Autobiography and Family Memory in the Nineteenth Century

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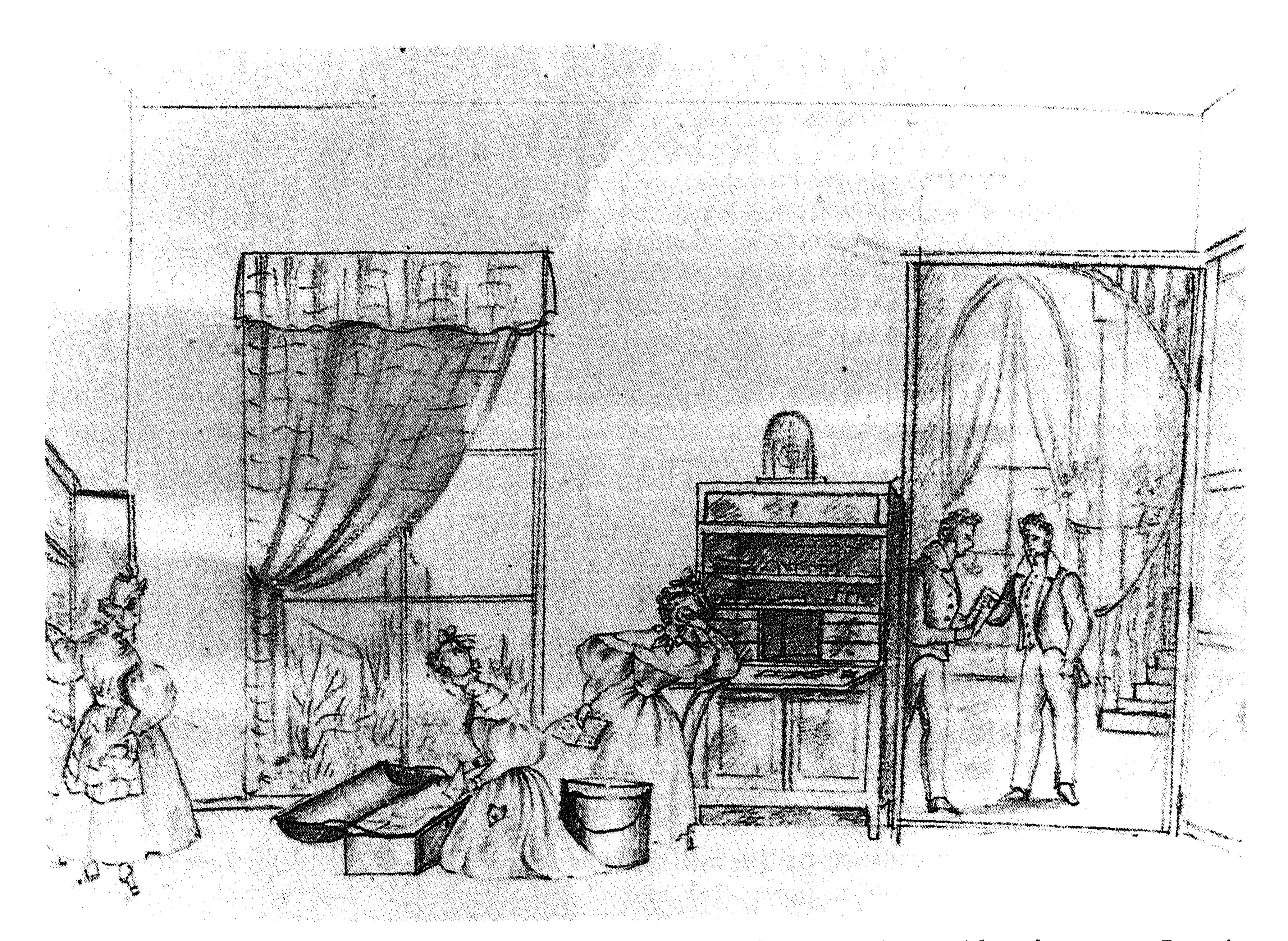
I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeliness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself.¹

These are the opening words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's autobiography. Sincerity, self-scrutiny, individuality, authenticity, introspection, those were the requirements Rousseau had set for himself in writing his *Confessions*. And after its publication, his autobiography soon acquired paradigmatic status. Generations of autobiographers took Rousseau as their example. More than a century later, in the early twentieth century, Rousseau's requirements were augmented by new psychological insights about the nature of the Self. After Freud, many autobiographers strove to analyse themselves with even more rigour and scrutiny.

