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## Between Text and Context

### An Interpretation of Three Patriotic Plays

by Anna P. Muller-Westerman

#### 1. The Future of Dutch Literary Studies

Does the study of Dutch literature still have any future as an independent academic discipline? This question was recently debated in an issue of *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* (2004). It might be a relief to think that this question pops up in nearly every academic discipline with a certain regularity of approximately every twenty five years.<sup>1</sup> However, the possible decline and disappearance of Dutch literary studies seems an impending threat more than ever before: the implementation of the bachelor-master system and the emergence of more general, interdisciplinary studies such as Liberal Arts & Sciences and *Taal- en cultuurstudies* has led to a serious decrease of students, cutbacks which have limited the number of teachers and professors drastically, and, most importantly, there seems to be a lack of innovative, inspiring research methods. The guest editors of that issue, Ernst van Alphen and Frans-Willem Korsten therefore felt the need to shake up their colleagues and open up the debate whether we should start organizing a stately funeral for the discipline or whether we should we strive for a rebirth of Dutch literary studies (cf. Van Alphen & Korsten 2004).

The opinions of the contributors to the issue differ widely. Some argue that we should develop a new, covering approach, while others feel that we should indeed discontinue Dutch studies in its current form and combine its constituent parts with other academic disciplines. Unfortunately, in the examination of this question, the nineteenth century was left out of consideration. Elsewhere (Jensen 2005) I have argued, against the background of two major works of

<sup>1</sup>) See, for example, Spies (1973) or the recent debates in the field of women's studies, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a number of special issues, among which *Spiegelbeeld: Reflecties bij 25 jaar vrouwengeschiedenis. Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 25 (2005).

Willem van den Berg and Marita Mathijssen, that, in order to maintain the study of Dutch literature as an independent academic discipline, future research should focus more on the content of literary texts in combination with a more thorough role for methodological and theoretical assumptions.

From several sides (cf. Van Alphen & Korsten 2004: 290; Pieters & Vandevoorde 2003) it has been suggested that New Historicism, intellectually founded by former Berkeley professors such as Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault, might offer new methodological impulses to Dutch literary studies. In this paper I will consider this suggestion by discussing a recent article by Jürgen Pieters and Hans Vandevoorde, who propose a new research method inspired by New Historicist theories. I will argue that, within certain limits, elements derived from New Historicist critical practices can indeed be inspiring for future research. In the second part of this paper I will try to bridge the gap between theory and practice and take the work of the nineteenth-century actress and woman writer Anna P. Muller-Westerman as a case study. Between 1831 and 1834 she published three plays with themes from the national past: *Haasje Klaasdochter* (1831), *De admiraal Piet Hein* (1832) and *Lambert Melisz* (1834). These texts can only be understood if one looks at the circular relationship between the literary text and the variety of social-historical texts which surround it.

## 2. New Historicism: The Solution?

New Historicism is an approach in literary criticism and theory that arose at the beginning of the 1980s. It is particularly associated with the work of the American Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt, who consequently connects the texts he studies to the institutions, practices, and beliefs that constitute Renaissance culture in its entirety. Since the 1990s New Historicism has grown immensely popular. An increasing number of introductory surveys and collections of essays have appeared since then.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the underlying assumptions of New Historicism have also evoked serious criticism, for instance from the side of Feminist Criticism.<sup>3</sup> Although it is impossible to summarize here the distinguishing characteristics of a widely diverse and complex set of practices, a few preliminary remarks about New Historicism might be useful.

In short, New Historicism can be seen as a critique of literary formalism (or "The New Criticism") that treated literary objects as ahistorical icons. The New Historicists think of "culture as a semiotic system" or "a network of signs"

<sup>2</sup>) To mention only two which I found very useful: Brannigan (1998) and Greenblatt (2005).

<sup>3</sup>) A number of "extraordinary problems and perplexing questions" are listed by Gallagher & Greenblatt (2000: 14–16). The rather tense relationship between New Historicism and Feminist Criticism is discussed by Corporaal (2003: 1–7).

