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Condemnation and Praise

In the eighteenth century, many Dutch cities had anatomy theatres, with collections of misformed babies preserved in alcohol, stuffed animals and human skeletons. The theatre in Rotterdam acquired a rather grotesque attraction around the middle of this century: the prepared and stuffed skin of a woman called Aal the Dragoon. This was placed, sword in hand, upon the carcass of a horse. Aal had served as a dragoon for many years when she was stabbed by a fellow soldier in a fight over a game of cards. The fact that her body was subsequently put at the disposal of medical science and that her remains were thereafter to serve the purposes of instruction must be considered posthumous punishment, because only the most serious cases among criminals were denied burial at the time.

The posthumous treatment given another female soldier about a century earlier whose sex was also discovered only after her death stands in stark contrast to that given Aal. Trijntje Simons, alias 'Simon Poort', was buried in the garrison town Rees with military honours, and military and naval commanders, as well as the local municipal authorities, were present at the ceremony. Her father took it upon himself, moreover, to have a memorial stone placed on her grave, because he felt that 'such brave deeds by a woman should not be forgotten, but are worthy of being lodged in the hearts and minds of the Dutch people'.

In this chapter, we will examine the contemporary reactions to female cross-dressing, of the authorities, of those in the women's environment, and of public opinion in general. The stories above show that the treatment given female cross-dressers could differ greatly, and more such contrasting examples could be given here. To cite but one, several women who were discovered on board VOC ships were condemned as criminals, but Francijntje van Lint was permitted to disembark at the Cape and to seek a husband there, because authorities viewed her case as 'an evident example of God's wonderful direction in all things'.

At first glance this diversity in reactions appears arbitrary, but
closer study shows clear patterns, which, however, do leave some
reactions unexplained. First, the position of those who reacted to
these women made a difference. Judges must adjudicate cases: they
may punish or set free those brought before them, but they can
never reward. At most, they may close their eyes to a phenomenon
such as cross-dressing. Therefore, in our most important sources,
we can hardly expect to find positive reactions. On the other hand,
the officers and captains who were confronted with disguised
women could not ignore cross-dressing, but were instead obliged to
take action in all cases. A female soldier or sailor was a considerable
source of annoyance to them, but she was also a possible means of
propaganda. Officers were free to commend individuals and
reward services rendered, but they had little power to punish the
women themselves beyond the unavoidable dismissal.

A pattern that can be discerned is the difference in reactions
between the common people and the elite. Negative feelings
predominated among the lower classes, whereas the elite showed
more nous, comparing the women to legendary heroines, and
citing other, often literary examples. But this sophistication is seen
most often when stories and second-hand experiences of transvest-
ism were concerned. Those who discovered a case of cross-dressing
in their midst were deceived at that point where one normally
encounters the first and most important criterion in relationships
with others: the knowledge that one is dealing with a man or a
woman. Unexpected direct confrontation with a woman in
disguise very often provoked negative emotions.

But the most important variation in reactions to these women
was dependent upon the nature of the motives and degree of
success of the disguised woman, as well as the degree to which she
was guilty of other offences. It was judged that a woman who
became a man strove to become something better, higher, than she
had been, and that was considered an understandable and
commendable effort in itself. If she was successful, one had to
admire her. Scorn and rejection, however, were her part if she
failed. If the cross-dressing was instigated by patriotism or family
feelings — praiseworthy sentiments in women — then she might be
judged mildly. If, however, the fraud of disguise was used for
further deception and criminal practices, the reaction was
extremely negative. Considered the worst of these practices was the
perversion of a relationship or even marriage with another woman:
not only the natural order of things, but also religious consecration of the divine order was mocked.

Practically all reactions discussed above are male. It is, however, likely that among the hostile by-standers and singers of jeering songs there were also women. Within the women's culture cross-dressing may have been thought of and talked about in a different way, but of that we have no information. We found only one written testimony by a woman, and her reaction is very suggestive. On 11 May 1769 a young girl wrote in her diary: 'Today . . . I had with much emotion ample food for thought. It was about a prisoner I saw being driven along: a woman in men's clothes who was fetched from a barge by the sheriff of Rotterdam; she was deadly pale and the sight disturbed me deeply. I sat brooding on it all evening . . .'.

LEGISLATION AND THE BIBLE

Dutch law drew from many sources: common law, Roman law, Canon law, and, very important in the Calvinist Netherlands, the Bible. The Bible contains a clear prohibition regarding cross-dressing: 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God' (Deut. 22:5). This Biblical text was sufficient to make cross-dressing a criminal offence, even if the act was not included in contemporary compilations of criminal law. It was persecuted and brought before courts, but many of the trials we know of were of women who had also committed another offence. The reason for this could be, of course, that women who were guilty of dressing as a man only were generally left in peace.

Legislation and the administration of justice were extremely decentralised in the Netherlands. Most of our cases were dealt with by municipal courts: a minority came before provincial courts or military courts. Because the bureaucracy was somewhat careless in the period and not all archives have been preserved, it was not always possible to recover information concerning the procedures followed and verdicts reached. Other sources such as newspapers sometimes provided supplementary information.

In a fragmented judicial system such as that of the Dutch Republic, problems of jurisdiction easily arose. Female soldiers
could pose a problem of juridical competence, as is shown in the case of Maria van der Gijse. Maria was a soldier, but she fled from the army when she learned that the woman who had helped her had betrayed her and discovery was imminent. She was arrested in the countryside as a deserter by an ensign. The ensign turned her over to the bailiff of the village of Brummen in Gelderland. But a juridical question arose: did Maria fall under the legal administration of the military as a deserter or the civil administration as a woman? An elaborate correspondence followed, moving upwards in hierarchy till it reached the Provincial Court of Law, which in the end decided to take over the responsibility for the case itself.

JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES

As no punishment for cross-dressing was prescribed in Dutch legal literature, and courts had to deal with the phenomenon infrequently, no consistent procedures were established. It is also difficult to distil the penal practice from the sentences, as we know of few cases of trials for cross-dressing only.

Temporary transvestism during festivities was an old folk custom and was therefore tolerated, unless the festivities got out of hand. The Amsterdam woman who had joined a bridal feast in cross-dressing in 1784 was sentenced to a fine of 100 guilders and six weeks in the workhouse. But this procession had turned into a political demonstration, and this was the true focus of attention during her trial. In the same city, a serving maid came before the court in 1701 for having dressed in men’s clothing, and, together with the son of the house where she was employed, having visited a brothel and participated in other revelry. This of course aggravated the offence, but she was let off with a reprimand nonetheless. A more severe punishment had been prescribed under similar circumstances in 1783. The woman declared before the court that she did not realise that there was any harm in their actions, but she and her friend were each fined 100 guilders. It is likely that their drunkenness and rowdiness on the street were also taken into account.

We already pointed out that women who had crossed the threshold between genders apparently found other forms of deception easier to undertake as well. For a number of women, the offence in question concerned the collection of earnest-money as
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soldiers or sailors and their subsequent failure to turn up for induction or embarkation. This form of fraud was often practised by men, who when caught were punished with the forfeiture of several months pay, and, of course, they had to fulfil their service. For this offence women were punished with a reprimand or exile. The sentence for women who inadvertently betrayed themselves soon after actually entering service varied from some weeks to a year in a workhouse or prison, or they were condemned to exile, the pillory, or whipping. The punishment was also related to attendant circumstances. This may be seen in the case of Maria van Spanjen, who enlisted five times around 1782, four of which were for service with the war fleet. After the first time, when she was able to maintain her disguise for eight months, she was not punished. The second time, when she was quickly discovered, she was shut up for a week and a half in the Rotterdam Admiralty Court: her failure as well as her relapse led to an; albeit light; sentence. No sentence is known for the third and fourth attempts. The fifth time, she also committed a theft and collected earnest-money more than once, so she was sentenced to a year in prison. The crimes against property she had committed, together with her repeated relapses, contributed to the severity of the sentence.

Women who used cross-dressing to embark upon a path of crime received sentences which were in the first instance determined by their crimes, but the judges viewed their masquerade as an indication of the depravity of such women. The aspect of disguise certainly played a role in influencing the court, as is clear from the verdict pronounced over the swindler Trijn Jurriaens. She was exposed on the pillory and had to serve her prison sentence in men’s clothing, making her an object of interest and ridicule in the Amsterdam prison, which was open to the public as a tourist attraction. Lumke Thoole represented a similar case. She was unmasked en route to the Cape, but she was permitted to settle there as a woman. She married, but a few years later she was recognized by her first husband who as a sailor coincidentally landed at the Cape. Lumke Thoole was sentenced to the pillory for bigamy, exiled to Europe, and fined 100 rijksdaalders. It is clearly stated in this sentence that her cross-dressing of two years before was taken into consideration in the punishment prescribed.

Women who had a relationship with or who had even married other women while in men’s clothing comprised a very different group. They were suspected of sodomy or tribady, which was
definitely established as a capital offence. Most legal texts concerned themselves with male homosexuality, but texts also existed which dealt with sexual contact between women, such as Roman law, which prescribed beheading, and the Constitutio Criminalis of Charles V, which prescribed death by fire. These were important legal sources during the Dutch Republic. The judgement of the French jurist, Jean Papon, who recommended the death penalty for lesbian women in the beginning of the seventeenth century, was also cited in the Netherlands. The fear of Maria van Antwerpen, expressed in her autobiography, that she might be put to death, was certainly justified in terms of legislation.

In spite of the prescribed death penalty for tribady, amorous relationships between women, even when these were coupled with physical caresses, were rarely viewed as serious throughout Europe. Notions concerning sexuality were so phallic-genital oriented that two embracing women were viewed as relatively innocent. In sharp contrast to the fate of male homosexuals, only a few trials of a lesbian sexual relationship as a single crime have been found in Europe, and even fewer executions. In the Netherlands, no lesbian relationship as a sole offence has been found to have been tried by a court until the very end of our period. Between 1796 and 1798 several women were sentenced in Amsterdam to a few years in prison, thus receiving very much lighter punishments than male sodomites.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, only in cases in which one of a female couple dressed as a man, and particularly when official marriages were involved, were accusations of sodomy sometimes made. But even in such cases no one knew quite what to do about it. The second trial of Maria van Antwerpen, when she admitted to having 'seduced and debauched' a girl she had been living with, provides a remarkable example of this. The court simply passed over the significance implicit in this statement, and did not ask further questions.

Homosexual relationships between two women living as women were therefore in fact not punished and were even ignored, in glaring contrast to the death penalty which was applied without the possibility of pardon to male homosexuals. When sexual relationships between women were concerned, the courts were very hesitant to draw the conclusion that sodomy was involved and even more reluctant to prescribe its attendant punishment. In some cases we know that the death sentence was debated among
the judges, as in the case of Hendrickje Lamberts van der Schuyr in Amsterdam in 1641. The court considered Hendrikje's offence very serious, as she 'not only dressed in men's clothing despite the fact that she is a female person in all parts, but also - and much worse - she had entered into a relationship with one Trijntje Barents... against all natural order, as if the one had been a man and the other a woman'. The sentence, however, was whipping and twenty-five years exile from the city. Trijntje Barents was also sentenced to be whipped but she was not exiled. She was in fact kept in the city precisely because the intention was to keep the two women apart.

