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The Theme of Loneliness in the Novels of Anna Blaman

In the last few years it has become rather quiet around the name and reputation of Anna Blaman (1906-1960). While in the early 1960s it could still be maintained that she was "onbetwistbaar een van onze belangrijkste en meest bekende schrijfsters" (according to the dust jackets of several of her novels in Meulenhoff editions), few scholarly works have been published on her since then, and while her name is inevitably mentioned when postwar literature is discussed, little influence on later writers can be attributed to her. In fact, the particular line of writing with which she is associated, the "gloomy" style we can also find in W. F. Hermans and Gerard van het Reve, in itself now seems slightly old-fashioned. Yet her novels – *Vrouw en Vriend* (1941), *Eenzaam avontuur* (1948), *Op leven en dood* (1954) and *De verliezers* (published posthumously in 1960), as well as her short stories *Ram Horna* (1951) and *Overdag* (1957), and her novella *De kruisvaarder* (1950) – remain of significance, not only because of their intrinsic value as works of art, which they undoubtedly are, but also because of their documentary value as an example of the culture of the immediate postwar period and the central problems with which that era was concerned.

In a conversation with Ellen Warmond,

reported in his doctoral dissertation, Henk Struyker Boudier claims that loneliness is the most important theme in Blaman's work. Warmond disagrees: "Eenzaamheid lijkt mij helemaal niet de belangrijkste thematiek ... het gaat er eerder om te laten zien hoe kontaktarm de mensen zijn, of zij nu hetero- of homofiel zijn." To which Pierre H. Dubois, who quotes this exchange in a 1989 review of Blaman's correspondence, adds his comment: "Afgezien van het feit dat kontakt-armoede, die zó fundamenteel is als hier bedoeld en door Anna Blaman verbeeld wordt, enerzijds oorzaak, anderzijds gevolg van eenzaamheid is, is deze opmerking wel juist. Maar het resultaat komt op hetzelfde neer: de mens zoals Blaman die ziet, is tot onherroepelijke en onverlosbare eenzaamheid veroordeeld" (Dubois, 263).

In the case of at least one of her novels, *Eenzaam avontuur* (1948), Blaman herself has stated unequivocally: "Mijn grondthema is dat der menselijke eenzaamheid" (*Over zichzelf en anderen*, 43).¹ Indeed, a simple word-count in the three novels that I would like to discuss would indicate clearly the pervasive and insistent use of the words "eenzaam," "eenzaamheid" and "alleen."

One reason for the preponderance of the theme of loneliness in Blaman's work is

hinted at in the conversation reported above: Blaman's own problematic sexuality, her "difference," and the frank depiction of homosexuality in her work, especially in *Eenzaam avontuur*. As was the case with homosexuals in general, this led in her own day to Blaman's novels being attacked for immorality and caused her partial exclusion, even her being ostracized from a Dutch society still overwhelmingly religious, conservative and, despite its self-proclaimed reputation, rather intolerant in sexual matters. W. L. M. E. van Leeuwen, in a short characterization of Blaman's reputation around 1950, remarks on this subject: "In Nederland blijft men ... gaarne preuts en blind en dus verwekte Anna Blaman's oeuvre een klein stormpje ...² Puinhopen zien en zingen van mooi weer blijft ... nog steeds het thema van het misplaatst, goedbedoeld moderne cultuur-optimisme der moralisten van domineesland, die, naar het schijnt ziende blind, de sexualiteit een onvoldoend 'brede grondslag' voor de roman achten en naïvelijk 'het volle leven' vragen van de literatuur" (van Leeuwen, 331-2).

