

Foreword¹

If it were possible for Eve to speak to us again,
Would she not justly chastise this poet.²

writes the Dutch poet Meynarda Verboom in 1664 in her *Pleyt voor onse eerste moeder Eva* (Plea for our ancestral mother Eve).³ In her defence of Eve she takes issue here with the most famous Dutch poet and playwright of her time, Joost van den Vondel himself. In his tragedy *Adam in ballingschap* (Adam in exile), which had been published shortly beforehand, Vondel – according to Verboom – glosses over ‘Adam’s sin’, and ‘shifts the blame altogether on to Eve’. In view of Vondel’s reputation it is not without some hesitation that she calls him to account, but she feels it to be her duty:

I am ashamed I must write back to this poet
Yet ere I grant him the honour of the matter
So contrary to our interests, so shall I by my pen
Demonstrate that I am a woman and daughter of Eve
Who speaks in defence of her grandmother.⁴

The verse essay in which Verboom expresses her point of view in opposition to Vondel’s probably caused some controversy in 1664, although no evidence for this has been found so far. But for us, at present, it comes as a great surprise, for the text itself had been totally forgotten.⁵ Are we not concerned here with someone whom we might, with some justification, call a Dutch Mary Wollstonecraft, expressing her views already in the 17th century? Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen states that there is no-one in the Netherlands who is comparable to her.⁶ Yet there are some

¹ I thank Corry Hogetoorn for comments on an earlier version of this foreword.

² Verboom 1664, quoted in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997 (article by Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen), p.310: ‘Zo’t Eva mogelijk waar’ met mensen weer te spreken,/ Hoe zou zij haar met recht aan dezen dichter wreken’.

³ For the complete text, and a short introduction, see *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.304-312; see also Van Gemert 1996, p.6-11 and Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1997.

⁴ Verboom 1664, quoted in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.311: ‘Ik schaam mij dat ik moet tegen dees dichter schrijven,/ Doch eer ik in dit deel hem aan de eer liet blijven,/ Tot nadeel van ons recht, zo zal ik met mijn pen/ Tonen dat ik een vrouw en Eva’s dochter ben,/ Die voor haar grootmoer pleit’.

⁵ So far nothing is known concerning this author’s dates of birth and death.

⁶ See her contribution to part I of this volume (p.3).

similarities between the writings of Verboom and Wollstonecraft. Thus in *A vindication of the rights of women* (1792), Wollstonecraft also wrote in defence of 'mother Eve', attacking the great Milton for the image that he presented in his *Paradise lost* (1667) of 'our first frail mother', and, at the same time, of all her daughters: 'when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless [...] he meant to deprive us of souls [...]'.⁷

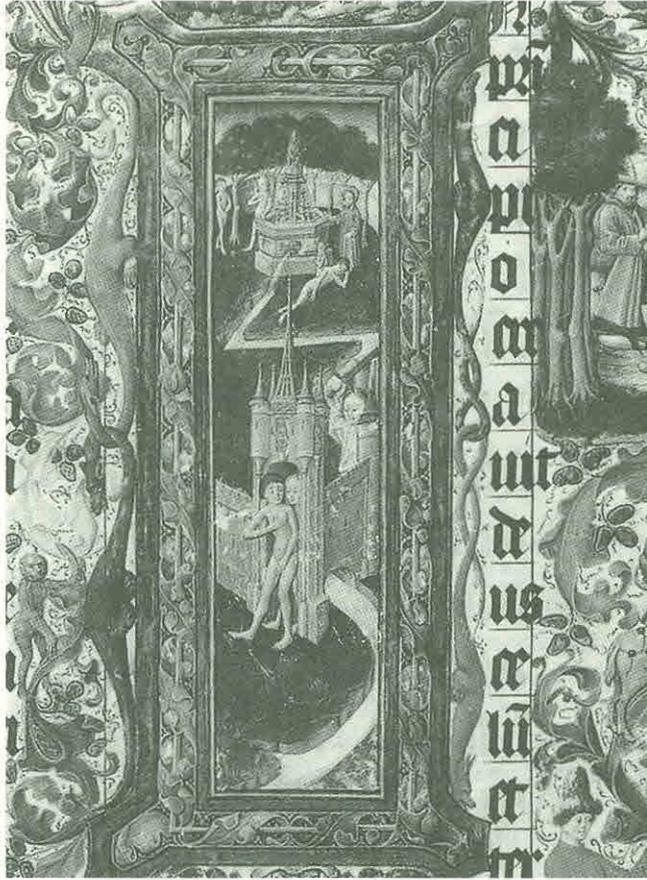
It is due to the recent completion of an extensive research project that we are now aware of the existence of this Dutch defender of Eve. In 1997 the impressive result of this project was presented in an anthology entitled *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*: 'with and without laurels'. Thanks to this book, readers in the Netherlands and Flanders became acquainted with the work of some 160 women authors active during the period 1550-1850. Although some of them were offered a laurel-crown by their contemporaries, the great majority of these writers had remained virtually unknown until 1997. And for most of these hitherto little-known authors, the publication of their writings in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* did not result in canonization. The importance of this anthology is that although it is aimed at a broad readership, it offers an excellent starting point for further research, not only into these authors and their work, but also into the place occupied by Dutch and Flemish women writers in a broader European context.