In many of these cases, the women who dressed as men married their betrothed officially. This mockery of the religious ceremony was naturally considered to be a serious offence. The one who took on the man's role was always considered to be the guilty party. In reality this was not always so, but it did frequently happen that the 'woman' did not know that her lover, bridegroom or husband was not a man. This, of course, aggravated the deception. The motivation behind the verdict pronounced by the military court concerning Maria van Antwerpen, who as 'Jan van Ant', had married Johanna Kramers, was expressed as follows: 'because the prisoner has deceived and misled the whole world and especially the previously stated Johanna Kramers in a scandalous and abominable manner by such an extreme and unnatural change and counterfeit of name and quality, and beyond this had defrauded and deluded the institutions and edicts of the land, which in a nation of justice may not be countenanced but must rather be punished so as to make an example of it'.

Her punishment was exile from the districts of Brabant and Limburg, and - possibly to avoid the risk of a relapse - from all garrison cities. Of her second trial we know the sentence demanded for this offence, as well as the verdict reached. The prosecutor called for whipping, branding, twelve years in the house of correction and banishment for life from all of Holland, but the magistrates finally considered life-long banishment from the city of Gouda sufficient. In the final indictment tribady was not mentioned.

Maeyken Joosten, who left her husband and children for a woman, whom she later married, was directly accused of sodomy. The prosecutor stated that her deeds and those of her lover were 'matters of most evil consequence, bringing down the anger of God
upon cities and countries and reeking of the inexcusable sin of sodomy, which according to God's law and all civil edicts, is forbidden upon pain of severe punishment and penal law'. The punishment he called for, therefore, was that the prisoner 'shall be condemned to be bound and put alive into a sack and choked in water, and thereafter, that her dead body be brought to a place of execution and placed on a pole as an example and mirror to others'. The sentence, however, was only whipping and banishment from the city for life. Barbara Adriaens paid for her marriages each time with exile from the city where she was living, and of the first time we know that she owed this light punishment to the intervention of a visiting French duchess, who took interest in her case. In Cornelia Gerrits's case a lesbian relationship was evident, but no mention was made of sodomy in the verdict. Her case was exceptional in that her 'spouse', who was equally guilty but who lived as a woman, was given the same sentence of twelve years exile from Leiden.

It was not so much lesbian relationships or cross-dressing in and of themselves, but their combination, that was considered to be extremely serious. We can also conclude that the one of two female lovers who assumed the role of the man was as a rule more severely punished than her accomplice. The attempted usurpation of the male prerogative was not dismissed lightly. It is also striking that the courts were very hesitant in pressing the charge or even suggesting the existence of sodomy, and that whereas the judges knew and agreed that the death penalty was prescribed for sodomy, the courts were considerably reluctant to put this into practice.

OFFICERS IN THE FLEET AND ARMY

The ship's surgeon De Graaff described how quickly tensions arose after a discovery of a disguised woman among a male community who sometimes saw no women for months on the long trip to the East. Such a discovery caused a considerable amount of trouble to captains and officers, who had no choice but to take immediate action. Despite this, we found no negative evidence concerning the manner in which the unmasked female soldiers or sailors did their work. They generally received the wages they had earned and sometimes more than that. Among the papers of Admiral Tromp,
we found a ‘Document Concerning Seamen Become Female Persons’. This concerned Jannetje Pieters and Aeltje Jans who had entered the service of the VOC. When war broke out with England in 1653, they were pressed into the navy. In this document, the captain of their ship was requested to ‘remand them (= the women) at the earliest possible moment and in the most civil manner to their lords and masters and to give them certificates of good conduct in order that they might be paid their wages as it had been found that they had observed their positions in a fitting and proper manner and had comported themselves well’. Their captain certainly judged them positively and they were therefore properly paid.

As far as we have the information, the unmasked female sailors of the other sea wars were also judged favourably and well treated. We know of two who did not have to repay their earnest-money, and another who received travel money when she was put off the ship. Cases also occurred in which the rights to collect booty and sickness monies were honoured.

Illustrative of the responsibilities of the authorities in such cases is the story of Maritgen Jans, about whom we are rather well-informed. Maritgen Jans, who had served as a soldier in a West Indies Company fort in Africa, and who had done her work there well, was discovered when she fell ill and had to be nursed in a hospital. The Governor immediately had a separate room made ready for her, wanting to send her back to Holland at the first opportunity – for what else could he do with a single white woman among all those men, so far from the fatherland? The only alternative was that she should marry as soon as possible, so he would no longer be responsible for her; we have seen the same reaction in the case of Maria Elisabeth Meening. Maritgen herself did not want to go back to Holland, so a marriage was organised for her, and this proceeded in a most efficient fashion. First, women’s clothing were ordered for her. The Governor and the council gave her a golden chain, a beautiful frock and other presents with the express purpose to make her a more desirable bride. A number of candidates quickly reported themselves ready to fill the position of husband, and these were permitted to visit her at her sick-bed and talk to her ‘in order to see if some love could come of it’. Maritgen eventually chose a 35-year old jurist, a much better match than she could ever have achieved in Holland.

The wedding took place only three weeks after the discovery and
was celebrated with much ostentation and festivities lasting for four days, with all the customs observed. The Governor performed the function of father of the bride. He declared that this solution had been dictated to him by the Lord. It proved, alas, a short-lived one, as the groom fell prey to a tropical illness a few weeks later and died. Maritgen was then sent back to the fatherland at the first opportunity.

