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## RHAPSODIST, DE (1771–83)

*De Rhapsodist*, published by the successful Amsterdam bookseller and printer Pieter Meijer, appeared between 1771 and 1783. The title 'collector of miscellanies' reflects the varied content of the magazine (cf. Immanuel Kant's use of the word 'rhapsodic' as antonym of 'methodical'). Every issue of approximately 180 pages contained a disparate mixture of translated and original essays on social, political, moral, and philosophical subjects, extracts from scientific works and novels, short stories, biographies, poems and correspondence. The editor(s) remained anonymous (and still are unknown today). They presented themselves as two 'friends', who had raised a 'Society of Rhapsodists'. All readers were invited to send in writings for publication, and if these were accepted, they would automatically become members of the Society. In the first three years new issues were published every four months; later it appeared irregularly. The complete periodical consists of six volumes, each of three issues.

*De Rhapsodist* can be characterized as one of the most unorthodox and polemical magazines of the eighteenth century. It distinguished itself from other periodicals by its anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, and uncompromising character. The journal's satirical and free writing style was inspired by the German satirist G.W. Rabener, author of the *Sammlung satyrischer Schriften* (1751–5), a work that had been published in a Dutch translation in 1774–5. The first issue of *De Rhapsodist*, for example, contained an 'Index without a book', modelled after Rabener's 'Proof of a German Dictionary'. Under the entry 'Deistery' one could read that the word functioned as a synonym of 'Socianery' and that it referred to a system of thoughts that could not be refuted by 'the blind orthodoxy of any sect'.

The main targets of *De Rhapsodist* were the *rechtzinnigen*, or orthodox Calvinists. Although

the authors did not mention any names, the readers could easily recognize their two worst enemies: the clergymen Petrus HOFSTEDÉ (1716–1803) and Johannes Barueth (1708–82). The first was repeatedly referred to as 'Hortensius', 'Dr. Schoonpraat' (Nicetalk), 'professor honorarius' and 'non-ens'. Barueth defended his colleague in *De advocaet der vaderlandsche kerk* (1771–2), in which he criticized *De Rhapsodist* for its insulting character and its inclination to deism and atheism. 'The rhapsodists' in their turn considered the orthodox Calvinists a serious threat to the welfare of the nation. They pleaded for an enlightened society, in which religious tolerance, the critical use of reason, and virtue would prevail. England often played a paradigmatic role in these discussions. For instance, the sermons of Paulus Chevallier (1722–95), professor of theology at the University of Groningen, were recommended, because they were influenced by the new and free English style of preaching, which had been introduced into the Republic by the clergyman and theologian Ewald Hollebeek. In addition, *De Rhapsodist* published a piece by Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), who warned against religious conservatism, and argued that dissenters were best capable of changing the intellectual climate, because they were not bound by any article of faith. Other contributions (one of which was taken from *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1772) criticize the 39 articles of the Anglican Church which Dissenters, Presbyterians, and other Nonconformists were forced to subscribe to.

Of philosophical interest are the outspoken enlightened character of *De Rhapsodist* and the attention it gave to the natural sciences. Its plea for religious tolerance and the critical use of reason in the search for truth was more radical than that of any other periodical of the period. The aim of *De Rhapsodist* was not to spread unbelief – on the contrary – but to criticize the narrow-mindedness of the orthodox Calvinists. Whereas these tended to describe God as a severe judge and human

beings as deprived and puny creatures, the 'rhapsodists' emphasized the benevolence of God and the possibility of human beings to improve themselves by leading virtuous lives. Their anthropocentric and optimistic worldview can be found in 'A Philosophical Account of Human Being' (vol. 3, pp. 1-18 and 183-210) and in other articles.

One way of gaining knowledge of God, according to *De Rhapsodist*, was by studying His creation. The study of nature would prove the existence of an intelligent and omniscient Being, who had imparted to the world its systematic order. Much attention in *De Rhapsodist* was therefore given to the natural sciences. Newton, for example, was present in nearly every issue. A series of (translated) extracts from *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries* (1748) was included, written by the Scottish mathematician and friend of Newton, Colin Maclaurin. He gave a summary of Newton's most important physical experiments and compared his worldview with that of other philosophers such as DESCARTES, SPINOZA and Leibniz. For Maclaurin the attractiveness of Newton's thought resided in the fact that he made God's Providence central to any proper understanding of science and nature, since he described God as a completely free agent and the omniscient designer of nature. Extracts were also published from the scientific works of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* (1749-89) and Bazin's *Histoire naturelle des Abeilles* (1744). The physician Petrus CAMPER (1722-89) gave permission to the editors of *De Rhapsodist* to publish his speech on the origin and colour of negroes, held in 1764 in Groningen and based upon anatomical experiments. He argued that the sun was the only cause for the black colour of the skin, and that blacks and whites should both be regarded as descendants of the first human created by God, Adam, and thus as equal. The subordination of negroes and slaves was also disapproved of in other contributions of *De Rhapsodist*.