Today, almost another century later, the image of the autobiography as a mirror of the soul has been set aside as naive. Literary critics have shown to what extent autobiographies are influenced and modified by literary conventions. Nevertheless, in particular among historians, and even more among the general reading public, it is still believed that hidden in these texts there is authentic, individual experience to be found. Sifting through many layers, trying to separate "Wahrheit" from "Dichtung", many readers are still on a quest for the Holy Grail.

The idea that Rousseau's *Confessions* heralded a new era in autobiographical writing was one of the assumptions underlying the Dutch project of collecting and describing all egodocuments in the Netherlands from 1814 to 1914.² I expected to see how growing individuality, or even the atomising of society, would lead to the disappearance of the older, more traditional, chronicle-like types of egodocuments. So I expected that our research into nineteenth-century family archives would yield a much greater number of introspective autobiographies and "journaux intimes" than had been found during the previous inventory project, which covered the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³

Although my colleague Gerard Schulte Nordholt and I have only just begun this project, we have already described hundreds of nineteenth-century egodocuments. So far the results do not suggest a linear growth of introspection or a growing tendency towards intimacy.⁴ Instead, we found diaries with comments of readers in the margins, like the diary of Otto van Eck whose parents used his daily notes as a medium of control. We found life stories which develop into a family epic, we



Opening a trunk containing papers of the Van Meurs family in Haarlem, mid-19th century. Page in the sketchbook of Antonia Elisabeth van Meurs (Gemeentearchief Arnhem).

found diaries of men continued by their wives, and autobiographies of fathers continued by their sons, and, finally we found many agendas containing only jottings with very factual information, like '18 June Saturday: Ernst is getting better, the fever has abated. Anne D'Escury dined with us. Inauguration of the newly built Kurhaus.' 5 The notes of another diarist show even more density "M. 13 peaches, 10 cents. Jean's room. Friendliness. Rain. Buma not unfriendly". Or they show great density combined with great creativity, like the diary of Jacob Nieuwenhuis, a thirteen year old boy. He labels each day differently: "February 10th: a very bad day. (Watson threw snowballs at me. I quarrelled with my teacher); Friday 19th: A brilliant day". More variations were possible: "a heavenly day, a good day, a not too good day, a bad day, a pleasant day, a very pleasant day, a really very pleasant day". Occasionally we found a diary with a promising start. In 1842 Cornelis Elout, for instance, writes that he had long intended to begin a real diary, and fills the first 15 pages with reflecting on the way this should be done: "My diary, how should I organise it? 1. For myself alone, without even reading fragments to Lina [his wife]; 2. Written in such a way that my son, if he survives me, can read it, and maybe learn something from it". But, even before he reached a decision, this diarist suddenly died. After which his wife Lina continued to write in this diary, describing his death, the funeral and some other family affairs.⁸

The results of our inventarisation so far, show that most nineteenth-century writers – if they had thought about it at all – did not choose to write an egodocument "for myself alone". They chose the second option, for instance the diarist who wrote on the cover of his notes: "Written in such a way that my son, if he survives me, can read it, and maybe learn something from it". Our original image of nineteenth century-writers, seated behind their desks, unburdening their hearts, was replaced by visions of rows of industrious clerks, obsessively penning down the dull drone of their monotonous lives.

However, these may well be premature conclusions. The rise of the introspective autobiography and the simultaneous increase in traditional, chronicle-like types of egodocuments found in the archives is not necessarily an anomaly. The end of the eighteenth century was not only characterised by the rise of individuality, but also by the rise of the bourgeoisie. This development brought along an intensifying of the bourgeois archive tradition. Bourgeois families then started to organise their archives on a larger scale. As noble families had already been doing for centuries, these "nouveau riches" started to invest in a collective identity, a luxury in itself, and starting a family archive is one way of achieving this.