PUBLIC OPINION AND POPULAR SONGS

As female cross-dressing was a living tradition among the common folk, it would be logical to expect a certain degree of toleration for women who dressed as men. But we found very little indication of this. Tolerance, however, tends to leave fewer traces in the archives than its opposite. In only two cases did we find proof of some acceptance within a small circle. One example is that of a woman in a Dutch village, who went through life with the significant name, 'Aart de Broekman' (broek = trousers), and who was employed as a farm worker. Her cross-dressing was apparently accepted, but came to an end because a new maidservant on the farm where Aart worked refused to share a bed with 'him'. This servant protested to the church council which as a result insisted to the village council that Aart must dress 'as sacred and human laws entail'. The local court put the choice to Aart: leave or dress as a woman. We do not know her choice. The second example, that of Maria van Antwerpen, was restricted to the family. One of her brothers and his wife appeared as godfather and godmother for the child that she, as 'father', had baptised in Amsterdam.

There are hints that other members of Maria van Antwerpen's family and acquaintances knew of her cross-dressing. For example, when she was later living as a man under the name of Machiel van Handtwerpen, she visited her former landlady in Gouda, which implies that the latter knew of her secret. Moreover, in the same town Maria dressed as an 'amazon' for some time while living there as a woman, by which we suppose that she dressed in men's clothing but was nonetheless recognisable as a woman. It is also clear from what we know of Barbara Adriaens, Maritgen Jans, Geertruida van den Heuvel and others, that there often were intimates who knew, or had discovered, the true sex, but who, for some reason and sometimes temporarily, kept their mouths shut.
But knowledge can not always be taken as acceptance and
toleration, or as an indication of a favourable judgement.

However, we found positive reactions with regard to some
female cross-dressers who had resumed life as women after a period
as man. This was particularly the case when their military or naval
careers had been successful, no further misdeeds had been
committed, and they had become ordinary, respected female
citizens. Then they could even become popular and local
celebrities. The ex-soldier Margareta of Groningen profited from
this, for example, by opening a shop. The ex-sailor and soldier,
Aagt de Tamboer (tamboer = drummer), in Amsterdam in the
seventeenth century attracted customers to her inn by hanging a
signpost with the following text on it:

Here Aagt de Tamboer dwells
That which she does, she does it well
Twice as tar with Tromp she sailed
But still is sound of limb and hale
She swims as well as fish or whale
Lately, she saved a drowning lass
The cost to see her: a mug or glass!

In contrast, a great many women encountered first reactions
which were hostile and aggressive. Immediately after signing on as
a sailor, Lena Wasmoot was discovered and subjected to the maling,
which meant that she was surrounded by a crowd of people who
pushed and jostled her, a form of popular justice which occurred
regularly in the streets of Amsterdam.6 The arrest of Barbara
Adriaens also was accompanied by angry crowds, and the police
only just saved her from the maling. And, more so in the seventeenth
than in the eighteenth century, this hostility could survive the first
confrontation. The life of Hendrickje Lamberts, whom the neigh-
bourhood knew had served as a soldier in the past, was so
embittered by it, as she stated in her trial, 'that she never dared
take to the streets for the harassment of the people'.

Maria van Antwerpen provides us with the most detailed
impressions concerning the reaction to those whose cross-dressing
was abruptly discovered. As she was brought into Breda after her
arrest, half the inhabitants of the city lined the roads to look and
laugh. Remarks were directed at her wife, who had also been
arrested, such as 'How many children have you had of Jan van
Ant?' While in prison, Maria was the centre of attention and
interest. 'The throng of people was so great at the main entrance that the guards could not obstruct them, and each was enraptured with astonishment about such a rare case. They asked me thousands of questions, and I had heavy work to satisfy their curiosity. It fell happily to my lot to be allowed to remain there a day longer, and the beneficence of the military and civil persons was very great. (. . .). That afternoon I was brought drinks from all sides . . . such that when I was brought in the evening to the house of the captain master-at-arms, I was quite befuddled. The rush of people was then so abundant that it was necessary for each of us to conduct two separate watches thereafter . . .'.

These first reactions can be summed up as astonishment, hilarity, curiosity, but no real hostility was involved. In Maria's case, the negative aspects (she was married to a woman) and the positive (she had served valiantly as a soldier) were balanced. Moreover, it seems that in the second half of the eighteenth century the judgement became increasingly less harsh and fierce. That is, at any rate, a tendency we can see in popular songs.

Reactions and opinions among the lower classes of society are not easy to find, but in addition to trial records one other rich source does exist: song books. Popular songs played an important role in the daily life of the common people, and they were sung in the streets, in inns, at fairs and at work. Songs served not only as entertainment but also as a source of news and to shape political opinion. News about war and peace, events in local or national politics and in particular about grisly murders, horrible accidents and strange occurrences were quickly reflected in songs. The texts, with an indication of the melody to which they should be sung, were offered for sale by the singers to bystanders. These street singers and news peddlers came from the marginal groups of society, even though we might expect some degree of literacy, and they were often treated like vagabonds. Criminal records show that many of them were women.

Loose sheets of songs were often bound into song books which were sold in book shops or hawked about. Many such song books have been preserved, and these, moreover, can be complemented by what has been recorded from the oral tradition in our century. In view of the public for which these folk songs were intended, we can consider these as a deposit of information reflecting the opinion of the common people.

In these collections of songs, we found more than thirty with the
theme of female cross-dressing. Most of these were noted down in
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but many must have been
later versions of earlier songs, and some actually date from the
seventeenth century.