The publication of this anthology gave rise to a colloquium held in 1998, under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, during which the first steps were taken to assess the place of early modern Dutch and Flemish women writers in this broader geographical context. Among the other issues that were discussed at this colloquium, one of the most important was the general problem of the historiography of women's writing: whether we should be concerned primarily with awarding laurel crowns or with understanding the special position of women writers within the larger literary field. The colloquium was attended by scholars specializing in women's writing in different European countries, including large language regions like England, Germany, and France, as well as smaller ones: the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and Hungary. This book is the result of the colloquium: twenty essays on female authorship from the 16th to the 19th century (from the end of the Middle Ages until approximately the time of the first wave of feminism) in various European countries, and – especially – on the question of how we should write the history of this women's literature.

This volume of essays is thus intended to stimulate discussion on an international level of a number of problems that are by no means specific to Dutch literature alone. This discussion already began during the colloquium, among participants from different research traditions and from countries in which research on this material is at different stages of development. Differences in the level of research sometimes correspond to differences in women's literary production, either in terms of the number of women writers or of their preference for certain genres. In spite of these differences, it is apparent that research into issues concerning female authorship can benefit from comparative studies: there are similarities between women's writings from

⁷ Wollstonecraft 1975, p.100.

different countries, and, moreover, the authors of these writings were in contact with one another. To some extent, both correspondences and contacts were based on the fact that these authors all felt themselves to be granddaughters of Eve, and, furthermore, that wherever they lived they were compared to Sappho,⁸ and came up against Pygmalions, from whom they were not always able to escape.⁹



The creation of Eve, the fall and the expulsion from Paradise (fragment).

Met en zonder lauwerkrans continued: one example

Thanks to this new anthology, we know now about Meynarda Verboom, the above-mentioned defender of Eve. In *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, she is presented as an almost isolated case: 'Suddenly, as if from nowhere, Meynarda Verboom appears on

⁸ For comparisons between Sappho and other female authors, see DeJean 1989; for Sappho and Dutch women, see the contribution of Marianne Peereboom to the forthcoming volume mentioned in note 28.

⁹ See, for example, the contributions of Anna Fábri and Maria-Theresia Leuker to this volume.

the scene'.¹⁰ Yet she might have been compared, in her way of reacting to a celebrated male contemporary, to one of her countrywomen. Charlotte de Huybert (?1622/3–?1646/55), who, before the publication of Verboom's essay in verse in 1646, had reacted cynically to the praise given by Johan van Beverwyck to women.¹¹ In her own *Lofdicht* (praise poem), addressed to him, she wonders

[...]