Presumably, the results of our investigation are coloured by the special features of the main source in which we found our egodocuments: the family archive. As it turns out, the family archive is not a neutral place, it is not a random collection of papers, but a paper bulwark, built and rebuilt by generations, with a specific function: to preserve and protect a common family identity. The aspects of creating welcome identities and hiding or even destroying unwanted identities should be seriously taken into account.

This specific character of family archives has important consequences for the general conclusions which can be drawn and for the analysis of the texts as such. We are used to looking for literary conventions in egodocuments. From this point of view, egodocuments stored in family archives seem to have a more direct, one-dimensional, character than the printed, more literary, egodocuments. This uncomplicated nature, however, is only apparent. Close reading, not only of the egodocuments themselves, but also of the surrounding papers in the family archives, brings other conventions to light. These "family conventions", as I will call them, are no less stringent than literary conventions.

This can be illustrated by a few examples of such "family conventions" discovered during our project, and in particular with the autobiography of Pieter Blussé, written in 1822. Pieter Blussé was an energetic and successful publisher in Dordrecht.⁹ This is the earliest memory of Pieter Blussé: "My earliest development was slow; I was late in learning to walk, later still I learned to speak, and no doubt this contributed to my shyness and sensitivity". How did Pieter Blussé know this? And why would he want to remember this detail at the age of 74? Although the mechanics of remembering and forgetting are still a largely unknown territory, scientists agree that conscious memory comes with the acquisition of speech. The fact that Pieter



left: Miscellaneous papers from the Blussé family archive right: Loveletters from Pieter Blussé to his future wife Sophia Vermeer, written around 1770 (Gemeentearchief Dordrecht, photo Ad Molendijk).

Blussé could remember when and how he learned to speak is obviously a contradiction in terms. Not only are babies and toddlers incapable of converting experience into words, but, more importantly maybe, they have not yet developed into social beings. According to Maurice Halbwachs, memory is a collective phenomenon, a reconstruction raised on common ground.

The Rotterdam merchant Jan Hudig seemed to be aware of this when he started his autobiography with the following remark: "Reliable sources inform me that I was born on the 24th of November 1840, which fact I take for true. This is not a memory, but to me this information is equal to memory". O Another autobiographer, Jacob Nieuwenhuis, mentions how he once secretly ate his little sister's porridge. The context makes clear that this was not an authentic memory but an anecdote his parents used to tell him with the intention of making him feel guilty and working on his conscience. This was made all the easier when his sister died soon after, at an early age. 11

Such memories, which I would like to call "semi-authentic", can only survive in families in which the bond between generations and the attachment to a common past is strongly felt. By exchanging tales, memory gaps are filled until the discrepancies between personal memories and those of others become blurred. Anecdotes like Pieter Blussé's backwardness or Jacob Nieuwenhuis's secret eating of his sister's porridge seem destined to become part of a common family heritage: stories that will survive generations. Both are more than just good stories, they are also moral lessons, messages for the future.

This enables us to answer the earlier question why Pieter Blussé wanted to revive

those childhood memories, some seventy years later. At first sight backwardness, retarded speech development, difficulties in learning to walk do not seem to be memories one would like to cherish. This is also the conclusion of the Dutch historian Hugo Röling, who has studied hundreds of childhood memories from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "In the first place, there is the over-exposure of success; autobiographies are in most cases the history of personal success." ¹²

Röling, however, studied mainly printed works, often with literary qualities or at least literary ambitions, many of them written by famous Dutch authors like the novelist Lodewijk van Deyssel, and the pedagogue Jan Ligthart: "The smart children [who] became the successful adults, who came into a position to write their own life stories. They noticed at an early age that they were superior to some of the adults". These autobiographies differ in many ways from those found in family archives. Their authors wrote down their childhood memories with other objectives and with a different reading public in mind.