(Greenblatt 2005: 3). They emphasize the textuality of this culture: it is only through texts that a culture becomes present to us. Literary texts are therefore used alongside other texts from many different genres and discourses. The borders of the literary text are opened wide and put in an "unprivileged exchange with the historical forces in the time of their production." In the end, the intentions of the new historicist method, which by definition is highly interdisciplinary, is not to clarify the meanings of a literary text, but to use it as a tool that gives us access to the culture of the past. Thus, the New Historicist project is aimed at describing and examining "the linguistic, cultural, social, and political fabric of the past in greater detail" (Brannigan 1998: 11–12).

New Historicism has had a large impact on literary criticism in the Anglo-American countries, but it has, remarkably enough, until so far received little attention in the Netherlands. This might perhaps be explained by a certain scepticism with regard to the poststructuralist foundations of the movement and by the lack of integration of literary theory in most work of Dutch literary scholars. According to Joosten and Vaessens (2004: 351), it is one of the most persistent misunderstandings amongst scholars of Dutch literature that literary criticism can be practiced without any theoretical framework or assumptions. In this respect, there seems to be little interaction between with the departments of Dutch Studies and Comparative Literary Studies. Within the field of Literary Studies several scholars have responded to the theoretical challenge to unravel the complex relationship between postmodern thinking, literature and historical writings. Ann Rigney (2001), for example, has combined the analysis of fictional and historical writings of, amongst others, Sir Walter Scott, against the background of (postmodern) theory of history. The literary theorist Jürgen Pieters (1996, 2001) has, from 1996 onwards, drawn attention to the methodological assumptions of New Historicism. Whereas his earlier publications focus exclusively on the theoretical background of Greenblatt's work, he recently shifted his attention to the practical implications of Greenblatt's work for Dutch scholars.

Together with Hans Vandevoorde, Pieters recently published an article (Pieters & Vandevoorde 2003) in which they strongly criticize the traditional approaches of Dutch literary historians. In their view these historians either reduce the literary text to a mere illustration of its cultural context or they use the cultural context to gain more understanding of the literary text, which then surpasses its context. Inspired by New Historicism, Pieters and Vandevoorde question the traditional distinction that in both cases is being made between the text and its *Umwelt*. Instead they prefer a "dialogical" rather than a "monological" approach between the text and its "context." This can be achieved by considering the texts as "representations." Representations should be seen as the results of an activity: they are at the same time a product of their culture and media that produce new meanings themselves. Therefore the representa-

tion functions as the place where the two worlds (traditionally called "text" and "context") meet: the world created in the representation itself and the world in which the representation came into being. These assumptions are illustrated by analyses of Vondel's *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* (1637) and a novel by Maurice Gilliams, *Elias of het gevecht van de nachtegale* (1936). In both cases Pieters and Vandevoorde confront historical references in these works with contemporary connotations. In Vondel's play, for example, the famous scene of the murdering of the Clarissen is situated in a medieval nunnery, but in Vondel's time this building was used as a house of correction, a symbol of a protestant civilization which reeducated criminals. When analyzing the play, one should have an open eye for such conflicting fields of association, without having to decide which one dominates.

To be honest, I still prefer to read Mieke Smits-Veldt's (1994) analysis of the *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* instead of the more "dialogical" approach (i.e. confronting different fields of association) of Pieters and Vandevoorde, who, interestingly enough, only pick out the scene of the Clarissen nunnery, to illustrate their point. Their analysis of this single scene indeed adds a new perspective to the already existing knowledge of this singular scene, but I seriously doubt if they would also be able to maintain this "unpredictable" dialogue between the text and context with regard to the whole play. Their approach might lead to the neglect of the unity of the literary text, and the dissolution of the literary text in an endless realm of contexts. Furthermore, their approach might also lead to a neglect of more "formal" characteristics of the text, such as its embeddedness in literary traditions, narrative structures, and generic conventions.

Moreover, Pieters and Vandevoorde are not the first to use the concept of representation within the field of literary studies (cf., for example, Meijer 1996, Rigney 2001), and their pretensions to have finally bridged the gap between the literary text and context seem somewhat exaggerated. It was at least Pieters himself who in an earlier article pointed out that, paradoxically, practitioners of New Historicism somehow need to maintain the distinction between the literary text and its context in order to make their preliminary statements. The central question about the exact relationship between the text and its context necessarily remains a rhetorical one: any categorical answer denies the effort of the New Historicists to let the two notions blend together in a fruitful dialogue (Pieters 1996: 286-288).