What can praise given to a woman bring her,
Except the beauty of wilted flowers?
We remain what we are: our virtues are ours alone
And do not anyhow benefit society.¹²

This woman, too, who points here to a need shared by all women – to play a role outside their own family¹³ – is isolated from the rest of women's literary production in the presentation of *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*: 'suddenly she makes her presence known'; 'and then, once again, there is silence'.¹⁴ How should we evaluate such statements? Was my comparison between Verboom and Wollstonecraft in any way useful? Granted, the English author goes further in her conclusions; her remarks appear, after all, in a text which, in view of its title, has polemical pretensions extending much further than an attack on one established author. But Wollstonecraft had the advantage of living at the end of the 18th century, for by that time some development had already taken place in women's criticism of the representation of women: in reaction to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), Eliza Haywood had written her own *Anti-Pamela* (1741). In France the female novelists Jeanne Leprince de Beaumont (1748)¹⁵ and Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni (1782) had reprimanded, respectively, the Abbé Coyer and Laclos, the author of *Les liaisons dangereuses*, by refusing to accept their vision of women and the female characters they created. The work of Meynarda Verboom and Charlotte de Huybert appears to fit into this tradition of women's criticism.

There is no point in wondering whether the work of these two Dutch women writers had any influence outside the Netherlands. But they were contemporaries of Anna Maria van Schurman, who wrote in several languages including Latin and French, and whose fame spread far beyond the borders of the Netherlands. In 1636 she had complained about the exclusion of women from the newly established university of Utrecht.¹⁶ Thus the writings of Van Schurman, De Huybert and Verboom, which can

¹⁰ *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.304.

¹¹ In the introduction to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* they are actually mentioned together in one paragraph, but without reference to any connection between their points of view (p.72).

¹² *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997 (contribution Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen), p.267: '[...] Wat heeft een vrouw van 't lof, waarmee zij haar hoort roemen,/ Dan hoogverheven roem van neergebleven bloemen?/ Wij blijven die we zijn: ons deugd is d'ons alleen:/ En daarvan komt toch niets ten dienste van 't gemeen'.

¹³ Van Beverwyck received her praise poem and reacted to it in the second edition of his *Van de wtne-mentheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts* by saying about her: '[she] is very good-natured in her poetry, as is evident from that which she has sent me in praise of this work'. He reproduces her text without commenting on its content (*Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.265).

¹⁴ *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.265.

¹⁵ Cf. Stewart 1993, p.28-35.

¹⁶ *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997 (contribution Pieta van Beek), p.208.

all be classified as belonging to the genre of occasional poetry, spontaneous *ad hoc* reactions to recent texts and events, can also be read as representing a critical tradition that was already present in the Netherlands.

A leading figure at the beginning of this critical tradition is Christine de Pizan, who is duly named in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*,¹⁷ but without further mention of any influence she may have exerted in the Netherlands. In her *Livre de la cité des dames* (1404) she, too, criticizes firmly established representations of women, such as those given by Ovid, and adds her own – female – commentary. Her work was indeed known in the Netherlands: in 1475 a translation of it was especially commissioned.¹⁸ But it was above all in England that her work was well received. According to the *Norton anthology of literature by women*, although it was out of print from the 16th century on, ‘*The city of ladies* summarized a vision of female power that would also be recorded in various ways by [...among others...] Aemilia Lanyer’.¹⁹ Lanyer (1569-1645) was the author of a poem entitled *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. This poem includes a part called ‘Eve’s apology’, in which, as in Verboom’s text, Adam himself is held responsible, if not for the Fall of mankind, then at least for taking the bite from the apple:

But surely Adam cannot be excused;
Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame.
What weakness offered, strength might have refused;
Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame;²⁰

Shortly afterwards Verboom penned the following lines, in the first part of her ‘Plea’, that may have been written before she had read Vondel’s tragedy:²¹

He who received the law, sinned against God
Of his own free will and fell from grace
Before the omniscient eye which, through the fig leaves,
Saw where the crime lay hidden.²²

Both Lanyer and Verboom find mitigating circumstances for Eve:

No subtle serpent’s falsehood did betray him;
If he would eat it, who had power to stay him?
Not Eve, whose fault was only too much love,
Which made her give this present to her dear,
That what he tasted he likewise might prove,
Whereby his knowledge might become more clear.²³

¹⁷ Id. (contribution Els Stronks about Johanna Hoobius), p.227.

¹⁸ An article concerning this translation, by Corry Hogetoorn and Orlanda Lie, will be published in the collection of essays announced in note 28.

¹⁹ Gilbert/Gubar 1996, p.13.