Besides Newton, two other thinkers received special attention: Rousseau and Voltaire. The first issue contained a fragment of the *Lettres sur le christianisme de Mr. J.J. Rousseau* by the Swiss clergyman J. Vernes. It was published, according to the editors of *De Rhapsodist*, in order to warn young inexperienced people against reading Rousseau's inconsistent and confused works, but as *De advocaet der vaderlandsche kerk* pointed out in its critique of the first issue, the editors actually tried to stimulate interest in them by quoting extensively from Rousseau's work. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that the last volume of *De Rhapsodist* contained a very positive biography of Rousseau, in which he was praised as one of the few people elected by heaven to spread his word around different nations. The same ambiguity can be discerned in the contributions on Voltaire. Warnings against his godlessness went hand in hand with recommendations to read his works. However, in general the *Rhapsodist* is more critical of Voltaire than of Rousseau. The first volume of *De Rhapsodist* contained a translated biography of Voltaire, written by an unknown rabbi. Voltaire was praised as a great poet, but at the same time his attacks on Christian religion were condemned. For instance, the journal points out that his *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) could have been an excellent work had it not ridiculed religion. On the occasion of Voltaire's death in 1778 a sketch of his character was published, which again contains both praise and condemnation.

The question still remains unanswered of who were the driving forces behind the *De Rhapsodist*. Only some contributors are known, such as Camper (who also contributed to *DE DENKER* and Van Engelen's *De Filosooph*), the merchant S. de Vries, the poet and publisher P.J. Uyenbroek, the German immigrant O.C.F. Hoffham (also a contributor of *De Denker*), and the Amsterdam merchant I. de PINTO. As for the editors, they must have belonged to dissident and liberal circles and it seems plausible to seek them amongst the

literary friends of Meijer. Several names have been suggested, such as Cornelis van Engelen (1722-93), a Mennonite clergyman, who contributed much to *De Rhapsodist* under his initials (C.V.E., V.E., C., E., or V.). He had gained editorial experience with the moral weeklies *De Denker* and *De Filosooph* (1766-9), of which the latter was also published by Meijer. The lawyer Frederik Willem Broers (1743-1815) has been mentioned as a possible co-editor. He might have been responsible for the many contributions signed with 'B'. That initial, however, could also have referred to the well-known novelist Betje WOLFF, whose defence of religious tolerance in *De veel veranderde Santhorstsche geloofsbelydenis* (1772) brought her into conflict with the orthodox views of Barueth and others. She might have co-operated with the Mennonite clergyman Cornelis Loosjes, but any clear evidence for this is absent. A third candidate for the initial 'B' is the writer Joannes Lublink de Jonge (1736-1816), who sometimes published under the pseudonym Batavus and who closely co-operated with Meijer in producing one of Meijer's other popular magazines, *De algemeene oefenschoole van konsten en wetenschappen* (1763-82), a Dutch version of Benjamin Martin's *The General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (1755-65). Perhaps Lublink de Jonge and Meijer himself were the driving forces behind *De Rhapsodist*.

That Meijer - whether he was one of the editors or not - must have been a central figure is suggested by the fact that after his death in 1781 only three more issues were published which, moreover, lack the sparkling and polemical tone of the earlier issues.

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#### RHOER, Jacobus de (1722-1813)

A Reformed minister's son, Jacobus de Rhoer was born in the village of Angeren. He was educated at home, at Nijmegen's Latin School, and at UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, where he studied philosophy, languages and theology. In 1745 he was called to the ministry at Delden, but only a few months later he was appointed professor of history and eloquence at the ILLUSTRIOUS SCHOOL of DEVENTER. In Deventer, in 1749, he married Maria Hildegonda Slocker. He was rector of the Deventer school in 1749 and 1758. In 1767 he accepted an appointment as Professor of Classical Languages (later also History and Statistics) at GRONINGEN, where he taught until 1804. He died on 12 December 1813.