Nevertheless, taking the current discussion about the future of Dutch literary studies into account, including the complaint that there is a lack of refreshing and provocative studies, the efforts of Pieters and Vandevoorde to break a lance for New Historicism among Dutch scholars should be welcomed. The work of Stephen Greenblatt, who makes a strong connection between literary text and historical context, can indeed be used as a source of inspiration. In his

famous essay, "Culture," for example, Greenblatt (2005b) raises a set of cultural questions, which nurture the critical exchange between text and context, such as "why might readers at a particular time find this work compelling" and "upon what social understandings does the work depend?" (12). These, and other questions, constantly remind scholars of the links between the writing and social surroundings, in which texts are produced, read, and valued (cf. Rigney 2004: 104).

This does not, however, necessarily imply that the literary text has to dissolve in an endless realm of other texts, which are more or less considered on an equal level. In my opinion, there are indeed boundaries to be drawn between those texts that, in the eyes of the nineteenth-century reader or spectator, belonged to the field of literary genres and other types of historical documents that functioned alongside the literary text.<sup>4</sup> To illustrate this I will now discuss the work of a nineteenth-century playwright and actress, Anna Petronella Muller-Westerman. I will mainly focus on her first play, *Haasje Klaasdochter, Stichteress van het Burger-Weeshuis* (Haasje Klaasdochter, foundress of the Burger-Weeshuis), which was received with great enthusiasm by the spectators and the critics.

At first glance it seems a mystery to the present-day reader why this short play was met with so much enthusiasm: the plot is extremely simple, it is written in plain prose, and there are no complex characters. Precisely therefore it becomes a challenge for the literary historian to answer the question why the audience found this work so compelling. The answers, I believe, refer to three different kinds of 'contexts' that are connected to the text: the background of the author, the social-political circumstances and, finally, the historical-fictional texts that resonate in the play.

### 3. Representing the Past:

#### Three Plays by Anna Petronella Muller-Westerman

In the summer of 1831 Voltaire's *Merope*, originally published in 1743, was performed at the Stadsschouwburg of Amsterdam. There was nothing unusual about that, because the successful play had been staged regularly during the last decades (cf. Ruitenbeek 2002: 410-411). It was, however, unusual that it was followed by an original Dutch historical play of the leading actress of *Merope*, Anna Petronella Muller-Westerman (1802-1893). The audience reacted enthusiastically to *Haasje Klaasdochter*, which also got very positive reviews in the local press. Muller-Westerman was especially praised for the fact

<sup>4</sup> These boundaries might be different with respect to different genres. In the case of the historical novel, critics were seriously concerned with the blending of facts (historiography) and fiction, while other genres, which made use of historical matter, for example poetry or drama, were mainly judged on the basis of other criteria. These genres might have presupposed a different, more "literary" reading attitude; cf. van der Wiel (1988: 115).

that the benefits went to the poor families of members of the civic guard. And although the plot seemed a bit simple in the eyes of the critic, even the most cold-hearted person would be touched by the "motherly love" and "charitable nature" of the main character, Haasje Klaasdochter (*De Atlas* June 12, 1831; July 17, 1831).

In *Haasje Klaasdochter* the audience was taken back to the early sixteenth century, when a wealthy lady, called Haasje Klaasdochter, founded an orphanage in the center of Amsterdam, the Burgerweeshuis. In the play we see how Haasje Klaasdochter worries about the fate of two orphans who are about to leave the institution. Fortunately their long lost rich uncle suddenly turns up, with whom they are happily reunited. After this reunion, one of the two orphans, Willem, decides to serve the country and enter the navy. His uncle tells him never to forget the charity he enjoyed in de Burgerweeshuis: "Zóó zult gij een paerel aan de stedekroon van Amsterdam zijn, en het dankbaare nageslacht zal zich kunnen beroemen, dat ook het burger-weeshuis helden heeft gekweekt, waarop Europa steeds met verrukking zal staren" (In this way thou shalt be a pearl to the city crown of Amsterdam, and future generations will thankfully take pride in the fact that the Burger-Weeshuis has educated heroes, at which Europe shall stare in delight) (Muller-Westerman 1831: 57). The audience knew that the uncle was referring to one of the most famous former inhabitants of the Burgerweeshuis: Jan van Speyk. He was the man who had blown himself and his boat up only a half year before, in February 1831, instead of letting the Belgians take over. Contrary to history, Willem was depicted as following in the footsteps of Van Speyk.