Most authors of autobiographies in family archives did not intend their texts to be published. They usually wrote for their offspring. Often they explicitly stated this intention in a preface. Our findings confirm this for the whole of the 19th century. Hendrik Beeck van Vollenhoven, for instance, saw his memoirs as a "farewell" to his children. 13 Jacob Petrus Havelaar, father of six, copied his "reminiscences", as he called them, six times, adding: "when these reminiscences, after my death, will be read by my children, my memoirs will give them great pleasure". 14 The most important conclusion they were to draw had already been announced in this written motivation at the beginning. He expected his memoirs to please them because they will show that, "their behaviour never caused me the slightest sigh or tear". It was a good idea of his to make six copies of his memoirs, because today only one survives in the archive. The father of Robert Jackson was less attentive. After Robert Jackson discovered the loss of his father's family papers he nearly despaired and decided to write his own life story to "spare" his own children "this sorrow". For the Amsterdam merchant Gideon Boissevain, writing a diary also fitted the family tradition. He wrote the first page in 1834 "after the decease of my beloved father, who used to make daily notes of such things as concerned himself and his family. In order that my own children may derive pleasure from it one day." 16 Herman Gelderman, to give one last example, wrote an autobiography for his children as his mother had done for him, but only after she had put great pressure upon him to do so. 17

To return to Pieter Blussé, on the first pages of his autobiography he also emphasised that he wrote for insiders: "Let it be a useful and pleasant memento for my numerous offspring!". It was not only his children and grandchildren that Pieter Blussé had in mind. He supposed that many future generations of the Blussé family would read his memoirs. This is apparent from the remarks in the margins of the manuscript. At first, Pieter thought there was no need to mention the names of his many children. In the second version of his autobiography, however, the sentence "the latter being known to all of my children" had been replaced by the remark that

later on he would write in detail about this. R. van der Graaf, whose autobiography was found in the Rotterdam archive, wrote even more explicitly about his intentions for the future: "this is about my life and about my birthplace Rotterdam; it is written for present and future members of my family, to serve as a link between the generations".¹⁸

In these family-egodocuments the medium was the message. Moral lessons were offered by urging descendants to identify with their ancestor. In a manner of speaking, the singularity and heroism characteristic of literary autobiographies yielded to a more general interest. When Jacob Nieuwenhuis mentioned eating his sister's porridge and other misdemeanours, far from being a confession this was meant to stress the importance of a stern but fair upbringing. Likewise, the backwardness related by Pieter Blussé had a moral objective. In his case the message became even clearer when he wrote about his schooldays: "Although less bright than most of my classmates, I equalled and even outstripped many of them through diligence and attentiveness." The moral in this case and in the autobiography as a whole was that diligence was more important than talent. Pieter's description of the period after he left school, when he was an apprentice in a bookshop in Amsterdam, implied another important message for his descendants, especially the male adolescents. The description of this stage of life was characterised by the theme: "wrong friends". One dangerous friend was older, more experienced in the book trade, but a rake: "more than once he tried to drag me into his ruinous schemes, but God saved me; I tore myself away from him with the loss of only 28 guilders, which he had succeeded in wheedling out of me by promises and threats". Finally this young colleague was imprisoned for debt and sent to sea on a man-of-war, after which he died soon. Two other dangerous friends persuaded Blussé to take a room in their boarding house, but he only found himself involved in an endless quarrel with the landlord. Again Blussé decided to tear himself away from these so-called friends. In his autobiography he looked, as usual, on the bright sight of life: these episodes had taught him a good lesson. And the following generations of young Blussés could learn a lot from his experience.

If there is a literary aspect to Pieter Blussé's autobiography, it would be that of the "Bildungsroman", a genre which had become popular during his lifetime, and which may have influenced Blussé, who was a well-read publisher after all. However, this is merely one aspect of his autobiography. In its entirety, and taking account of the intended audience, it seems even more strongly reminiscent of the "ethical wills" studied by Avriel Bar-Levay. These Jewish ethical wills, with their tradition reaching back to the Middle Ages and before, were meant to hand down a coherent vision of life to subsequent generations, by male authors to their male descendants.