Van Leeuwen's comments are helpful in locating Blaman's writings within the "gevoelscultuur" of the late 1940s and early 1950s – a period which now seems very far removed from us. And yet van Leeuwen also confuses the issue, in placing sexuality at the center of Blaman's work. For if we are to believe Struyker Boudier, Warmond, Dubois, and indeed Blaman herself, loneliness and its attendant problems of communication, rather than problematic sexuality as such, are at the core of Blaman's work. To be sure, the problem of loneliness usually crystallizes in the problems of Eros, and in the novels I propose to examine, their treatment takes up most of the space in the text. Nevertheless, to anchor the problem of loneliness exclusively

in the problem of sex would do a disservice to the "brede grondslag" which does indeed exist in Blaman's work.

In one respect, of course, an emphasis on the autobiographical element in Blaman's work, and specifically on her sexual "difference," would suggest – correctly – a certain type of novel, namely the psychological novel. Van Leeuwen in fact goes even further, in claiming that besides "een ongemeen constructief, suggestief en stilistisch talent," Blaman also possesses a "psychanalytisch talent" (332). Although it is true that neither Freud nor Jung are explicitly mentioned in her work, Blaman's "method" is reminiscent of both: the subconscious, and such phenomena as suppression, sublimation, dreams, day-dreams and the donning of masks, role-playing, even writing as therapy, do play a part in these novels.

An important consequence of such an emphasis on analysis is a basic dualism in Blaman's writing, which is also nicely caught by van Leeuwen. Blaman's novels are composed, he claims, of a "tegelijk vruchtbare en vernietigende stroom van passie ... voortdurend onverbiddelijk gepeild met het dieplood van het borend intellect" (332). This intellectual thrust, and the pervasive theme of loneliness, have in turn suggested to many critics a certain proximity to the most visible of contemporary philosophical currents, namely Existentialism. For many of the earlier reviewers of Blaman's novels the approximation, nay equation, of her problematic situations with those raised in Existentialist works was a popular device – all the more so since there was a tendency to demonize the philosophy itself, at least in the version popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre. Demonizing Blaman and Sartre in one gesture of moral outrage was indeed *de rigueur* for

superficial critics and readers alike. However, the claim that postwar Dutch literature fell under the sway of Existentialism has also been made by more serious critics. Thus Gerard Knuvelde writes in his *Handboek tot de moderne Nederlandse letterkunde*: “de existentiële filosofie ... heeft haar neerslag gevonden in de publicaties van de Nederlandse auteurs die na de bevrijding aan het woord kwamen” (174), and he and others found its nefarious influence particularly in W. F. Hermans, van het Reve, and of course Blaman.

There are serious problems with this suggestion, however. First, as Pierre H. Dubois has pointed out, “Het ongetwijfeld existentiële thema dat het hare was is een van de grondthema's der moderne literatuur. Daartoe heeft niet een filosofie geleid, maar omgekeerd heeft de menselijke ervaring dit inzicht in de menselijke staat waarop de literatuur berust, opgeleverd. Dat is niet met Sartre begonnen en niet met Sartre geëindigd en dat is ook geen mode” (263). Although Blaman had studied French Existentialism and gained an intimate knowledge of it, her work is not a summary or literary equivalent of that philosophy. Blaman's position was gained, Dubois insists, from her own experiences and insights.

There are other problems with this description. Not only, as Anbeek reminds us, did Blaman and the other authors mentioned write their works before Existentialism became popular in Holland, so that chronology speaks against derivative use, but also the characterization of these undoubtedly gloomy novels as “existentialist” is impressionistic and imprecise, since it does not do justice to the range of meaning of Existentialism itself, which has a “decisionist” and optimistic version by Camus and an

absurdist and deterministic variety by Sartre. Moreover, even within the Sartrean system, as van Galen points out, a distinction can be made between the early Sartre of *Huis clos* “waarin de eenzaamheid van de mens centraal staat,” and the later Sartre of *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, generally not well known in Holland, “waar de nadruk ligt op de verbondenheid van mensen onderling” (Anbeek, 98). Anbeek, too, makes the point that the message of *Op leven en dood* (1954), the novel most often referred to in this context, was already present in Blaman's first novel, *Vrouw en vriend* of 1941. At best, therefore, Anbeek concludes, a foreign terminology can be said to have been applied to an independent, already existing vision of reality (104).³