There is also a love story: Klaas Jacobszoon, governor of the orphanage, tries to win the love of Haasje Klaasdochter, but she is reluctant to divide her attention between the orphans and him. Only when the future of two other orphans has been secured by Klaas Jacobszoon does she agree to marry him. Love, charity, and naval heroism; these were, in short, the ingredients of this successful play.

Part of the succes of the play might be explained by the name that was attached to it: Anna Petronella Muller-Westerman.<sup>5</sup> The curiosity of the audience must have been aroused by the fact that she was one of the most celebrated actresses of her days. She was the daughter of the prominent actor, writer, and publisher Marten Westerman, who stimulated his daughter's career from an early age. Anna Petronella obtained acting lessons from a friend of her father, the well-known actress Johanna Cornelia Ziesenis-Wattier (1767-1827), of whom it has been said that Napoleon called her "the greatest actress in Europe" (Hoff 1996: 1, 39, 93). In 1823 Anna Petronella performed together with her father in *Hamlet*, in which she played the character of Ophelia. In the

<sup>5</sup> For a short biography on Muller-Westerman, see Jensen (2007).

following years she gained a great reputation by playing the main female characters in tragedies such as Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Amstel*, Racine's *Phedra* and Voltaire's *Merope*.<sup>6</sup> Gradually she became one of the leading actresses of the Amsterdam Schouwburg. When she left the Amsterdam Schouwburg in 1832 for a short time because of an internal conflict with the board of directors, critics begged for her return. When she returned, they welcomed back this "very praiseworthy artist" and "great pupil of Melpemone," the muse of tragedy (*De Atlas*, August 9, 1832: 12-13).

Not only her reputation as an actress might have had a positive effect on the reception, but also her exceptional position as a woman playwright. Only a few women writers had preceded her, such as Christina Leonora de Neufville (1714-1781), Juliana Cornelia de Lannoy (1738-1783), and Katherina Wilhelmina Bilderdijk (1776-1830). Dramatic genres were generally considered to be a more public, and hence more masculine genre. The combination of being a woman playwright and an actress at the same time — two roles in the public arena — was rather unique. I only know of one other example from the early eighteenth century, Adriana van Rijndorp (1698-1753), who also was the daughter of an actor, and who wrote one farce, entitled *De driftige minnaars of arglistige juffrouw* (1723); cf. Moser (1997: 536-539).

A second reason for the instant success of the play is that it expressed strong feelings of patriotism, which were favorably received in the context of the Belgian Revolt. Especially the scene in which the orphan Willem decides to serve his country by entering the naval military appealed to the kind of heroism that was needed these days among Dutch citizens. A month after the first performance the so-called Tiendaagse Veldtocht took place. The Dutch Army invaded Belgium and defeated the Belgian forces near Hasselt and Leuven, but was forced to retreat soon after. Muller-Westerman was personally affected by this event, because one of her brothers, Johannes Casper, was killed on the battlefield in Leuven. Research by Hennie Ruitenbeek (1993) has shown that the political turbulence of the Belgian Revolt brought the number of patriotic historical plays to a peak. Playwrights often chose episodes from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch Revolt, such as the relief of Leyden, in order to draw parallels between the most glorious episode from Dutch history and the present situation.