In contrast with these "ethical wills", in which the message is compressed into a brief statement, and also with literary autobiographies, which possess a greater degree of autonomy, Pieter Blussé's memories were not written as an independent entity. As mentioned before, it is part of a paper bulwark, the family archive, with an

internal logic of its own. This archive and the autobiography form an organic whole. A number of archive papers seems to have been preserved mainly to serve as a basis for this autobiography, to refresh the memory of its author. At the same time, the autobiography serves as a guide to the family archive. Or even as an inventory, for every now and again the reader is referred to other papers for further information. The historian who compares the autobiography with information found in the archive papers is confronted with a snake biting its own tail. Yet there was no choice but to turn to those 84 boxes of private papers, if only because Pieter Blussé, the author, wanted me, a reader of nearly two centuries later, to do so.

An example of the relationship between this personal autobiography and the family archive is Blussé's description of the tragic death of his only brother, Adolph, in 1767, which contains a reference to an elegy their father composed on this occasion. This funerary poem is indeed still among the family papers. The reader avid for more detailed information concerning Pieter Blussé's carnal delights during his wedding night is also referred to the archive: a bunch of occasional poems on this marriage, neatly wrapped and preserved inside the marriage announcement.

That his descendants actually read the family papers appears from various handwritten comments in ink, pencil or ballpoint, sometimes even found on the same wrappers. These readers' notes vary widely: one and the same wrapper displays remarks like "highly amusing" or "very interesting" but also "of no consequence". The comments on these wrappers become more and more detailed over the years and show us how these papers were received by their readers. At the same time they bear witness to an ever-decreasing confidence in the readability of the family papers. Pieter Blussé simply wrote "from my father" on a collection of occasional poetry. But one of his sons added the name of the author – Abraham Blussé senior – and wrote a brief elucidation signed with his own name, Abraham Blussé junior, and the date. Later generations in their turn pencilled explanations on wrappers containing the correspondence of this Abraham Blussé junior. Future readers are told that Mijnsheerenherberg is the name of the house of that particular branch of the family that lived in the Voorstraat in the town of Dordrecht, while the name "Piet van de Groote-kerk" is to be identified as "Mr.P.B.v.O.A.", still no more than initials, but a great step toward clarification: the late nineteenth-century lawyer Pieter Blussé van Oud-Alblas not to be confused with his namesake, the eighteenth-century publisher. For almost two centuries, until it was handed over to the municipal archive of Dordrecht in the late twentieth century, the archive of the Blussé family was only open to insiders. But it was obvious that the knowledge which had once been taken for granted, was already diminishing. Amidst these fading memories, Pieter Blussé's autobiography stands out as a lasting memorial. By using a narrative style, and relegating his additions and comments to the margins, the author succeeded in keeping his text accessible. Its importance as a master key to the archive has even increased over the years, while the meaning of most of the family papers in which it was embedded has paled.

As mentioned before, the archive also served as a palace of memories, a museum for Pieter Blussé himself. ¹⁹ Many events recounted by him are also represented by relics in the archive. One example are the love letters he exchanged with his future bride. All letters written during their engagement around 1770, have been preserved. They are still there, bound by a silk ribbon, now half decayed. It hardly seems a coincidence that many pages of the autobiography were dedicated to the commotion surrounding this engagement.

There is a sharp contrast with another event during this period of Pieter Blussé's life. Only one paragraph was devoted to a business trip to the Southern Netherlands which was of great importance for the publishing firm. It ends as follows: "From this journey, a few fragments remain of which I, being occupied all the time, and also because the pencilled parts have become obscure, cannot make a fair copy". Without notes Pieter was unable to reconstruct this journey. He even forgot how long he had been away: within the same paragraph he switches from two months to six weeks. Again, this stresses the collective character of personal memories. Pieter travelled alone, so he could not share his experience on the journey with someone with the same frame of reference. Neither could he share his memories afterwards. According to Maurice Halbwachs, these are necessary conditions for a long term memory of certain events. After the death of Pieter Blussé the pencil notes, already faded and no longer decipherable even by him, have vanished. Later generations had no use for them, except as a monument to forgetfulness. And that was not what the archive was meant for. On the contrary, archive was the everlasting imperative to remember. However, it was not a "total recall". You must remember us, as they will remember you after you have passed away. We should, however, realise that Pieter Blussé never wanted everything regarding his family to be remembered indiscriminately. His "invisible hand" guided later generations.