What, then, is the vision Blaman projects, and what role does loneliness play in that vision, regardless of any references to Existentialism, a philosophy in which - at least this much critics agree upon - loneliness is likewise a central theme? To answer this question would take a close examination of all of Blaman's works and an analysis of the range of meaning of the term. Space will not permit me a full analysis of all her novels, of course. I therefore propose to examine *Op leven en dood* as the main source for my purpose, since it is the most “philosophical” of the novels, and also provides, as a later work, a kind of summary of previous arguments. The novel also has the advantage of being much simpler in construction than, say, *Eenzaam avontuur*. I will use briefer references to the other novels to clarify and expand my points.

The plot of *Op leven en dood*, such as it is - Blaman's novels generally have little plot at all - is simple. Stefan, a hero who is, in his own words, “moreel uitgevreten, verarmd en geperverteerd,” a weak character in the Frans

Coenen tradition, examines his life and present situation, and assesses it as one long failure.⁴ Six years earlier he lost his wife Stella to another man, and since then he has lived a rather lonely life. An affair with a certain Francisca, surprisingly old-fashioned and romantic against his better judgment, yet at the same time intensely sexual, has gone awry when, during a moment of intense love-making, Francisca cried out for a child from Stefan. The latter promptly "retreated" into a heart attack.⁵ In the wake of this episode it is suggested by his boss, Paul Stermunt, that he take a vacation, while Stermunt's wife Marian, with whom Stefan has maintained a half-serious flirtatious relationship over the years, suggests that he return to Francisca. In a flashback, Stefan relives his problematic relationship with Stella, whose unfaithfulness involved Stefan in violent scenes of jealousy, spying on her, and an ultimate breakup.

In the second part of the novel the theme of friendship comes sharply into focus. Paul Stermunt's solicitous attitude towards Stefan – who continues to reject help – leads to a quarrel, after which Paul is killed in an automobile accident. Devastated by feelings of guilt, Stefan rushes to Marian's side in an effort both to console her and to exonerate himself. Unexpectedly, Marian now confesses that her relationship with Paul has been most problematic. When later that night she finds among Paul's belongings a notebook with a letter revealing his deepest feelings for Stefan, she commits suicide, in turn pushing Stefan into an emotional and physical crisis.

Stefan regains consciousness after three weeks in a coma. A young nurse, Jane, helps him re-establish contact with the world. Eager to attempt one last reconciliation with Stella, Stefan tries to write her a letter, but can't find the right words. The planned rendez-vous

with her ends with Stella's sister informing Stefan that Stella has found another man, and is pregnant. Now nurse Jane takes matters in hand. She suggests an outing during which a fragile new relationship is established between her and Stefan. Blaman ends her novel on a tentatively positive note; as the book's dust jacket puts it, after the hero's crisis "treedt een herwaardering in, die de gestalte heeft van een eenvoudige milde werkelijkheid en een hem tegemoetredende schenkende liefde."

Several typical Blaman themes and constellations can be distinguished. There is first of all the theme of the "vrouw en vriend" (the title of her first novel). Erotic relationships, one ending and one beginning, frame the central episode concerned with friendship; but that episode contains a crucial sexual relationship of a problematic nature, while at the heart of the novel friendship and eroticism meet in a highly symbolic dream – a favourite device in Blaman's writings to reveal deep structures and often suppressed truths. The themes of Eros and friendship are played out against the background of the process of Stefan's maturation,⁶ which is in the nature of a quest, complete with a "descent into hell" and an ultimate resurrection of sorts. The crisis itself, both intellectual and emotional in nature, is a complex process of loss of faith in all values;⁷ it is a truly "existential" crisis centered around philosophical problems concerning the self, supra-personal values and inter-personal relationships.