In view of the sensation usually caused by the discovery of a
disguised women, many of these songs probably originally func-
tioned as news songs. It is, however, often difficult to find evidence
concerning the historical events upon which they were based. As a
rule, the singers presenting the events described them as if they had
just occurred, putting considerable effort into embellishing them
with local colour. This makes it all the more difficult to determine
which case is concerned. A song which was published as 'The
remarkable story of a maidservant by the name of Anna Katrijn
who encountered misfortune while in service and, at a recruiter’s in
the Vinkestraat in Amsterdam, accordingly resolved to sail to the
East Indies as a sailor', sounds very credible because of the concrete
details provided, until one discovers that another version exists in
which the maidservant is called Anna Maria, and in which she
enlisted in the Breedestraat in Rotterdam.\(^8\) The best remembered
song with this theme is *Daar was laatst een meisje los*, cited in the
Introductory chapter, which has come down to us in several
versions. In one of the oldest the heroine’s name is Margriet van
Dijk and the ship upon which she was to have sailed was called *De
Eik*. But we could not find either Margriet or *De Eik* in the
archives.\(^8\)

As a rule, the singers loved to embellish their stories, and they
gave special attention to sexual and other salient details. If these
details did not exist, they were invented; we can establish this in
cases for which we know something about the women concerned.
Comparing the facts with the image presented helps us interpreting
the songs. It is, for example, noteworthy that in the songs, the
women were often described as having been sentenced to a harsher
punishment than they had been in reality, and the opinion of the
singer is always that they fully deserved what they got. Hostility,
scorn and hilarity were the reactions most often found in the songs,
especially the older ones. The sexual aspects were dwelt upon
rather coarsely and with considerable malicious pleasure. Women
were described as very eager for sex. The idea that sex was possible
without a penis, or that a woman might attempt to marry another
woman without having this irreplaceable attribute at her disposal
was considered the height of absurdity. We already cited a song in
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which a female sailor acquired an artificial penis of horn. In a song
about Maria van Antwerpen, a scene is described which was to
have taken place in the nuptial bed. The bride is told:

Without mast, I sail
And cannot avail
Me of what thou desires

This clearly had its origin in fantasy, as Maria van Antwerpen’s
first spouse did not know the true sex of her ‘husband’. Sometimes
however, the singers did not have to supplement reality. The
following lines were written about Barbara Adriaens and Hilletje
Jans, who married in Amsterdam in 1632:

For when the bride made free
To feel if there might be
cock and balls, said she,
‘T’ is most rare
I perceive them not, yea, nothing there,
How may I then assay
My heat with thee thus to allay
In the nuptial bed where we two lay.10

This passage conforms more or less literally – albeit in a poetic
form – with what Hilletje Jans told the court.

The negative view taken in the songs about cross-dressing
women, especially if they had usurped the male privilege of
courting women is not only apparent in the tone of the descrip-
tions, but is also directly stated. ‘A new song of two females who
married in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam’ is one of the songs made
up about Cornelia Gerrits and Elisabeth Boleyn, who married in
Amsterdam in 1685. It begins as follows:

Listen, friends, to my tale
Of how two jades their duties failed
They did abandon the lawful bed
Of the men that they had wed
To flee, and these wives are now
Themselves bound by the marriage vow

The song then goes on to describe how Cornelia, dressed in
men’s clothing, met her lawful husband from whom she had been
separated nine years before in Leiden:
He did inspect her, foot to head
And spoke thus, 'Beast, to walk the street,
I shall see thee snared in dread
Thy evil paid, thy justice mete

According to this song, they were sent to prison for this, while in fact they were exiled. They were described to be:

Arrested in a trice
And taken to gaol
Where they ceaselessly rail
Against marriage and vice
The deed that they mourn
And life's lot of scorn

In a song entitled, 'Of a female brought to jail who there must sew and spin with a hat on her head and a jerkin on her back'. We recognize Trijn Jurriaens, who indeed in 1679 was sentenced to serve her prison's term in men's clothing. It ends in the following way:

The sentence must be praised
(. . .) Who will, approach and stay
To look, to marvel at a man
Once comely, kindly, grand
(. . .) Become a curious display

Another song about an unidentified woman in The Hague ends with the following lines:

Let Sir Bawd in prison spin
I have no pity for her, no;
Who doth with such sport begin
Begins in sport and ends in woe

These songs corroborate the notion that it was precisely among the common folk that the greatest disapproval of these women existed. And in the few cases for which another tone can be detected, there is also little evidence of understanding of or sympathy for such women. In more comic songs, the main character is often a girl who cannot find a lover on land and then disguises herself as a soldier or sailor in order to satisfy her sexual needs, as in a song about three women who enlisted during the Dutch Revolt. They did so because of 'amorous heat' and 'to go
drinking'. They quickly squandered their earnest-money whereupon their officers discovered their real sex:

They laughed aloud at them there
And a sentence did declare

According to the songs, the ordinary soldiers and sailors did not have such strong objections, because they considered females discovered on board ship to be fair game. In one seaman's ballad, in which it is explicitly claimed that it was written by a common sailor, we read that after the discovery of a disguised female, the sailors wished:

That half the ship's crew might be so
That they might go
Rutting at sea
With fifty lasses as fine as she

Remarkably enough, a positive response can be found in a song about a female sailor who was discovered to be a woman by two Spaniards who boarded her ship and then attempted to rape her. For her bravery in holding these two foreigners at bay with a knife, she was praised and rewarded:

Thus the Admiral Supreme
And Gentlemen did speak
Thou didst not our praises seek
But worthy we do find thee
Hadst thou killed them with thy blade
Even without needs be
Thou hadst thy virtue thus preserved
And art a stalward, dapper maid
And herewith we commend thee

As a reward, she was given a house, an inn and a husband, at least in the song. In this, we can recognise patterns which we also encountered in reality. Cross-dressing could be permissible so long as the woman claimed no masculine prerogatives, maintained her feminine honour, was extremely successful as a man, and finally resumed life as a woman in the end.