²⁰ Id., p.43.

²¹ *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.305.

²² Id., p.308: ‘Hij die de wet ontving, zondigde tegen God/ Uit eigen vrije voorkeur en viel in ongenaden/ Van ’t albeschouwend oog dat door de vijgebladen/ Zag waar de misdaad school’.

²³ Gilbert/Gubar 1996, p.43.

It is not surprising that Eve could not resist
The temptation of the devilish serpent
With the delicious fruit; nor is it surprising
That she eventually gave in,
Being unaware of any deceit.
Perhaps she had the craving of pregnancy.²⁴

We are not concerned here with ascertaining whether or not Verboom was indeed influenced by Lanyer's work, or whether Christine de Pizan played any significant role in this connection.²⁵ But by placing these texts alongside each other, it becomes possible to envision an international 'movement' of 'proto-feminist' writings taking root in the Netherlands as well as elsewhere.²⁶ A limited literary corpus such as that produced by women writing in Dutch can therefore gain in significance by being placed in an international perspective. The importance of this is also emphasized in *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*.²⁷

It is obvious that following the publication of the Dutch-language anthology, our next step is to place Dutch and Flemish women's literary history in its international context. Meynarda Verboom will not only appear then as someone who opposed her male contemporary Vondel 'using his own weapon', but may be studied as a representative of the critical tradition extending from Christine de Pizan via Lanyer to Mary Wollstonecraft. Were the arguments she used inspired by a fellow woman writer in another country? Or were they of her own making: a more or less natural feature of a woman setting out to have her voice heard?

In this volume we take the first steps towards placing Dutch and Flemish women writers in their larger European context, and we discuss, on the basis of some specific examples, a number of the problems that arise for all historiographers of women's writing.²⁸ This collection of essays takes *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* as its point of departure. Accordingly, we have taken over its layered structure: thus, we present (fragments of) primary texts as well as historical studies of (other) primary texts, and lead up to a broader reflection on the aims and starting-points of historical research into women's literature. These three layers can also be found in the bibliography following each essay.

²⁴ *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, p.307: 'Wat wonder is het dan dat Eva wierd verleid/ Door 't duivelse serpent dat haar zo vaak bekoorde/ Met dat uitmuntend ooft; dat zij ten laatsten hoorde/ Naar dat bedrog; hoewel van geen bedrog bewust./ Och! Of zij ook misschien bezwangerd en belust/ Haar heeft vergaapt [...]'.
²⁵ In the *Livre de la cité des dames*, Christine still spoke of Eve's 'misdeed', her point was a different one: 'if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve' (Christine 1983, p.24). For a detailed overview of visions on Eve, see Norris 1998.

²⁶ In *De Jeu* 2000 some attention is devoted to other writers who are representative of this 'movement'.
²⁷ See also the contribution by Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen to part III of this volume.

²⁸ The sequel to this will be a collection of articles to be published under the (provisional) title '*I have heard about you*'. *Female writing crossing borders*, edited by Petra Broomans, Suzan van Dijk, Janet van der Meulen and Pim van Oostrum.

Women's writing

The first layer is that of 'Women's writing' itself: the object of our research. We have provided several examples of this writing, scattered throughout the book, mainly in order to introduce the work of Dutch and Flemish women writers to a non-Dutch readership and to those unfamiliar with Dutch literature; for this purpose, we have selected six authors whose work has long been known, recognized and even canonized in the Dutch-speaking world. In the reproductions of these women's portraits the bonnets they wear sometimes look suspiciously like laurel wreaths. These short texts and fragments provide a good example of the influence of religion and neo-classicism on the work of several eminent women writers (Anna Bijns and Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken), and of the importance of the novel for female authorship (Margareta Geertruid van der Werken, Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken, Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint); Flemish lyric, too, is represented (Johanna Desideria Berchmans).²⁹