Stefan's negative assessment of himself, his extreme loneliness, is clearly the result of a loss of identity. The positive value of freedom, which detachment from life could indicate, is perverted by Stefan's strong sense that his life is fully determined: "De laatste

jaren voelde ik me als een reiziger die een verkeerd pad had ingeslagen, maar dat al zo lang gevolgd had dat terugkeer niet meer mogelijk was," the novel opens. "Daar buiten om gebeurden er dingen die ik onmogelijk kon voorkomen, die een dreiging inhielden en de betekenis kregen van spookachtige richting-aanwijzers naar de afgrond ..." (5). His insecurity in emotional matters, his rejection of friendship, his floundering in his chosen career (he is a journalist), are all indications that self-esteem, determination, authority, and existential and instrumental freedom have been compromised. Being and will fail miserably in their confrontation with reality, yet a core of authenticity remains in the fact that he refuses to accept, as others do, strategies which console and obfuscate, or masks and devices which allow escape from his precarious situation. Unable to find a stable point within himself (he is "een zwakke"), he yet rejects two specific value systems which are proposed to him: religion and socialism. The way of an earlier acquaintance of his, Christina, who in her willingness to embrace faith at the expense of reason had seemed to him to demonstrate the escapist character of religion, is not open to him. Nor can he accept socialism or utopianism, as we see in a longish discussion he has with Paul Stermunt's niece Sally. For Stefan, the human condition must be formulated in anthropological terms, not along social lines. If this attitude leads to his being an "outcast" (the word is used in this context), he accepts this, for loneliness is to be preferred over a submission to illusion. We can only speculate to what extent this mentality is merely an instance of hubris, or to what extent it illustrates two dicta of William James: "if your heart does not *want* a world of moral reality, your head will assuredly never make you believe in one," and "Mephistophelian skepticism ... will satisfy

the head's play instincts much better than any rigorous idealism can."

Similar arguments also make Stefan reject Paul's sollicitous advances and attempts to alleviate his suffering. That Paul's assumption of the role of saviour⁸ may in reality be a form of hubris and hence one further illusion, is suggested in the central episode of the novel. According to Marian, Paul's excessive tolerance, his measureless understanding and forgiveness, his complete lack of vulgarity, but also the absence of passion in him, make him less than human (180), prevent him from committing himself in affairs of the heart in the "fatal" and passionate way in which Marian has committed herself to him.⁹ If Paul seems to compete with Christ himself (180), in the end he cannot deliver. In the highly symbolic dream, reported in the notebook which Marian reads with fatal consequences, his ultimate failure to save Stefan indicates that he too falls victim to illusion.

If religion, utopianism and especially friendship are shown in this and Blaman's other novels as being subject to illusion and failure, sexual relationships, the other major category of interpersonal relationships, are presented as yet another domain of illusion and disenchantment. Blaman's insistence on the erotic as a dominant theme in her writing has on occasion been severely criticized by her contemporaries as an inadequate topic for the art of the novel. It is helpful to recall Blaman's words in her defense: "Ik vraag me af: Wat betekent ooit een onderwerp op zichzelf? Ligt het er niet helemaal aan wat de auteur met zijn levensbeschouwelijke visie, zijn emotionaliteit en zijn indringingsvermogen van een onderwerp maakt, dus door welke intelligentie en welke bewogenheit het wordt gehanteerd? Afgescheiden nog van het feit dat ik de

erotisch georiënteerde menselijke relatie niet anders kan zien dan als een grondslag van leven die maar al te vaak het menselijke bestaan zeer breed en zeer langdurig beïnvloedt" (*Over zichzelf en anderen*, 44).

In Blaman's view, friendship and love are similar in nature and not clearly distinguishable. "Vrouw en vriend" combine, complement and contrast in the novel *Eenzaam avontuur*, while in the case of *Op leven en dood*, Paul's friendship for Stefan has homosexual overtones, so that the borderline is even less clear. Both love and friendship revolve around the question of how these modes of interacting qualify and/or modify the initial situation of loneliness to which they are intended to provide an answer.

