

BOOK REVIEWS

Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, General Editor; Karel Porteman, Piet Couttenier, Lia van Gemert, Editors; Hans Luijten, Irene Haan, Katlijne van der Stighelen, Illustrations Editors, *Met en zonder lauwerkrans. Schrijvende vrouwen uit de vroegmoderne tijd 1550-1850: van Anna Bijns tot Elise van Calcar*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997. Pp. xxi + 970; 170 figures. Hfl. 99,50.

Met en zonder lauwerkrans is quite simply a wonderful book, and no one with an interest in the culture and literature of the Low Countries will want to be without it. "De Lauwerkrans," as it has come to be called, is at one and the same time three things: a solidly scholarly book, a collection of entertaining and enlightening glimpses into the lives and writings of fascinating women, and a coffee-table showpiece. For all of these reasons it is easily worth its solid, though relatively speaking not hefty, price, and I recommend it most highly to a variety of audiences.

For the scholarly field of writing and literature in the Netherlandic language, "De Lauwerkrans" constitutes a foundational study. In their 103-page introduction, editors Schenkeveld, Porteman, and Couttenier justly characterize the period from 1550 to 1850 as *terra incognita* as far as our knowledge of women's writing is concerned, for both the Netherlands and Flanders; their extensive discussion, together with the 157 author profiles written by twenty-three further colleagues in both countries, make an excellent start in surveying the territory and providing a basic map.

The introduction surveys the Netherlandic version of a number of issues familiar to those working in the area of women's literature: the dis/advantages of considering women's writing separately from men's, the question of aesthetic merit, the issue of a "woman's voice" in the texts, the special

(ideological as well as logistical) challenges facing female writers, the social position of women (including possibilities for their participation in literary institutions), the opportunities for publication open to them, the function and readership of women's publications, the relatively greater numbers of religious writings, matters of genre, and a concluding short section on the treatment of women's writing in literary histories. There is some repetition in parts of the introduction (religious literature in "het Zuiden" has headings in three different sections, for example), but the net result is a compelling composite picture in which to situate the 157 writers whose profiles follow.

It is these profiles which will appeal to the broadest audience. Under a focussed theme articulated in a title — examples: "Een kuise neolatiniste" (Johanna Othonia), "Een moederdochter probleem" (Anna Berchmans), "Avonturen op zee" (Elizabeth van der Woude) — each writer is introduced by a short biographical sketch. Some of her texts, or excerpts of longer texts, follow; almost each profile has an illustration (see discussion below); a short bibliography of primary as well as secondary sources completes the entry. Some of the profiles (Anna Bijns, Anna and Tesselschade Roemer Visscher, Betje Wolff and Agatha Deken, Virginie and Rosalie Loveling) are based on significant information and prior scholarship, but in the majority of cases, facts and scholarship are sparse.

With or without this help, however, the net result is a series of highly readable, lively presentations that will enrich, entertain, and astonish. Only a few of the authors will be known to readers, while most are not: Maria Margareta van Akerlaaken (1605 - c. 1670) tartly heading off criticism with an appeal to common sense ("Mans met kloek verstand geladen / Zullen niet mijn schrift

versmaden / En die geen verstand en heeft / Daar mijn pen niet om en geeft"); Maria Petyt (1623 - 1677) reflecting on the relationship between writing and memory; Katharina Lescailje (1649-1711) running a publishing business and writing petrarchistic love poems to female friends; Adriana van Overstraten (1756-1828) roundly condemning slavery and castigating her society for its part in the slave trade. The texts themselves have been slightly modified in the direction of modern Dutch for greater ease of reading, and some explanatory notes are provided; the modicum of effort still required to read this older literature will be well rewarded.

The 170 illustrations are simply magnificent. The three editors responsible for them (Luijten and Haan from the Netherlands, van der Stighelen from Flanders) expended tremendous effort to find appropriate visual material: the list of sources (pp. 955-958) demonstrates their success in combing a host of archives and libraries in both countries, and a gratifying number of the illustrations come from private collections. Certainly it is as difficult to find visual traces of women as it is to recover their texts, and the variety of subjects portrayed in the illustrations, as well as of the media in which they were portrayed, demonstrates that difficulty. Still, precisely the variety of subject matter and of media will delight the reader. For example, there are a number of portraits: a Wedgwood relief from 1786 of Anna Cornelia Mollerus (#22), the well-known etched self-portrait of 1633 by Anna Maria van Schurman (#39), an oil painting dated 1677 depicting the nun Catharina Peremans kneeling before Mary and Christ (#59), oil or pastel portraits of a number of writers (#86: Anna Rethan, c. 1700; #90: Agatha Maria Sena, c. 1745; #116: Belle van Zuylen, c. 1770), an ivory miniature from the later eighteenth-century of Aagje Deken (#117), a lithograph dating from 1815 of the maid Francijntje de Boer (#144), sculptures (#151: an undated bust of Johanna Desideria Berchmans, who lived from 1811 to 1890; #156: a bust made in 1912 of Anna Louisa Geertruide Toussaint), and photos of a number of nineteenth-century writers.