The archive as a palace of memory, the archive as a snake which bites its own tail, a paper bulwark from which posterity is exhorted and guided, these metaphors best characterise a family archive. One more can be added: the family archive as a place of oblivion. It will be clear by now, that the archive and the autobiography together cannot be regarded as a random collection of texts which survived by chance. On the contrary, both are the result of careful selection and pruning by a successive line of custodians. In this respect the family archive functions like human memory. Human memories are not reproduced like the registrations of a tape recorder, but constructed, as for instance the experiments of the psychologist W.A. Wagenaar or Elisabeth Loftus have shown.²⁰ They could, perhaps, be compared to building blocks that can be arranged in different ways to form various structures. They change according to the changing perspectives of the remembering subject, and they can erode and crumble. That is the reason why Pieter Blussé at the end of his life remembered going to a Latin school, a gymnasium, for a period of four years. In reality he never did. After two years he left school to learn the practice of book-selling, the trade he was born to. In the year 1766 Pieter Blussé was a bookseller's apprentice, son of a self-made man from the lower middle-classes. Seventy years later, when writing his autobiography in 1822, he was an immensely rich *pater familias* directing a family empire. This was a drastic change of perspective. Blussé's own children all had the opportunity to finish their schools, that his grand-children went to university was a matter of course, and that his great-grandchildren would become government ministers must have been in line with his expectations. The false memory of his school period may not be a conscious twist of truth. What would be the point when in other respects he stresses the self-made character of his career? It is much more likely that in retrospect, Pieter Blussé simply could not imagine he himself had never finished school.

At other times, the autobiography shows omissions which cannot be explained by the loss of notes, or by changing perspectives. Writing about his many children, of which ten survived childhood, he cited one of the birth announcements to illustrate his joy: "The fertile grapevine alongside my house has grown a new shoot". When I found this birth announcement in one of the archive boxes, the wine turned out to have a bitter aftertaste. Of all possible birth announcements Pieter Blussé had precisely chosen to quote from the birth announcement of the only son whose life took a very sad turn. By the time his father wrote his memories, this son, Adriaan, had been confined in a mental institution for seven years, never to be released again. This son was not mentioned in the autobiography at all, and obviously even the quotation from his birth announcement did not evoke any meaningful memories of this son. Probably only the phrase lingered, and was found too good not to be recycled in the autobiography. In the archive, too, the unfortunate Adriaan hardly left any marks. The only trace was found in the documents concerning Blussé's inheritance: a bill sent by the madhouse where Adriaan was being nursed.

This is not the only example of untold events or absent family members. Remarkably enough, the archive does not contain a single letter referring to any family conflict. This successful family may have been very harmonious indeed, but it is highly improbable that there never were any quarrels. Precisely because a family-economy like theirs depended on internal harmony and mutual loyalty there is a fair chance that all traces of disharmony were eradicated as being detrimental to the collective family memory.

The perspectives of other families throw an interesting light on that of the Blussé family. Was the strong correlation between autobiography and archive exceptional? In some cases I have found evidence of a similar practice.

A typical early case is the autobiography of the seventeenth-century merchant David Baute, whose manuscript originally contained references to family papers, including titles and page numbers. His descendants dutifully copied his autobiography, including these references a century later although the papers to which they refer no longer existed.²¹ In some family archives, autobiographies are found in more than one copy, or in abbreviated form. Some authors not only left autobi-

ographies and diaries but also extensive indices of names, places and objects. These registers must have been helpful to the authors themselves, but maybe they were also compiled as a service to later readers.