As becomes clear very quickly, love and sex are for Blaman a domain *par excellence* for misunderstanding and conflict, a realm in which reason appears to have no part to play. Rather, the claims of the heart and especially of the body are presented in Blaman's oeuvre as a powerful force, an overwhelming urge. Her depiction of the exigencies of love therefore tend to emphasize sensuality and sexual passion rather than romantic idealization or the aestheticizing of the body and its functions. In fact, idealization of Eros is rather seen as a dangerous tendency which hastens disenchantment and pain.

Frequently it is the woman rather than the man who refuses to embellish the erotic. Kosta, the male hero in *Eenzaam avontuur*, idolizes Alide, and takes great pains to avoid any hint of vulgarity.¹⁰ By contrast, Alide is quite resigned to take up with the mediocre Peps, owner of a hairdressing salon. Peps has few intellectual and aesthetic qualities, but his love-making is intense. Alide is in awe of Peps' "zwijmelende, warrige liefhebben"

(147), which, Blaman argues, is more flattering than the loyal, demystified and demystifying admiration Kosta has for her.¹¹ In *Op leven en dood* the love affair between Stefan and Francisca is also more frivolous for Francisca than for Stefan, who has a tendency to romanticize and fantasize. When at one point in their love-making Francisca dons black stockings and high heels, Stefan chides her. Yet the relationship is of an extravagantly ambivalent nature. Francisca holds a fascination and attraction that Stefan is at pains to explain.¹² She is not particularly beautiful, and in this she resembles other women in Blaman's novels.¹³ Francisca has, in fact, plenty of negative qualities freely admitted by Stefan: she is vulgar, "schijnheilig," has no schooling, no taste, and small notions. Yet there is an irrational force at work which causes Stefan to pursue Francisca until he is brought up short against a claim he cannot fulfil.

Irrational, uncontrolled and compulsive behaviour has also destroyed his earlier marriage to Stella. Stefan meets Stella's unfaithfulness with helpless rage; his resorting to spying is the very worst answer to the situation. In an identical situation, Kosta has an identical response to Alide's having an affair in *Eenzaam avontuur*. Not only does he gather information about his rival; he insists on interrogating Alide about the affair, even as to their present ways of love-making. That Alide could and still does love him, he cannot understand. Instead, he escapes into a private fantasy, by writing a novel in which the detective, a certain King, repeats Kosta's precarious situation. In the novel, King, who must prove or disprove the guilt of Juliette, an alleged poisoner, becomes, like Kosta, the victim of a confusion of sentiments. Having fallen hopelessly in love with Juliette, he cannot now accept her guilt, of which he is

more and more convinced. Juliette, on the other hand, having shown every sign of loving King in return, cannot convince him of the authenticity of her feeling. Rather than let love speak, King breaks out of his dilemma by leaving Juliette behind and choosing renewed loneliness. Such complex, contradictory and seemingly incompatible behaviour in the matter of sex is but an indication of a much greater malaise. The impossibility of truly understanding one's partner, the illusions partners maintain about each other which ultimately lead to alienation, breakdown and renewed loneliness, are representative of problems of communication in all interpersonal human relationships.

A breakdown of communications is also indicated in *Vrouw en vriend*, once again a complex story of failed erotic relationships. George Blanka's love for Sara Obreen is doomed because of Sara's problematic past. Victimized by a talented but cold-hearted concert pianist who "experiments" on her before he finds his true nature in a homosexual relationship, Sara has become a mixture of "dorre tante" and "lichtekooi," vulnerable to flattery by men like Basti, a vulgar playboy. By playing the role of a pleading whining victim, Blanka only aggravates the situation. Blaman excels in this novel in depicting the extremely complicated role-playing in which sexual partners may engage. The concluding episodes of the novel, in which Blanka attempts to effect a reconciliation, amply demonstrate Blaman's profound psychological insight and powers of observation. At the same time, these scenes provide, at least for this reader, a source of frustration. Blanka, greatly in love and completely indifferent in manners, is opposed, then accepted by a play-acting hypocritical vulgar Sara who oscillates between desire and repulsion. "Verloochening," "verlangen,"

"zelfkwelling," "wrok" are some of the terms which invade the vocabulary of this – again open-ended – episode.