Parallels between the past and the present were also an important ingredient of Muller-Westerman's second play, *De admiraal Piet Hein te Delftshaven* (1832). The scene of action was the harbor of Delftshaven, where Piet Hein, who had just defeated the "Spaanse Zilvervloot," was being warmly welcomed by his family and citizens. Piet Hein then explains the secret of his success to

<sup>6</sup> The archive of the Westerman Family is kept in the Gemeentearchief Amsterdam (inv.nr. 399). It also contains notes, letters, and pictures of Anna Petronella Muller-Westerman (nrs. 69-74).

the crowd: "Onze geheele zeemagt is thans met ééne geest beziel, en waar zulk eene eendragt heerscht, kan een volk zich onoverwinnelijk noemen" (our naval force is impassioned with one spirit, and with such unity a nation may call itself invincible) (Muller-Westerman 1832: 85). United we stand, divided we fall: that, in short, is the message. To intensify this message, the spectators are constantly reminded of the bad character of the Flemings. Maarten Tromp presents Piet Hein with a letter, in which he is asked to return to the battlefield. He is needed because the "Duinkerker kapers," these "unreliable Flemings," are making the coast unsafe by plundering defenseless merchants. The spectators of course knew that Piet Hein would die in his next battle with the "Duinkerker kapers," but in the play they are not confronted with the sad ending of his life. In the end Piet Hein agrees to sail out again and is being cheered off by a choir of sailormen: "Men dwing de roov'ren tot ontzag / Voor Hollands moed, voor Hollands vlag" (We force the robbers to stand in awe of Dutch courage, the Dutch flag) (Muller-Westerman 1832: 88). The actual political circumstances resonated throughout the play, which was also performed regularly in the years after the Belgian Revolt. It was still being performed in the 1840s, on the occasion of the annual celebration of the king.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the Belgian Revolt gave authors an extra impulse to turn to their own past and look for heroic examples. However, the plays of Muller-Westerman can also be seen as part of a much larger trend that had already started earlier. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, one can see a growing number of publications about the Dutch national past. All successful writers, such as Bilderdijk, Helmers, and Tollens, employed historical themes for their literary works, which were used as an instrument in nation building. New historical genres appeared, such as the historical novel, the narrative poem, and the romance. This was all part of a larger international process that has been described by Joep Leerssen (2004) as a period and condition that might be called "literary historicism," which points at "the presence of the literary preoccupation with culture's rootedness of the past" (234). This "pervasive common condition" affected "the field of literature, as well as antiquarian and philological scholarship" (239).

It is precisely this historicizing of literary genres that offers a third explanation for the success of *Haasje Klaasdochter*. Besides the curiosity for the leading actress and the expressed sentiments of patriotism, the mixture of historical elements and contemporary issues within a literary setting must have appealed to the audience. To explain this, let me turn to the concept of "representation." As was said previously, representation can be defined as the product, performance, or image of its culture, but at the same time it is a medium

<sup>7</sup> The performances were announced in *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Aug. 20, 1838), (Apr. 17, 1839), (Dec. 9, 1840), (Oct. 9, 1845), (Oct. 9, 1846). On the success of the play see also the figures in Ruitenbeek (2002: 395–437).

that produces new meanings itself. In the case of theater, the concept of representation is even more significant, because the plays are actually being acted on stage and therefore temporarily visualize another world that interacts with the mental concepts of the people in the audience. The historical past, in other words, is made present in a new context to a present-day audience. To unravel the complex relationship between the text, its audience and the past and present, Pieters and Vandevoorde (2003: 94) make a useful distinction between the REPRESENTED TIME and REPRESENTATIONAL TIME. The REPRESENTED TIME is the time that is being represented in the text, and REPRESENTATIONAL TIME is the time in which the text actually is being produced and perceived for the first time, in this case the summer of 1831. Both moments of time are connected to differentiated fields of associated texts which may have resonated in the text.

If we look at *Haasje Klaasdochter*, the represented time is the early sixteenth century. According to the written tradition, a wealthy Amsterdam lady called Haasje Claes owned some small houses in the Kalverstraat. About 1520 she decided to house seven or eight orphans in these houses. In 1523 the regulations were officially drawn up, and from then on the supervisors were appointed by the mayors of Amsterdam. The first supervisor mentioned in the official documents is the husband of Haasje Claes, Claes Jacobsz. Paradys, who was appointed in 1529 (cf. Wagenaar 1765: 285). In the following decades the number of orphans quickly grew and they were moved to the St. Luciënsklooster in 1579, which later became the housing for girl orphans. Half a century later, the boys were placed in the adjacent building, the former Oude Mannen- en Vrouwengasthuis. The entrance of the boys' house was described and celebrated in verses by Joost van den Vondel, which are extant. During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century the number of orphans fluctuated between 200 and 800 orphans.<sup>8</sup>