The texts are accompanied by a translation (in English, French or German) for the most part contemporary to the text. Contemporaries of these Dutch and Flemish authors were of the opinion that their writings deserved recognition beyond the borders of the Dutch language region. The 16th-century writer **Anna Bijns** was indeed included in an inventory (made in 1804) of famous French women³⁰; her international fame is mainly due to translations into Latin. Thanks to its French translation, the novel *De kleine Grandisson* (1782), by **Margareta Geertruid van der Werken**, acquired great international fame, the French version being reprinted well into the second half of the 19th century; even if Arnaud Berquin, who translated and modified the text in 1787, is often regarded as its author. Translations were not however always made abroad. The anonymous French version of the epic *Germanicus* (1779), by **Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken**, was published in the Netherlands, probably by a Dutchman; it appears to be the only one of her works that was translated. The works of **Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken** made more headway in other countries: their *Historie van mejuffrouw Sara Burgerhart* (1782), which emphatically placed itself in an international discussion of the novel genre, was translated into French, for example, by Henri Rieu in 1787, and into German by two different translators, in 1789 and 1796.³¹ Especially worthy of note is the translation of **Johanna Desideria Berchmans'** poem by Ida von Düringsfeld, a German poet who in her own poems expressly sought alliances with other women writers, including those in other countries. The work of the great 19th-century Dutch female novelist, **Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint**, was translated by a former Walloon preacher, Albert Réville, who published it in France. His translation, which is a slightly abridged version, served as the basis for versions in English and in Swedish.

²⁹ For more information, see *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* 1997, passim.

³⁰ Briquet 1804; see about this *Dictionnaire* my contribution to part II of this volume.

³¹ See Buijnsters 1979, p.83-85.

The history of women's writing

Subsequently we give some examples of the kind of history that has been written and is still being written of female authors and their works. Part I includes six examples of women's literary history in action, and presents women writers from a number of different periods. Attention is focused on their work, on the context in which they wrote and their relationship with the literary field in the period concerned. The women writers presented here are from the Netherlands, Belgian Flanders, France, England and Hungary.

To begin with, opportunity is provided for further acquaintance with the results of the *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* project. **Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen** starts by giving an overview of the literary production of Dutch and Flemish women writers. In this overview, based on her introduction to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, she focuses on a number of problems that are also raised by other essays in this collection: the influence of prevailing images of womanhood and the upbringing of girls associated with them, the role that men played either in encouraging women to write or in helping them publish their writings, and the question of a specifically female preference for certain genres. **Piet Couttenier** takes a closer look at 19th-century Flanders. He discusses one of the writers unearthed by this large-scale research project: Jeanette Delcroix, an almost unknown prose writer, who on account of a lack of response to her work produced a small oeuvre, but whose text turns out to be of surprising quality and innovative in terms of its content. Discoveries like this necessitate a rethinking of literary history in general.

Four other contributions to the first part also provide a partial historiography of female authorship, with special attention paid to the social position of the women concerned and to the way in which this finds expression in their work. **Marijke Spies** focuses on the 'natural' verse of 17th-century women writers in the Netherlands, verse that was inevitably plain and simple because the authors lacked a formal education. **Anna Fábri** describes developments in Hungary around 1800, with special attention on the relationship between male and female authors. It appears that men set themselves up as veritable Pygmalions, with respect both to female characters in their own novels and to real women who were or wanted to be writers. It is clear that these women writers, who were the first to be active in Hungary, had much to thank these men for. **Nicole Boursier** deals with six French authors whose works were published roughly between 1550 and 1750. She illustrates the development towards a certain independence and towards professionalization of women's authorship – a development that did not automatically imply recognition by the critical establishment and inclusion in the literary canon. **Maira Ferguson** discusses the way in which the political situation is present in the work of several 18th-century British women writers: women writing in English appear to comment extensively on imperial practices, whether they are English or Scottish, colonizers or colonized people. Some of them succeed in expressing their critical views and in making their voices heard.

The various points raised in these essays bear comparison with one another. Such comparison is useful, for it can provide points of departure for new research. One of the questions that immediately arises with regard to the Netherlands, and possibly

also to Hungary, is whether searching specifically for more female authors could eventually provide evidence for an earlier professionalization of female authorship. This seems unlikely, however. What is perhaps more important is to establish a connection, on the basis of such comparisons, between the study of women's literary works and research into nationalism and nation-forming.