Blaman complements this doomed relationship with two others. Jonas, a physically weak character, attempts, against his own better judgment and that of his motherly, devoted sister Toos, to respond to the strong, healthy love of the nurse Marie. Mismatched, though deeply in love, Jonas and Marie renounce their love under the impact of Jonas' physical collapse. Toos, meanwhile, is in love with Blanka, who has eyes only for Sara. The novel's theme, Anbeek has suggested, "zou kunnen worden samengevat in de regel uit een bekend cabaretliedje: 'En die ene die wil de andere niet'; alle personages lopen achter iemand aan, die weer op iemand anders verliefd is" (Anbeek, 41). In the end Blanka confesses to Toos that he, like herself, has been terribly lonely, despite the fact that he has spent the whole day with Sara. Toos reaches out to Blanka: "maar was dan toch gekomen," she says - why didn't you come? - and we read: "In haar ogen glansde het hardnekkig en verblind geloof van het verlangen"(191). If this is a suggestion of a "gunstige wending," Anbeek comments, it is "zoals altijd bij Blaman, niet meer dan een suggestie" (41). It is well to remember that Blaman herself denounced in readers and critics alike the tendency to "clothe the emperor" – to attempt, as her characters do, to escape from harsh reality.

Just as in *Op leven en dood* Blaman proves, in the doubling and even tripling of the erotic couples Stefan/Stella, Stefan/Francisca and especially Paul/Marian, that interpersonal relationships are fundamentally impossible and only reinforce the impossibility of communication, with loneliness resulting yet again – so the similar doubling which occurs

in *Vrouw en vriend* in the two couples George/Sara and Jonas/Marie once again prove that, regardless of the particularities of these constellations, the results are always the same. And if George and Sara part only tentatively with the comment "bel maar eens op," whereas Marie renounces categorically when told by Toos that Jonas is incurable and himself wishes to end the relationship, such differences are trivial. Even the vastly more complex construction of *Eenzaam avontuur*,¹⁴ which not only doubles the erotic couple Kosta/Alide with an imaginary couple King/Juliette, but which adds a chorus of other characters to the central couples, only serves to reinforce Blaman's pessimistic message.

Especially each of the four girls who live next door to Kosta and Alide when they are on vacation repeats the familiar cycle of reaching out and drawing back. Yolande, an extraverted flirt and a somewhat calculating realist, attempts to strike up a relationship with Kosta when his marriage breaks down, but fails because Kosta is too fixed on Alide. Hilde, who is "verstandelijk" and a born "vrouw des huizes," maintains a problematic relationship with a sea captain whose lack of passion gradually leads to her own frigidity. Annie, "onbeduidend en mooi," is the victim of her mother's resentment over the death of her brother. Temporarily drawn to Hilde, then disappointed, she longs for the day of her liberation. Berthe, finally, a girl with a "masculine inslag," is attracted to both Annie and Alide. She is, in her "difference," torn between seeing herself as "uitverkoren" and doomed. In this she is very much like Jonas in *Vrouw en vriend*, whose physical vulnerability comes, at least in the eyes of his sister Toos, with a kind of compensation in his wonderful qualities. It is Berthe's specific form of loneliness which enables her to empathize

with Kosta, she explains in a conversation with him.¹⁵ She, too, attempts to break out of her loneliness in later encounters, all of which end in failure.