The seventeenth-century statesman Paulus Teding van Berkhout left his papers in a rather chaotic state. His son Pieter was greatly annoyed, and in his diary he noted more than once how he had spent a whole day ordering the family archive: "16 August 1672, Je rangerois l'océan de papiers de mon père, séparant les bons des mauvais" [I was busy arranging the ocean of papers left by my father, separating the good from the bad ones]. A year later he was still busy: "3 November 1673: je fus occupé toute la journée à ranger les papiers de feu mon père par ordre alphabet avec un addition d'un registre, que je fis du titre" [I spent the whole day arranging the papers left by my late father according to alphabet, and adding a register of titles]. Pieter Teding van Berkhout learned a lesson from this effort. At the end of each year he arranged his own papers and letters in alphabetical order. In 1692 he also composed an index to his extensive diary in the form of a list of visitors to his country manor. Carried away by his own accuracy he even added them to a total annual number of visitors. Just for the fun of it, or maybe as a gesture to those among his descendants with a penchant for statistics. ²²

In other archives, readers have left traces, sometimes made by the author reading his earlier notes, sometimes by descendants, or by both. The baron Johan Hendrik Verboom jotted down his whole life on a mere eight folio sheets. The period from 1835 to 1838 was very briefly dealt with. These years were joined by a bracket, followed by a short comment by the baron himself: "Nothing worth paying attention to". His later remark, an addition in pencil, is slightly more detailed: "N.B. very interesting, but unpleasant period". One of his descendants was more enthusiastic, writing on the first page of this autobiography: "Very brief, yet highly interesting life story". 23

Sometimes an egodocument contains excuses from the author to his readers. For example, the Rotterdam grain merchant Willem van Rede stuck a note to his series of 25 diaries, bearing the message: "I apologise for the handwriting. It wasn't until 1912-13 that we began to use English broad-tipped pens on a permanent basis. Before that I only tried them out; I had to finish the old stock of sharp pens first."²⁴

The diary of Cornélie van Schuyleburgh from 1878-1879 has a post script. Not by the author, but by her sister-in-law. On 30 April 1940 she wrote: "Today I reread the abbreviated version of Cornelia's diary (the original version was more intimate, and was destroyed after her death, in accordance with the author's wish)". This is a clear example of an egodocument functioning as a "lieu de mémoire". This abbreviated diary is visited like one visits a grave, leaving flowers in the form of a postscript or an additional entry. 25

The above example sheds light on yet another aspect: the destruction of egodocuments. Many more examples could be given here. Another woman, Maria van Assendelft de Coningh, wrote a shortened version of her diary for her relatives, who

Front page of the notebook in which Johannes Jacobi kept his diary over the year 1834. (Gemeentearchief Rotterdam).



were even more prudent, and carefully tore out many pages which they considered unfit for a wider audience.²⁶ In his diary, the Rotterdam merchant Ferrand Whaley Hudig used a code of signs to denote certain events and names. This was not safe enough for later generations. One of his descendants noted that as some pages were less decent, these had been destroyed accordingly.²⁷ This also shows that changing ideas about what is proper and what is not, to a large extent determine the way readers handle such texts. Also, many autobiographies and diaries begin and end abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, and that should definitely make the reader suspicious. The last example of destruction can be found in the diary of Pieter Teding van Berkhout, quoted above. He wrote: "I was busy arranging the ocean of papers left by my father, sifting the good from the bad". 28 What he did with the "bad" papers is easy to guess. No doubt these traces of destruction are only the tip of an iceberg. Eyewitnesses and perpetrators alike usually remained silent. An unusual account of such a bonfire of destruction, was recently given by the Dutch novelist J.J. Voskuil. In an interview from 1999, Voskuil tells how he personally destroyed the extensive diaries of his late friend and fellow author Bert Weijde: "Yes, he -Weijde- wanted his diaries to be destroyed. It was a large amount of paper, filling six trash bags. I tore up everything, a terrible amount of work. You feel as if you are killing a fellow human being, but he really wanted this, and I respected his wish. It took me three days. Weeks later, my arm still hurt." A disturbing detail is that Voskuil is himself the author of a successful autobiographical novel – 5033 pages in seven volumes published between 1996 and 2000 – based on his own diary. Voskuil, now in his seventies, and Bert Weijde were both members of a small group of literary authors who all based their novels on personal experiences and on the diaries they kept.²⁹