After 1800, the tradition of female transvestism dwindled fast. But songs about such women were sung until late in the nineteenth century, however, especially in Flanders. But the songs sung in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries differed noticeably
from the earlier ones. The songs from the northern Netherlands sung in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a rule concern female sailors or are news songs about sensational cases such as that of Barbara Adriaens. The motives attributed to the disguised women were reprehensible – they sought an easy way to acquire money; they had pretensions of becoming male; it seemed a clever way to catch a man – and the tone is extremely negative. In the second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the heroines are often soldiers, a development to which the great Napoleonic wars contributed. The tone, however, had become quite different, and one can find considerable admiration in them for the heroic women. This is clear even in a version of a song about Maria van Antwerpen dating from the early nineteenth century:

Valorous in manner
Stout-hearted in blood
Moral and honourable
Steadfast of nerve

This is quite different from the judgement made of Barbara Adriaens, who was arrested for the same offence more than a century earlier:

In appearance and in dress
An indignity to her sex

Cross-dressing women who seduced members of their own sex disappeared from the songs as they did from reality. The motives imputed to the women in these later songs are also positive: patriotism, and, in particular, the desire to follow a lover or husband. Such songs often ended on the battlefield, where he saved her, or she him. Sometimes one or both were killed; sometimes the song ended with a marital reunion or a marriage, as was the case in a Dutch song about a French female soldier:

Her valour was acclaimed by all
And the Council did agree
That these two might be
By the marriage vow united
And to remain thus undivided
And so in the hangman's stead
The priest was called
And the two were wed?
The nineteenth-century songs were increasingly less concerned with the reality of the old tradition. Further, the language used became more and more decent. In short, these songs drifted increasingly into the genre of romantic fictitious tearjerkers.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMON FOLK AND THE ÉLITE

If these songs comprise a source whereby we may learn something about the opinions of the common folk, we must look elsewhere for insight into the notions of the literate middle and upper classes. References to and commentaries on cases of female cross-dressing can be found in chronicles, diaries, travel narratives, collections of anecdotes, popular scientific treatises, daily newspapers and magazines. These sources yield many mixed but also a considerable number of purely positive reactions. We find references to historical and classical mythological figures, such as Joan of Arc and the Amazons. In the mythical and legendary tradition of the theme, heroism and the preservation of virginity were important criteria. Pieter de Lange, the author of a seventeenth-century collection of anecdotes, for example, placed the two female sailors about whom he was writing, in the tradition of the amazons, praising them because they ‘preferred an honourable death to a life of shame’.

Opinions concerning female cross-dressing fell readily into the heated literary debate of these centuries concerning the nature of women. It was no coincidence that the seventeenth century witnessed a boom in the number of publications concerning Pope Joan. She was the woman, who, according to legend, was elected Pope in the ninth century while disguised in men’s – or to be more precise – monk’s clothing. This discussion culminated in a book by Frederic Spanheim, printed in Leiden in 1691, in which nearly 500 works which had appeared since the thirteenth century concerning this mythic figure were critically examined. His book was repeatedly reprinted and was also published in abridged editions in French and German.18

In the Netherlands, the famous and influential doctor, Johannes van Beverwijk took up the querelle des femmes with verve. In 1639, he published his book On the Excellence of Women, in which he listed a number of Dutch female soldiers, praising their courageous deeds. Positive opinions from chronicle writers in the seventeenth century
include those of Caspar Ens and Nicolaas van Wassenaer, among others.

Chronicles and newspapers naturally paid most attention to recent and sensational cases, and they did not restrict themselves to the Dutch Republic. The popular monthly, Europische Mercurius, for example, reported in 1749 that the executioner of Lyon who had performed more than sixty executions had inadvertently betrayed herself while in a drunken state to be a woman. That same journal commented in 1727 positively, although somewhat ironically, on a case in England of cross-dressing which included a marriage between two women. But some years later, the conduct of Maria van Antwerp was described by them as 'unnatural and illegal', and further that 'such brutish women' were deserving the death penalty. This diversity is characteristic of the greater ambivalence to be found among the higher classes. Still, fundamentally, the judgement expressed concerning these women was predominantly negative for this strata as well, the more so when it happened close to home.

In moralistic works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we find warnings against cross-dressing based upon the Biblical text in Deuteronomy. It was a clergyman who, after Barbara Adriaens' arrest in Amsterdam in 1632, pressed for the pronouncement of the death penalty for her crimes. Jacob van de Viver is a good example of ambiguity. In his popular collection of anecdotes, first printed in 1615, he wrote that he admired the courage of female soldiers, but at the same time admitted that he disliked courageous women, deeming them rather ridiculous. He evoked the Bible to justify his rejection of them. In Simon de Vries, a writer of many popular scientific and sensational works in the second half of the seventeenth century, we find a similar ambivalence about our women. On the one hand, one finds admiration for their brave deeds in his works, but on the other hand, he also condemns them for their cross-dressing: 'Such women are in no way praiseworthy who deny their sex so that they may follow the war in men's clothing, fine though their deeds may have been.' He conceded, however: 'It cannot be denied that honour is due such (women). Ridicule was also among the reactions of the elite; we know that among the upper circles of The Hague, a joke circulated around 1670 about a 'tribas' which was based upon the case of Barbara Adriaens or Hendrickje Verschuur.

Among those writers whose opinions were unambiguously
negative concerning such women, we find precisely those who came into closest contact with them. The ship’s surgeon Nicolaus de Graaff is one example; and Nicolaas Tulp, who condemned cross-dressing women fiercely in his Observationum medicarum served as a magistrate in the trial of Hendrickje Verschuur.