Writing women's literary history

Part II focuses on the way in which women authors have been treated in literary history. Attention is paid to the approach followed by the earliest literary historians (18th and 19th century), whereas the impact of more recent, and more 'feminist' undertakings is discussed with regard to the extent to which this pioneering work can serve as an example and as a point of departure for further studies. Here, discussion focuses on the literary history of German, French, Dutch and Scandinavian authors.

The influence of what happened in earliest historiography of women's literature has been considerable, but probably different for each country – at least in the case of France and the Netherlands, as is evident from the contribution by **Suzan van Dijk**. It is important to analyse this influence, so that we may distance ourselves from the fictionalization process that also took place in the 19th century with respect to a number of Dutch women writers. **Maria-Theresia Leuker** shows that it was not only contemporaries but also writers several centuries later who took great liberties with the images of women writers: they interpreted their lives and their motives for writing in different ways, according to whatever it was that they wanted to prove. **Maaïke Meijer** also focuses attention on the motives of male biographers and historiographers of women writers: thus, she argues that the mere act of praising women's writing does not necessarily imply a serious attempt to reassess its literary worth.

Part II also discusses more recent examples of the historiography of women writers. **Cornelia Niekus Moore** gives a summary of what has been achieved in Germany during the past few decades. Much material has been made available, generally without attempting to make value judgements with regard to aesthetic quality – as was the case with *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, too. The prestigious project documenting Scandinavian women's literary history is discussed by **Petra Broomans**, who pays particular attention to the selection criteria of the editors of *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria*. It appears to be difficult, even for progressive historians of women's writing, to break away from previously existing patterns. Speaking with the authority of someone who is involved in a project of her own, **Christine Planté** describes the problems involved in establishing criteria for the compilation of an anthology. In her recent anthology of texts by 19th-century French women poets she goes one step further than the editors of *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*: the poems have been emphatically selected and treated on the basis of their textual qualities. Consequently her anthology constitutes a reaction against existing hierarchies.

The question arises as to what can be learned from all this for the future of research into women's literary history. There appears to have been a move away from male involvement with women's writing to a situation of exclusively female

scholarly activity in this field. This development has occurred in tandem with a growing, serious interest in the texts concerned, but the risk of misinterpretation remains a real problem. While Meynarda Verboom *may* have been inspired by female predecessors such as Christine de Pizan or Aemilia Lanyer, Anna Maria van Schurman or Charlotte de Huybert, it was, in any case, *certainly* a man, Joost van den Vondel, whom she intended, in her poem, 'to greet in turn with this gift'.

Broader approaches in literary historiography

Part III demonstrates, on the basis of examples from the Netherlands, France, England and what is now the Czech Republic, that the writing of women's literary history calls for a broad framework. According to **Louise Schleiner**, this framework can be provided by studying institutional *discourse domains* which underline the interrelation of textual linguistics, feminist and psychoanalytic theory, and the study of ideology, politics, and genres. In this way attention can be given to the functioning of the texts and to their specifically 'female' elements. Furthermore, the concept of gender, used as a starting-point, can enable us to view the corpus of women's writings from a different angle. **Mary Trouille** also discusses the literary scene as an ongoing dialogue, in which the problem of gender plays an important role: thus Louise d'Epinay, in her posthumously published autobiographical novel, offered a response to Rousseau's representation of women;³² the full meaning of the novel is only apparent in the context of this dialogue. **Kate Flint** also links women's writing to women's reading: Mary Russell Mitford transformed the masculinist narrative of the *Mutiny on the Bounty*, and in doing so she not only offered a woman-centred romance, but also found a powerful role for women's violence.

In this part the discussion is about the conditions under which women are able or unable to publish their writings, with special reference to the role of the publisher. The presence of women in the book trade has been closely studied, for France and England, by **Geraldine Sheridan**, and for the Netherlands by **Paul Hoftijzer**. Their inventories of women involved in the publishing business provide useful information, which enables us to ask the question whether the literary production of women may actually have been promoted by female publishers. In France and England women were more involved in book production than had been expected, although women were active mainly in the retail business rather than in the printworks; in the Dutch Republic they probably occupied positions enabling them to have a slightly greater influence on the published works. Further research in this area is desirable.

