)	16
11	Tim Krabbé (M, W, NL)	<i>Het gouden ei</i> (1984)	15
12	Philip Huff (M, W, NL)	<i>Dagen van gras</i> (2009)	14
13	Willem Frederik Hermans (M, W, NL)	<i>De donkere kamer van Damokles</i> (1958)	11
14	Jaap Robben (M, W, NL)	<i>Birk</i> (2014)	11
15	Özcan Akyol (M, NW, NL)	<i>Eus</i> (2012)	10
16	Alex Boogers (M, W, NL)	<i>Alleen met de goden</i> (2015)	10
17	Bert Wagendorp (M, W, NL)	<i>Ventoux</i> (2013)	10

**Table 1:** Books most frequently recommended to students in the fourth year of havo/vwo. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders.

## Most frequently mentioned authors in three common Dutch teaching packs

Position	Name author	Number of mentions
1	Harry Mulisch (M, W, NL)	81
2	Willem Frederik Hermans (M, W, NL)	50
3	Ferdinand Bordewijk (M, W, NL)	42
4	P.C. Hooft (M, W, NL)	42
5	Gerard Reve (M, W, NL)	37
6	Louis Couperus (M, W, NL)	35
7	Hendrik Marsman (M, W, NL)	35
8	G.A. Bredero (M, W, NL)	33
9	Arnon Grunberg (M, W, NL)	33
10	Multatuli (M, W, NL)	33

**Table 2:** The most frequently mentioned authors in the three teaching packs for teaching Dutch literature. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders.

## Balance related to gender, ethnicity, and nationality per teaching pack (vwo)

Teaching pack	Aspects of diversity		
	Gender	Ethnicity	Nationality
<i>Laagland, literatuur &amp; lezer</i> (n=183)	91.3% male	97.8% western	67.8% Dutch
	8.7% female	2.2% non-western	5.5% Flemish
<i>Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie</i> (n=405)	88.2% male	98.8% western	45.9% Dutch
	11.8% female	1.2% non-western	2.7% Flemish
<i>Nieuw Nederlands literatuur</i> (n=284)	73.6% male	94.0% western	66.9% Dutch
	26.4% female	6.0% non-western	8.5% Flemish

**Table 3:** Balance between male and female authors, western and non-western authors, and Dutch and Flemish authors in the three analyzed teaching packs, based on the number of unique authors.

## Most frequently read literary texts among exam candidates havo/vwo

Position	Author	Title	Number of selections	Average rating	Average percentage read
1	T. Krabbé (M, W, NL)	<i>Het gouden ei</i> (1984)	558	6.8	80.8
2	H. Mulisch (M, W, NL)	<i>De aanslag</i> (1982)	441	7.1	72.1
3	Unknown	<i>Karel ende Elegast</i> (ca. 1270)	403	5.9	89.1
4	H. Koch (M, W, NL)	<i>Het diner</i> (2009)	38	6.7	71.8
5	J. Bernlef (M, W, NL)	<i>Hersenschimmen</i> (1984)	271	7.2	81.7
6	W.F. Hermans (M, W, NL)	<i>De donkere kamer van Damokles</i> (1958)	267	6.6	74.6
7	Willem (M, W, FL)	<i>Van den vos Reynaerde</i> (ca. 1271)	252	6.2	85.1
8	Multatuli (M, W, NL)	<i>Max Havelaar</i> (1860)	245	6.2	85.1
9	J. Wolkers (M, W, NL)	<i>Turks fruit</i> (1969)	240	6.6	60.7
10	A. van der Zijl (F, W, NL)	<i>Sonny boy</i> (2004)	222	7.2	63.5
11	W.F. Hermans (M, W, NL)	<i>Het behouden huis</i> (1952)	220	6.7	81.4
12	P.C. Hooft (M, W, NL)	<i>Warenar</i> (1617)	204	5.7	81.6
13	T. Wieringa (M, W, NL)	<i>Joe Speedboot</i> (2006)	184	6.9	68.4
14	H. Haasse (V, W, NL)	<i>Oeroeg</i> (1949)	177	6.6	75.6
15	R. Vuijsje (M, W, NL)	<i>Alleen maar nette mensen</i> (2006)	146	6.8	73.9

Table 4: Most frequently cited titles by exam candidates havo/vwo. Legend: M = male, F = female, W = western, NW = non-western, NL = from the Netherlands, FL = from Flanders