CROSS-DRESSING IN LITERATURE

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a growing flood of popular prose streamed from the Dutch printing presses, the majority of which was directed at the middle classes. The greater proportion of these were early novels, and more-or-less fictional autobiographies. A detailed, but certainly not complete, bibliography of popular Dutch prose from the years 1600–1815 includes twenty-five works on the subject, nearly all of which concern cross-dressing by women. The first novel on this theme dates from 1624, but most were published in the eighteenth century, when such novels developed into a genre of their own. The theme was considered attractive, because, as we read in the introduction to one of the works, ‘it is well known that the strangest occurrences may happen to those whose sex and clothing are incompatible’.

Some of these works were purely fictitious; others were based upon reality. The ghost-written autobiography of Maria van Antwerpen could be proved to adhere very closely to the facts. Another biography entitled De vrouwelyke soldaat (‘The female soldier’), which appeared shortly after 1743, is also probably quite trustworthy. The author, indicated only with the initials, M. T. M., can be identified as Maria ter Meetelen. We were able to trace her in the archives. Unfortunately, the episode describing her life as a soldier is short; the book is particularly interesting and historically important because of the description of her experiences as a prisoner in North Africa. We have more doubts about the authenticity of the autobiography of Maria Kinkons which appeared in 1759. She was to have had adventures while dressed as a man both on land and at sea. But the only information we could prove as historic was the name of the ship on which she presumably had sailed. But this is insufficient to include this work among the authentic stories.

A large number of other works are clearly fictitious, as the adventures are too fantastic and the heroines’ names too exotic.
The fictional autobiography was a favourite form for the novel at the time, and this fact must make us all the more cautious, particularly as one sometimes encounters real incidents and characters in otherwise fictional works. The discovery in 1743 of a woman who had worked as stableboy in Amsterdam for years led, for example, to one or two semi-fictional works. It is sometimes not possible to determine the degree to which fiction or reality is involved, however, as in the case of the ‘Stout-Hearted Heroine’, which we have discussed before. We believe that this is partly fiction, despite the fact that this book pretends to reflect reality, and the introduction even stresses the fact that many books have appeared concerning women dressed as men ‘which are not true in all details’. On the other hand, the sketch provided in the book of what life as a man was like can be more readily termed realistic than fantastic, and it may thus serve as an historical source nonetheless.

Also, just as in the songs, it is remarkable that the more fictional the nature of the works in question, the more the tone and judgement concerning the women tended to be laudatory. The women are depicted as real ‘heroines’ – although some irony can be detected in this classification. Franciscus Kersteman, Maria van Antwerpen's ghost writer, who in his autobiography admitted that he had earned a considerable sum by ‘The Heroine of Breda’ in later years also wrote a few travesty novels, each of which was more positive in tone and contained wilder adventures than Maria’s autobiography. He also conveyed this idea of making money to his brother, who tried his hand at this genre, too.28

The popularity of the theme of female cross-dressing was not limited to the Republic; it was a general European phenomenon. References in chronicles, magazines, collections of anecdotes and the like can be found in Italy, Spain, France, and England, as well as folk songs and, especially, more-or-less fictional (auto)biographies concerning such women. The notion that the theme was not limited by national boundaries is supported too by the number of translations which appeared. We found Dutch translations of French biographies, like those of Christine de Meirak and Renée Bordereau, and of the English ones of Anna Blound, Henriette de Boston and Hannah Snell. The biography of Catarina Vizzani was translated from Italian into English, and that of Géneviève Prémoys was translated from French into Dutch as well as English – to give a few examples only.29
The theme of female cross-dressing was equally popular in the theatre. Cross-dressing in dramatic performances, however, was a complicated matter, because it was originally common practice for men to play women's roles. Only in 1655 did a woman join the permanent company of the Amsterdam Theatre. Quite apart from this, however, cross-dressing was presented on stage quite frequently as an integral part of the work being performed. Cross-dressing by men as well as women was presented. In farces, it was often the man in women's clothing who provoked hilarity, but in what was perhaps the most popular Dutch comedy of the seventeenth century, *Nieuwigierig Aagje* ('Miss Inquisitive') a drunken woman is dressed in men's clothing as a joke. Female cross-dressing was popular in the theatre in other countries as well. Of more than three hundred plays first performed in London between 1660 and 1700, eighty-nine contained roles in which actresses donned male clothes.

Apart from making the idea of female cross-dressing more conceivable to a larger audience than that reached by the printed prose works of the time, the theatrical and real-life tradition of the theme reinforced each other in other ways as well. We already referred to Dutch actresses who preferred men's clothing to women's garb in their daily lives, as well as on the stage: non-Dutch examples are Madame de Maupin in France and Charlotte Charke in England. The latter, characteristically enough, produced a theatre play about Pope Joan. More than once, reality gave rise to a drama, such as those about the Spaniard Catalina de Erauso and the Englishwoman Mary Frith. The opposite also occurred. It was said of a singer in the Paris opera in 1724 that she had served five or six years with the Dutch troops. Hannah Snell, after a successful career as a sailor, staged a revue about her life as a man – for her, myth and reality were no longer divisible.

Painters and draughtsmen have found their inspirations in the theme to a much lesser extent. We know of only one authentic print of a Dutch female soldier, that of Geertruid ten Brugge, which dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century. This woman had been a soldier for some time, but had later resumed life as a woman in The Hague. There, unmarried, she bore a child in 1706. In the baptismal records, she is registered as 'La Dragonne'. She was apparently a local celebrity and possibly earned money selling copies of this print. Exploitation of fame is a characteristic we have encountered before and was also not exclusively Dutch.
The greatest number of images we have of female cross-dressers come from illustrations from books which dealt with such women. The Dutch edition of the autobiography of Hannah Snell, for example, included illustrations which may not have copied reality, but which in any case give us some insight into how artists imagined such women. Generally, they tried to render male as well as female traits simultaneously, so that the viewer could see at a glance that a disguised woman was being depicted. For these reasons, if for no other, these prints may not be termed realistic.