For many of the women no portraits were ever made, and the editors chose instead to include examples of their writing; there are quite a few title pages of published books, but also texts in the women's own handwriting. Some wonderful curiosities are included; my favourite is a photo (#131) of the sleeping cap knit by the blind Petronella Moens (1762-1843). Others include some delicate cutwork by the artist Joanna Koerten (1763) accompanying Geertruide van Halmale's poem praising her skill (#81), a caricature of 1802 depicting the disastrous results for a household in which a woman pays attention to learning (#11), and the ledger entry that Anna Puttemans was buried simply, "with a single mass," on November 29, 1673 (#47). Each of the illustrations has the effect of bringing more of the writer to life for the modern reader, and they are an intrinsic part of the presentation.

The book was the focal point of an international conference on "Met of zonder lauwerkrans? Writing the history of women's writing," held in Amsterdam in September 1998, under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Sciences. At this conference, Netherlandic women's writing, and the scholarly discussion of that writing, was placed in a larger context of similar discussions in other national traditions (German, Scottish, French, Hungarian, Scandinavian). This conference confirmed that "De Lauwerkrans" enables the writing of the history of Netherlandic women's literature to "catch up" (if indeed there is a race) with the rest of European scholarship on women's writing in the respective national traditions. Similar collections and anthologies of women's writing have appeared for other national literatures; their effect has been to stimulate further research on women's literature, on individual authors, and on genres, themes, and theoretical questions. The publication of "De Lauwerkrans" is a timely one, for the Netherlands and Flanders have just launched an ambitious project, amply supported by funding from both governments through the Nederlandse Taalunie, to write a new multi-volume, multi-authored history of Netherlandic literature, with publication to start in 2003. The results of the research presented in "De Lauwerkrans" will be informing

that discussion, and indeed one of the two general editors of that ambitious project, Arie-Jan Gelderblom, was both a contributor to the book and a participant in the conference.

Met en zonder lauwerkrans was highly praised in the public fora in the Netherlands and Flanders, both in scholarly reviews and in that larger public audience there is for literature in those countries. If there was any criticism, and if there is one to be made here, it is the sheer size of the book, meant quite literally for its physical nature: the book is in large format, it is just under 1000 pages, and is printed on heavy paper. This was briefly discussed at the international conference in September: the book is long because so many women were "found" who merited inclusion, and the paper is so heavy because the publishers considered this the quality needed for optimum reproduction of the many wonderful illustrations. While I, too, was slightly taken aback by its size when I went to purchase it, I have come to appreciate its length, its format, and the beauty of the illustrations; it is, indeed, a spectacular publication for a subject which merits it.

During the conference devoted to women's writing, the discussion of the word "monumentaal" in relation to this publication set a few teeth on edge, as apparently the word did when it was tossed about in the public reception of this book. While part of the unease may reflect a current Netherlandic aversion to monuments generally, the editors also protested; they point out that they have uncovered hundreds of previously neglected or hidden gems which would now change our understanding of Netherlandic literary history forever. Without a doubt this is true. The lives of women writers in the Netherlands and Flanders were circumscribed by their particular social and political circumstances, their writing accords with whatever literary aesthetic and its genres prevailed during their time - sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. One should not expect the women writers to be more brilliant than the men who were their contemporaries. Katharina Wilhelmina Bilderdijk-Schweikhard (to take just one example), known more commonly as Vrouw Bilderdijk, is not more

readable than her husband. But the knowledge of the writing of women completes the incomplete picture we have of Netherlandic literature, it is the other half of the coin. And so, I consider the book to be "monumentaal," a word which I use as an term of highest praise. "De Lauwerkrans" is indeed a monument to three centuries of women writing in Dutch who persevered against many odds, a monument to their lives, their possibilities, their creativity, their imaginations.

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Frans J. Schryer: *The Netherlandic presence in Ontario: pillars, class and Dutch ethnicity*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1998. xiv + 458 pp. (maps, figures, tables). Cloth ed. \$64.95.

In the Foreword to this unusual book, a combination of history, political science and sociology, Frans Schryer writes:

My portrayal of Dutch immigrants can be compared to creating a painting or producing a film: however, it is impossible to keep the brush-strokes within a single frame, or to create a single plot... What I will present, though constantly rearranging the basic patterns, more closely resembles a revolving kaleidoscope... No doubt rough brush-strokes will miss finer details, and the picture may occasionally become blurred.

In spite of his modesty, what in fact emerges is a remarkably vivid and masterful portrait of the Dutch-Canadians as an ethnic group of great complexity. With many examples, the majority of them gleaned from hundreds of interviews, Schryer illustrates the multiple tensions among competing religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional, national and class identities. As a sociologist he has performed this extraordinarily difficult and laborious task with objectivity, yet with the insight and understanding of one who has himself emerged from the group under study. As "both insider and outsider," born and raised in the