This applies, moreover, to the entire field of the history of women's activity in literature, that has now been put on the map for the Netherlands and for Flanders by *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*. The question of where to go from here in terms of research is raised and provisionally answered by **Lia van Gemert**. It appears that this first step has been effective in stimulating discussion. Van Gemert enters into this discussion, insisting on the one hand on the need to integrate the results of research

³² To which Mary Wollstonecraft also reacted; see Trouille 1997.

into our existing knowledge of literary activities, and on the other hand on the importance of networks. Such networks are not necessarily restricted to the region where Dutch is spoken. As we have argued above, it is important to consider also the female side of Dutch-language culture in its European context.³³ **Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen** expands on this topic, already touched on in her introduction to *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, and compares the Dutch literary production by women to that in other countries. She discerns similarities in the position and strategies of the authors, but also differences having to do with different political situations, notably the absence of a Dutch-speaking court (one of the discernible 'discourse domains'). Thus in the Netherlands, more than elsewhere, the voice of the middle-class woman is to be heard. The question as to who actually listened to this voice is discussed, finally, by **Joep Leerssen**. He states that literary history is a blend of the history of writing and the history of reading, and suggests that for women's literary history it may be important to give more consideration to the readers of the texts and to the way in which these authors were perceived.

Continuing the story...

It may be possible, eventually, to attain an all-encompassing women's literary history, with more importance being attached to the *reception* of the texts – by female and by male readers – than to their origin. In this connection the discipline of book history could provide a useful framework. In a certain sense the problem of aesthetic quality as a criterion would then be solved, or at least set aside, and replaced by the criterion of the role apparently played by female authors.

The opportunity to apply such an approach systematically will be offered in due course by a database currently in preparation within the NWO (Dutch Organization for Scientific Research) project 'Women writers and their audiences, 1700-1880', that equally furnished the framework for this conference. This database records data concerning the reception of women's writings. Their accumulation enables us to approach women's literature explicitly on the basis of contemporary reactions. Indeed the disappearance of female authors from literary histories often started after a considerable lapse of time, and did not affect only the voices of the 16th and 17th-century women writers who, as pointed out by Margaret Ezell, 'were silenced by later editors and commentators rather than by their contemporaries'.³⁴ In studying the reactions of the immediate audience, at home as well as abroad, it will be possible to gain a better overview of the functioning of the work of women writers – apart from the value that the texts themselves could still have for us now. This last question might be considered at a later stage: it may then still be possible to conclude that a number of these writers deserve crowns of laurel.

³³ It might seem a somewhat neglected area in the important research project 'Dutch culture in European context', funded by NWO.

³⁴ Ezell 1993, p.163.

The colloquium 'Met of zonder lauwerkrans? Writing the history of women's writing' was held in Amsterdam, 9-11 September 1998. Taking place within the above mentioned NWO. project, it was organized and funded by the KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), and prepared by Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, Lia van Gemert and Suzan van Dijk, with the help of Annelies de Jeu, Simone Veld and Lotte Jensen. For the preparation of this volume, the assistance of Alicia Montoya, Corry Hogetoorn, Lotte Jensen and Annelies de Jeu has been much appreciated. Before, during and after the colloquium we also had the invaluable help of Manita Giribaldie of the KNAW, who by the excellent care she took of the administrative side of the colloquium contributed very much to the well-being of the organizers, and to the success of the colloquium.

During the course of putting together this volume, we were shocked to learn of the passing away of one of the conference participants, Louise Schleiner, in February 2000. Throughout the course of the colloquium, she was a remarked and critical presence, stimulating reflexion and discussion, and contributing to the coherence of the meeting.

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Note on the text:

We have decided to leave quotations from French and German works untranslated, as well as titles of primary and secondary sources in these languages. We have translated textual fragments and titles from the Scandinavian languages, from Hungarian and from Dutch; when translating quotations, the original text has sometimes but not always been included in a note, depending on the importance that the author of the essay attached to the original form of the texts.

The names of Dutch authors are mostly given in accordance with *Met en zonder lauwerkranen*, in which women writers' maiden names are used consistently. In a few cases we have chosen the more widely accepted name (Betje Wolff instead of Elisabeth Bekker).