There is some hope left, however. Some intimate egodocuments have survived both their authors and their authors' descendants or their so-called friends, like those of the engineer Gerrit Adriaan Arnold Middelberg, whose last will was obviously disregarded by his descendants. On the cover of one of his notebooks is the following request: "Whosoever will find these papers after my death [...] is requested to burn them unread. I trust that my most secret inner life will not be unveiled". 30

The diary kept by the Rotterdam banker's son Jacob David Mees in 1872-1874, when he was studying in Leiden, was kept in the family archive, in spite of the fact that he made a vague suggestion somewhere in the text that it should be destroyed after his death. He died young of tuberculosis, but the family conserved his writings, possibly because he had changed his mind. When the text was published in the Egodocument series some time ago, some of his heirs thought that the omission of a century earlier had to be made good. Fortunately, this did not take place, although the manuscript is no longer accessible to the public.³¹

There is one diary which has survived the onslaught of time in an even more miraculous way. This is the diary written in the late eighteenth century by the tenyear-old boy, Otto van Eck.³² Otto died at the age of 17. Other surviving papers from the same family archive make clear that after his death Otto evolved into an example for later generations. Maybe this explains why his diary has survived: it was a "lieu de mémoire", a remembrance of a young boy's desperate struggle to be well-behaved and obedient.

This brings me back to my first observation: the moral of the story. The moral, that is, for posterity. We have seen the invisible hand in the family archive determining the content and character of the egodocuments which are preserved there. Nearly all those texts are intended as examples and models for later generations. Their selective character, however, is not only due to editing. The invisible hand could also be destructive. Documents that were of no consequence for the collective memory of a family were banned from existence. It is doubtful if any conclusions can be drawn from the number of surviving texts as regards the actual writing customs of the past. If we perceive development, for instance, in the growing number of women's diaries, do we see a change in the tradition of writing, or merely in that of preservation? If the latter is the case, maybe we ought to start, not by addressing the question why people wrote egodocuments in the past, but by answering the question why they did not throw them away.

NOTES

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Confessions tr. P.N. Furbanck (London: Campbell, 1992), 1.
- Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Gerard Schulte Nordholt, "Inventarisatie van in handschrift overgeleverde egodocumenten 1814-1914", Archievenblad 103 (1999), 18-21.
- The results of this project are summarized in: Rudolf Dekker, "Egodocuments in the Netherlands from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century", *Envisioning Self and status. Self-representation in the Low Countries 1400-1700*, ed. Erin Griffey (Hull: Association for Low Countries Studies in Great Britain and Ireland (ALCS) c/o University of Hull, Department of Dutch Studies, 2000), 255-285.
- There are some introspective Dutch egodocuments in which Rousseau is mentioned as a source of inspiration, for example: "Hoe zal het met mij aflopen". Het studentendagboek 1833-1835 van Jan Bastiaan Molewater, ed. Henk Eijssens (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), (Reeks Egodocumenten 17), 25.
- 5 Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA), Verzameling geslacht Mackay van Ophemert, 721.
- 6 Gemeente Archief Rotterdam, Verzameling H. Mees (288), 44, diary Willem van Rede (1880 1953).
- Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA), The Hague, 2.21.183.17 Inventaris van archivalia afkomstig van leden van het geslacht Nieuwenhuis, N. Domela en D.N. Nyegaard 18e en 20e eeuw inv. 40: Dagboeken van Jacob Domela Nieuwenhuis (1836-1924).
- Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA) 2.21.059 inv. 257: Dagboek van P.P.J. Elout 1842-1843, na zijn overlijden voortgezet door zijn weduwe Catharina Elout-Brest van Kempen (1807-1888), 1843-1846.
- 9 See my dissertation: Arianne Baggerman, Een lot uit de loterij. Familiebelangen en uitgeverspolitiek in de Dordtse uitgeversfirma A. Blussé en zoon (1745-1830) (Den Haag: SDU, 2000).
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