How did Muller-Westerman refer to the facts? Did she make use of historical sources? What is most striking is the fact that she incorporated a love story in the play: Klaas Jacobszoon, who in the play is already a governor of the orphanage, manages to win the trust and love of Haasje Klaas. In the historical sources, there is no reference to the year of their marriage, so it remains unclear whether the two already were married when Haasje Klaas founded the orphanage (cf. Kloek 2005). All the other characters seem to be fictitious: there is no reference in historical documents to a brother called Herman, or any orphans named Willem and Anna Hogenberg. It is possible that Muller-Westerman was familiar with Jan Wagenaar's detailed account of the foundation and history of the Burger Weeshuys (Wagenaar 1765: 275–301), which he

<sup>8</sup> The history of the Burger Weeshuys is described in Endlich (2002). In August 1960, 380 years after its foundation, the Burger Weeshuis was closed down, with only one orphan left as an inhabitant.



published in 1765. However, it is much more likely that she was inspired by the 300th anniversary of the Burger Weeshuys, which had been celebrated twelve years earlier, in 1820. King William I and his son Frederik attended the ceremonies, and a number of poets, H. H. Klijn, H. Haakman, and J. de Vries among others, read poems at the banquet. The day closed with the singing of the Dutch patriotic song by Tollens, "Wien Neerlandsch bloed in de aders vloeit." A detailed description of the day was published in *Verslag der feestviering bij het driehonderd jarig bestaan van het burger-weeshuis der stad Amsterdam, op den 6 April 1820* (Amsterdam 1820).

There are two striking similarities between Muller-Westerman's text and the written account of the celebration. First, at the celebration the oldest regent is seated in a decorated armchair, first in the girls' and then in the boys' housing, where one of the orphans recites a poem full of praise for Haasje Klaas. The building is also decorated with a painting of the founder, which is wreathed with roses and other flowers. In the play by Muller-Westerman, the institution is also decorated with flowers and garlands engraved with the initials H.K. On the occasion of Haasje Klaas' birthday one of the orphans, Anna, also recites a poem, in which she expresses her gratitude to the founder. Second, in the *Verslag der feestviering* the city of Amsterdam, its governors, and its inhabitants are constantly praised for their generous support. Muller-Westerman in her play also portrays the orphanage as an example of the successful cooperation between the city government and the Amsterdam citizens (cf. Muller-Westerman 1832: 51–52, 57).

Muller-Westerman does not seem to have been preoccupied with getting the historical facts correct, but she did intend to give the audience a vivid example of successful social commitment by choosing the charitable Haasje Klaas as the main character as well as by pointing out the commonly felt responsibility of the city governors and the inhabitants for the poor people of Amsterdam. These were messages that fit well in the general discourse of the representational time, i.e. the time in which the text actually was being produced and performed. The charitable, pious Haasje Klaas was an example worthy of imitation. Muller-Westerman herself gave the right example as well, by offering the proceeds of the performance to the poor relatives of soldiers. It was quite common to organize benefit performances in theatres: the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the Hague also raised money in this way to support the victims of the Tiendaagse Veldtocht (Van Kalmthout 2004: 71). Muller-Westerman might also have been inspired by another well-known woman writer of these days, Anna Barbara van Meerten-Schilperoort, who was the editor of the women's magazine *Penélope* (1821–1835). In March 1831 she organised a large lottery of fancy work in order to support the treasury, which was on the verge of bankruptcy because of the political crisis. This lottery became a great success: Van Meerten-Schilperoort managed to get her female reading audi-

ence actively involved with the state of the nation in a typically feminine way: together they raised nearly ten thousand guilders (Jensen 2001: 107).