Significantly, Berthe's wish to be accepted, to have her sexuality understood as "normal" (90), was at the time of publication interpreted by some critics (especially a certain Dr. Domenicus) as a plea by the author for the *superiority* of lesbian over heterosexual love. Blaman rejected this claim in her essay "Het laatste woord over *Eenzaam avontuur*" in an issue of the journal *Maatstaf* of 1954. Berthe's particular type of love is too similar in nature to the love which causes Kosta to suffer, for it to be interpreted as an "answer" to the problems associated with heterosexual love. Rather, Blaman claimed, Berthe's sexuality is but one aspect, albeit an important one and not to be ignored, of the "lonely adventure" which all erotic relationships entail.

The erotic, then, is hardly a domain that allows an escape from what appears to be the essential and existential human condition of loneliness. Love and sex as a realm of freedom – as Marcuse has suggested it to be – is negated not only in the generalities and sweeping statements such as those uttered by Stefan in *Op leven en dood* or by Kosta in *Eenzaam avontuur*, but also in the chain of events and the actions of the characters in these novels. If love is a means of finding one's identity, it is an identity which is flawed, corrupted, vulnerable, subject to illusion and coercion. Sexuality is necessity rather than potentiality¹⁶ or a means of empowerment. Both men and women are subject to it, but whereas men tend to idealize sexual relations, in Blaman's oeuvre the women are untypically hard-nosed about their desires, and demand gratification even if it

entails the loss of a certain *niveau*. Both sexes use love as a weapon like any other in the service of what Sartre has postulated as the *modus operandi* of all human relationships: "Écrase l'autre avant qu'il t'écrase." Sexuality is at best "vermomde eenzaamheid," loneliness *à deux*, as *Vrouw en vriend* suggests at the end.

This brief overview has hopefully demonstrated that the attempts by various characters to anchor meaning and values in the realm beyond the self (in society, religion, others) fails. Similarly, to anchor meaning in the realm of the self, *in* itself and for itself, also fails, despite the many strategies such as game-playing, the donning of masks, even writing. The self, ultimately thrown back upon itself after attempts to reach out, finds no consolation in its loneliness. On the contrary: just as each novel begins with a flashback to a relationship that has ended, so each novel projects – in vain, we realize – a new relationship beyond its tentative closure. In this sense these characters are in a prison house to which Blaman refuses, or is unable, to give a key that would set them free.

NOTES

¹ Adriaan van der Veen gave a similar assessment in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, in an article with the significant heading "Liefde en eenzaamheid" (quoted in Anbeek, 43).

² In *Na de oorlog* Ton Anbeek gives a summary of some of the extremely negative comments which greeted Blaman's novels, especially *Eenzaam avontuur*. He quotes Anton van Duinkerken as claiming, "In dit boek wordt het leven geschonden en diep geschonden. Het gebeurt bewust en het

gebeurt opzettelijk." Gabriël Smit uses the book to demonstrate the damage the war has done to morals in Holland, while a writer in *Vrij Nederland* accuses Blaman of having demolished the concept of love in her presentation of it as "een eeuwige onbevredigd latende alleen maar lichamelijke aangelegenheid." The most devastating criticism of the book is not couched in terms of morals, however, but takes issue with Blaman's style. L. Th. Lehmann writes: "Het boek blijft een platvloers, mislukt-puddingachtig, klonterig, draderig, noedelig, lianerig, broeikasserig, kleverig en klunzig geheel" (Anbeek, 44-45).

³ In this connection, Anbeek also categorically dismisses Struyker-Boudier's contention that Blaman's work is inspired by the "angstpoëzie" of the pre-war journal *Criterium* (99).

⁴ "Het enige wat me schijnt over te blijven is een metafysische redding" (10). Characteristically, he lives in the typical Blaman environment, which tends to consist of rented bare rooms with more or less hostile landladies and a cast of "gescheiterte Existenzen."

⁵ In his own interpretation Stefan suggests that he would sooner die than commit to life and the future.

⁶ "De volwassenheid is in feite niets anders dan de verzoening met de menselijke machteloosheid," says Stefan (84).