De Rhoer was primarily a historian, with a special interest for topics in Dutch national and general religious history. In his inaugural address at Deventer (1745) he discussed the dogmatic belief that pagan (Egyptian, Greek, etc.) knowledge of God and religion was ultimately derived from God's revelation to the Hebrews. Though not denying this, De Rhoer stressed that pagan philosophers have also discovered many good ideas by themselves. His *Otium Daventriense* contains an erudite survey of Roman religion and also, among other things, treats the relationship of St Paul to Stoicism. In Deventer De Rhoer also prepared an extensively annotated edition of a work by Porphyry (1767).

In his Groningen period De Rhoer moved away from a traditional framework of sacred history towards a conception of history focusing on the progress of morality and enlightenment. He came to conceive of knowledge and religion in more sceptical and utilitarian terms. In his inaugural oration on the uncertainty of human knowledge (1768), for example, he stated that theological disputes about unresolvable questions should not be allowed to disrupt the welfare of society. In 1768 De Rhoer became a member of the local society *Pro excolendo jure patrio*, dedicated to the study of Dutch law and legal history, and two years later he started lecturing on Dutch history. In his opening lecture (1770) he spoke of the many advantages of the study of national history for other disciplines. For *Pro excolendo* De Rhoer produced a great number of speeches and dissertations on Dutch (legal) history, including source publications, written from an enlightened perspective. One of his more conspicuous pieces was on the question of 'capital punishment and human sacrifice among the ancient Germanic peoples' (1796). In Rousseau-like fashion, De Rhoer conceived of Germanic society as a state of nature and natural equality. Yet he refused to idealize it, and in general he viewed pagan societies as more savage and less enlightened than Christian ones, supporting this with historical evidence. As his biographer Van Deursen has remarked, De Rhoer's work shows a combination of rationalistic and purely historical approaches to the past.

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#### RIEUWERTSZ, Jan [Sr] (c. 1617-87)

Jan Rieuwerts, a son of Rieuwert Jansz and Hilleetie Pieters, and married twice – to Trijn Jans van Calker (1649) and then Grietie Schut (1653) – was one of Amsterdam's most notorious publishers of the time. He was most likely a member of the Flemish Mennonite Church, the so-called congregation 'by 't Lam' ('near the Lamb') on the Singel canal, although his (adult) baptismal entry cannot be found in the church records. However, his first marriage is registered there, while his presence in Mennonite church services is recorded on several occasions. Both spiritually and commercially he was involved with the Collegiant movement, of which one of the main promoters was Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, minister of the Lamist congregation. Nothing is known of Rieuwerts's education. He started his career as a bookbinder in 1640, according to his membership entry of the local book-

sellers' guild. From 1644 to 1685 he was active as both bookseller and publisher (this combination was a common feature of the early modern booktrade) under the sign of 'In 't Martelaersboek' ('In the Book of Martyrs') in at least two different locations, Dirk van Assensteeg (1649-78) and Beursstraat (1678-85). From 1669 on he published a great number of books in co-operation with his colleague Pieter Arentsz, a Mennonite bookseller in the Beursstraat. Although most of his publications were printed on commission (by Tymon Houthaack, Thomas Fonteyn and Kornelis de Bruin amongst others), he must have had a small printshop himself, since in 1675 he was appointed by the city government as municipal printer, producing small-size official decrees and announcements. In 1685 his son Jan, who had entered the business in 1682, took it over, including the municipal printing office. Father and son bore the same name, but their imprints can be distinguished in most cases by the addition of 'de Jonge' ('Junior') to the son's name until 1687, when Jan Rieuwerts Sr died.

Rieuwerts's relevance as a bookseller and publisher is manifold. His business attracted the continuous suspicion of the Amsterdam orthodoxy. The vast majority of his publications (with the exception of steady best-sellers, mainly in the popular genre of travel books) can be labelled as 'unconventional'. Even his publications in the field of rhetoric and literature, including his first title, the *Redenkavelingskonst* (1644) by Petrus Ramus, or the anthology of religious and political poems, *Verscheyde Nederduytsche Gedichten* (1658), smack of controversy. No doubt, Rieuwerts's bookseller's policy was marked by his commercially and ideologically sharp eye for nonconformist, heterodox and radical writings, mainly in the field of religion and philosophy. His bookshop, both selling point and meeting place for all kinds of dissidents who crowded the streets of Amsterdam, was regarded by the Calvinist clergy as an asylum for radicals. Rieuwerts was not merely a calculating bookseller and