Haasje Klaas was presented as a heroic, charitable female figure full of "motherly love" who dedicated her life to philanthropy. It is tempting to connect this image of womanhood with a historical process that has been labeled by Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan (1999) as "the rise of caring power." In the course of the nineteenth century a growing number of women became involved in activities aimed at the well-being of deprived others, such as the poor and female prisoners. Women like Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler had a considerable impact in Europe in disseminating new ideals of womanhood. Social activism became an important constituting part of the female identity. In the Netherlands, Van Meerten-Schilperoort was one of the women that started propagating social activism by women, by encouraging her female readers to undertake philanthropic activities. The ideals of domesticity and motherhood, which implied caring for the children and husband could, in her perspective, be combined perfectly with the caring of the poor (Jensen 2001: 109–115).

Taking the ideals of motherhood, domesticity, and philanthropy, into consideration, it is significant that Haasje Klaas marries at the end of the play. In this way the dominant ideology of the family as a cornerstone of the nation is represented in the play, with the father at the top of the pyramid (in this case governor Claes Jacobsz., who is supported by his loving wife (Haasje Klaas), who in turn is responsible for raising new virtuous citizens (the orphans).<sup>9</sup>

Not only the parents but also the children could be used as examples worthy of imitation in theatre plays. This becomes evident when we, finally, take a short look at Muller-Westerman's third play, *Lambert Melisz., of de ouderliefende jongeling van Westzanen* (1834). Just as in *Haasje Klaas* she chose a heroic episode of the national past, which expressed her feelings of patriotism and at the same time enabled her to underline the conventional ideology of domesticity.<sup>10</sup> In this play Lambert Meliszoon shows exemplary love for his parents and heroic courage, because he saves his old and sick mother from the hostile Spanish troops. In her introduction Muller-Westerman wrote that the patriotic virtues of the ancestors were again glorified in the present-day time and should be preserved in memory. She acquired permission to devote her play to the princes of Orange, an exceptionally generous gesture on the part of the Ministry of the Interior. The fact that her own brother died in the Belgian Revolt probably played a role in this decision (Mathijssen 2004: 200).

<sup>9</sup> For the way this harmony-model was presented in literary texts, see Mathijssen (2003: 13–15, 201–210).

<sup>10</sup> The episode of Lambert Melisz. is told by Feyko Rijk in his *Chronijk van de vermaarde Zee en Koopstad Hoorn* (1706).

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Whether one endorses the New Historicists' assumptions or not, their statements force us to rethink our working methods and the way we connect literary works to their surroundings. Reading nineteenth-century literary texts in relation to other texts from the same historical context indeed seems to be the proper way to gain a better understanding of the function and place of literature in that society. The case study of Muller-Westerman shows that her plays can only be understood if one looks at the circular relation between the text and the variety of social-historical texts that surround it. Her plays fit well in the dominant political and public discourses, which portrayed the national past and at the same time were relevant to the actual debates of their time. She managed to allude to the serious and threatening political circumstances and to combine these issues with the more everyday family or domestic ideology, such as the motherly love of Haasje Klaas and the parental love of Lambert Melisz. Through the character of Haasje Klaas Muller-Westerman also depicted a typical female way of contributing to the endangered nation. She showed that the prosperity of the country was also dependent on the qualities of women, who undertook charitable and philanthropic activities, in order to support the deprived others. Finally, it should be noted that Muller-Westerman was quite original in her choice of subject: the stories of Haasje Klaas and Lambert Melisz. were, as far as I know, never dramatized by any other dramatist.<sup>11</sup>

Today the stories of Lambert Melisz. and Haasje Klaas seem to have slipped from our collective memory. Present-day historians even seriously doubt whether Haasje Klaas really founded the Burger Weeshuys in Amsterdam. Some argue that her name is absent in the municipal archives, but others did find references in other documents (Kloek 2005). For tourists, however, her reputation lives on: in the center of Amsterdam, close to the place where the orphanage was originally founded, they can enjoy "real Dutch food" in a restaurant called Haesje Claes.

<sup>11</sup> Adriaan Loosjes (1793) published a historical poem about Lambert Melisz. and Hendrik Tolens wrote "De jongeling van Westzanen" (1828, Part 2: 59-64). In 1855 Potgieter criticized the contemporary mentality in "Haesje Claesdochter op 't Prinsenhof" (cf. Potgieter 1917-18, Part IX: 86-88).

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