This was also the case for prints which constituted a genre in itself, namely those with the themes of 'the world turned upside down' and 'women on top', or 'the battle of the trousers'. In these folk prints, dating mostly from the sixteenth century but reprinted as children's gifts until the beginning of the nineteenth century, all sorts of anomalies were, cartoonlike, depicted as a warning to the viewer. Next to drawings such as 'The servant strikes his master', 'The man carries his horse' or; 'The fish sit in the trees', one always finds prints such as 'The woman goes to war'. The changing of gender roles was a frequent feature in such prints, because it confused the 'natural order of things'. A very distinctive print culture existed in the early modern period in the Netherlands, Germany and elsewhere concerning the theme 'the women don trousers', in which fear and rejection of women who coveted the position of males was made abundantly plain. The message in all these prints is clear: chaos threatens the world when the separate spheres of the sexes are confused.

CONTACTS WITH ROYALTY

In histories of female soldiers and sailors, a theme repeatedly emerges in which they are received at court and rewarded. These usually concerned women who were to have begun cross-dressing out of patriotism and loyalty to their sovereign. When such women bore their arms in an exemplary fashion on the battlefield a royal gesture of pardon and reward was in order. Maybe this can be placed in the tradition of interest of monarchs for human curiosities like dwarves, but female soldiers certainly had a propaganda value: the monarch could show to the world that even women rallied under his banners.

An example from the beginning of the seventeenth century
presents the Spanish woman Catalina de Erauso, who was given a pension from Philip IV. She was also received by the Pope, who is said to have given her permission to continue wearing men’s clothing. This recognition came after a life as a conquistador in South America, where she not only had not behaved like a lady, but in fact not like a gentleman either. In England, Queen Anne and King George IV extended favours to various cross-dressers. The English ex-soldiers, ‘Christian Davis’, Phoebe Hessel and Mary Anne Talbot, were to have lived from money that they received directly from high nobles and from the king himself. The last in this series is the German Antoinette Berg, who in English service fought the French on Dutch territory in 1799. During the peace festivities in London in 1814 she was even presented to the Tsar of Russia and the King of Prussia. France provided its own examples, from Louis XIV, who rewarded his soldier Géneviève Prémoy with a fine pension and a knighthood in the order of St. Louis, to Napoleon, who was to have bestowed the Legion of Honour to the Flemish Maria Schellinck in 1808.

The Netherlands were a Republic, but for the greater part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the offices of Stadhouder and commander-in-chief of the army and fleet were hereditary within the House of Orange. The Stadholders could therefore be—and were at the time—compared to monarchs in other European countries. And indeed we did find examples of their rewarding female soldiers and sailors, especially connected with Stadhouder Willem III, the later King William of England. He was to have given Elisabeth Sommuriel an annuity of 200 guilders for her valour as a soldier during the war with France in 1672–78. Newspapers tell us that he received Willemjje Gerrits at his court. In ‘The Stout-Hearted Heroine’ this story is also told, and this royal treatment there also included ‘Hendrik van den Berg’. Later, as King of England, Willem awarded a pension to a woman in men’s clothing, the soldier ‘Robert Cornelius’, in 1696.

Maria van Antwerpen wrote in her autobiography that she had hoped to complete her six years of service and then to make a triumphant revelation of her sex and reap benefits from it. This idea can easily have been inspired by stories about Elisabeth Sommuriel, who, like her, came from Breda. At Maria’s second trial in 1769, answering the question why she had disobeyed the stipulations made at her former trial, she declared that she had been received by Willem IV in 1751 and that he had personally granted her a pardon, reversing the sentence she had received
earlier that year. As 'guarantee' she had been given a golden medallion upon which the image and weapon of Willem were engraved. Unfortunately, she could not prove it as she had sold the coin when in need of money. She swore that the medallion had been seen by many people, but the judges attached little value to this story. We do not know whether to believe her either, as the archives where an answer might have been found, have been lost by now.

But in a news song which circulated about her the following lines were included, proving, if nothing else, how important this royal reward was to the popular imagination.

The Prince of Orange
Granted a pardon
Freed by her Sovereign
She came out of prison

The theme emerges in many ballads throughout Europe. A song about a fictitious woman who was to have fought on the Dutch side during the Belgian Revolt in 1830 for example runs

(Shes) did the Cross of Honour earn
When of her loyal deeds
The Crown Prince learned.45

In reality, this kind of royal reward was the exception and should in some cases be taken with a pinch of salt. But it is clear that the contact between the monarchy and such women appealed to the common folk. Although female cross-dressers and the monarchs had little in common in real life, they both appealed to the popular imagination and so they found each other in the myths created around them.

CONCLUSION

These contacts with royalty show a reaction that can be called positive. But when we sum up contemporary reactions, we must conclude that the basic judgement passed on cross-dressing women was negative. We found very little indication of toleration, other than in novels and plays. Women who had been successful as soldiers or sailors, who could give acceptable motives for living as men and who subsequently resumed respectable life as a woman
were sometimes positively received. However, more often the sensational or comic aspect of cross-dressing set the tone. Rejection was the most common reaction, and it is remarkable that among the common folk this was generally much more pronounced than among the elite, where fewer black-and-white judgements were made. The relatively more negative position generally taken by the common folk is puzzling as the tradition of female transvestism was rooted in this very social stratum. But then, we do not know if the street songs and behaviour of the crowds did fully express the feelings of the women present. We can only guess that deep in their hearts some of them must have understood.