⁷ "Het menselijk bestaan is redelijkerwijs niet te aanvaarden. Zolang je leeft zonder besef gaat het nog wel, maar als je dat besef inschakelt is het mis" (117).

⁸ The word "redding" occurs in prominent

places throughout the novel, referring to both the relationship Paul/Stefan and Paul/Marian, and especially in the central dream sequence.

⁹ Interestingly, Kosta in *Eenzaam avontuur* fulfils this requirement: "Hij hield van haar (Alide) op zo'n fatale wijze alsof hij door een liefdedrank betoverd was. Hij kon absoluut niet leven zonder haar" (54). Unfortunately, his absolute love is no guarantee of success: "Ik ken alleen mijn eigen fantasie-fantoom Alide, maar sinds zij zich daarmee niet meer wil vereenzelvigen en zij haar eigen weg met een ander gaat, is ze me vreemder dan een vreemde," he explains to the lesbian girl Berthe (188, see below).

¹⁰ That their relationship is not as simple as Kosta at times makes out, and that a change in their sexual relations is not only the result of his idealization, seems to be suggested in a passage of reminiscence about their earlier married life. One night, in a passionate moment, Alide confesses: "Ik zou me wel te buiten kunnen gaan, m'n liefste, en je kunnen pijn doen, erge pijn." When she follows her words with action – "In het duister wrong ze mijn huid tussen haar sterke vingers en zette ze haar tanden diep in mijn vlees" – Kosta comments: "Een mooi schrikwekkend dier"; but feeling regret the next day, Alide suggests "Dat moet niet tussen ons." The result is, "Geleidelijk verviel ze tegenover mij tot een frigiditeit soms onderbroken door korte perioden van bijna manlijk heftige lust" (63). But it is true that Kosta pronounces himself not too worried about her frigidity, and he is eager to explain it in terms advantageous to himself: "Ik vond zo honderden motieven om haar er des te inniger om lief te hebben toen ze ternauwernood ooit nog tot een zinnenroes te vervoeren viel. Het berustte op een veredeling van haar gevoel voor mij..." (63).

¹¹ Anbeek makes the point that Alide is not completely happy with Kosta, "die haar idealiseert en dus vergeestelijkt; maar ze wordt evenmin volmaakt bevredigd in haar relatie met de laag-bij-de-grondse Peps. In feite zou men uit het boek alleen een pleidooi kunnen afleiden voor een liefde die ziel én zinnen bevredigt" (44). Alide formulates it as "de entente tussen geest en liefde" (156).

¹² "Vanaf dit samentreffen was er geen ontkomen meer aan. Het werd een passie die elke morele weerstand brak" (36).

¹³ Alide, the heroine of *Eenzaam avontuur*, is beautiful, but she has large, grasping hands, whereas Sara Obreen, the heroine of *Vrouw en Vriend*, has a less than perfect way of walking and standing.

¹⁴ C. J. Kelk, in an article entitled "Eros bevrijd," finds the composition "uiterst vernunftig" (quoted in Anbeek, 43), and Anbeek writes, "*Eenzaam avontuur* zit gecompliceerd in elkaar" (41), and speaks of a "caledoscopische opbouw" (42).

¹⁵ Early on in the text she meditates: "ik had altijd kunnen weten, dat ik gedoemd was tot een eenzaamheid die nooit zou ophouden, en steeds maar erger worden zou. Waar moet dat heen? Vaak ben ik bang dat ik dat niet zal willen dragen, een heel leven lang. Soms denk ik ook: Ik heb een uitverkoren lot, ik ben een mensenkind met een bijzonder moeilijk, dus een uitverkoren lot." Note again the ambivalent use of both terms "uitverkoren" and "gedoemd" here.

¹⁶ "De liefde, het geluk, scheen wel een korte incubatietijd van een verschrikkelijke zielsziekte die somber en verbeterd maakte, en vijandig en krankzinnig" (quoted by Anbeek, 41).

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