

43.

Pious and learned female bosomfriends in Holland in the eighteenth century

Maaïke Meijer

On the titlepage of *Het Land* (1788), a novel in letters about a romantic woman-friendship, is an interesting picture: a woman, on her own, dressed in easy, loose-fitting clothes, is sitting at the crackling fire, reading a book. On the table is another open book and a stack of four that lies waiting to be read. In the background a curtain which is taken up high, behind which is a chock-a-block full bookcase. In another book by Post, *Het Waare Genot des Levens* (1796), the picture is used again. The caption reads: "O die stille Abendstunden, köstlich, herrlich sind sie mir." This picture represents the type of the learned woman: the woman who knows the luxury of being alone, who can find time to read and think.(1)

In the eighteenth century learnedness is an escape for women of the higher classes and a means of self-realisation. One can perceive a modest culture of learned women in the eighteenth century, who often know each other, highly admire each other, who practise their skills together, who give each other affectionate friendship. Apart from learnedness religion plays -- with some of course more than with others -- an important part in the loving alliances between women. The lady in the picture is probably reading pious books, for Elizabeth Maria Post too writes books of a deeply felt, almost mystical religiosity.

In this paper I would like to show some aspects of those loving connections between lettered women. For the time being my conclusion is, that the affectionate friendship that was often embedded in religion, was a vital element of the oppressed role of women. With their romantic friendships women remained within the domain that was granted to them, with their learnedness they treaded upon the forbidden grounds of men. Consecutively the following points will be dealt with:

1. Learned woman-friends
2. The caricature of the "Savante"
3. The "Savante" as a piece of social fiction
4. Battle of the sexes: learnedness as the frontline
5. The women called back
6. Friendship "sanctified by Virtue".

This paper is part of a more elaborate study which will be called "The masks of patriarchy" and which is summarized in the Abstracts for the Congress Among Women, Among Men. (Congresspaper 15-12-1982)

#### 1. Learned woman-friends

In the eighteenth century it is not easy for a woman from the higher classes to become lettered and well-read (for a woman from the lower classes it is absolutely out of the question): she is not allowed to go to the Latin school or to University. As a little girl she goes to the sewing- and knitting school and then to the French school, or she is educated at home. The level is low: a bit of French, a lot of religion, a lot of needle-craft, dancing, manners, a little music, reading and writing, and with that the girl's education is more or less completed (2). If she is lucky she may learn something from enlightened and educated parents, from brothers, from self-study if her father possesses a library, or she learns from woman-friends. Older woman-friends -- but also of the same age -- can function as a shining example and as a role-model (3). The need for knowledge is closely interrelated with the friendship: friendship consists of perfecting the mind together, progressing in virtue together, correcting each other, reading together and discussing what is read. The acquiring of knowledge is of no social interest from a social point of view: in the eighteenth century women cannot exercise a profession with that knowledge. At best they can write books, but then it is not the done thing to earn money doing so (4). So the education served the only purpose that then remained: personal perfection.

The lives of Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken show a series of this kind of "learned amouressnesses". Already as a Flushing adolescent Betje adores the great Lucretia van Merken (The doll fell out of my hand, so much did my ear listen; Oh Flushing, I thought, if only you had your van Merken too!" (transl.) An example closer to home Betje finds in Petronella Haverkamp-de Timmerman, a learned widow, who becomes the more experienced friend to Betje. Petronella studies mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, she writes, she is interested in theology and brings Betje into contact with the way of thinking of the German philosopher Christiaan Wolff. Furthermore she sends her young friend to visit the adored van Merken -- whom she knows -- but in spite of Betje's repeated attempts it never comes to a friendship with Lucretia (5). The friendship with Petronella effortlessly survives the marriages of both women (6).

When Betje lives in the Beemster, after her marriage with the vicar Wolff, she forms a bosomfriendship with unmarried Anna van der Horst, shortly after 1860. Anna is of the same age and, as Betje, a writer and a philosopher. Together these

friends read the kind of romantic literature which then becomes the fashion in Europe, such as Young's Night-thoughts. Anna initiates Betje in her religious literature, Betje initiates Anna in the English and French philosophers of the Enlightenment. Together they brood over feminist ideas. From this period originates Betje's Staat der Rechtheid, a plea for women's right to education and learning. The friends feel especially united in their dislike of strict religious orthodoxy. Anna's relatives are stiflingly strait-laced and Betje supports Anna in her fight to free herself from that narrow-minded environment (7). In this period Anna van der Horst writes De lotgevallen van Ruth, a play about the biblical love between Ruth and Naomi. It seems likely that in doing so she attempted to give a pair of woman-friends the same fame as those biblical friends David and Jonathan already possessed (8). The friendship between Betje and Anna seems compatible with Betje's marriage as a matter of course. The vicar agrees to everything. The dramas which take place between the friends in 1765 are not caused because someone opposes to the passion and intimacy between the women, but because Anna's "pious" family do not allow her to associate with such a godless and latitudinarian person as Betje, who drags Anna off the ways of righteousness.

The long and touching poem Aan Mejuffer Anna van der Horst can serve as an example of Betje's experience of learned woman-friendship (9). The poem begins with a praising of Anna "My van der Horst!, who is so skilled at "the useful arts and illustrious sciences", who brings hearts to ecstasy with her music and who wins the same hearts with her beauty, who is learned but not pedantic. But Anna is not the only woman who "reads, and thinks, yes! who is mistress of wonder"(transl.). To prove that Betje points to the great female examples of the seventeenth century: Barlaeus' daughter, Tesselschade, Anna Maria van Schuurman, Katherine Lescaille and the "lovely de With". And then come the female contemporaries: "No dear Friendship (that is, with Anna) closes my eyes to others" -- and in the imagination Betje now takes her friend by the hand and takes her to Flushing, to the "silent cell" of the beloved teacher Petronella de Timmerman. Full of love De Timmerman is shown to Anna:

"'k vraag vryen toegang voor myn Anna als vriendin;  
Vergun, vergun dat w' haar bespieden,  
Terwyl zy, met den passer in de hand,  
Doorluchte proeven geeft van haar doorwrocht verstand.  
(...)  
Trè zachtjes toe, op dat uw oog al meer beschouw.  
Zaagt g'oit beminnelyker vrouw?

Zaagt g'immer ogen die meer geest, - meer ziel ontdekken.  
Verrukkende Pictuur, maalt immer uw Penceel  
De wysheid Maal die dame in uw tafreel:  
Wilt gy Geleerdheid in een minlyk licht vertonen?  
Ontleen uw schetst van haar op wie ik oog'.  
Wil, lieve Reisgenoot, die reverie verschonen  
Die my, een ogenblik, my zelf, en u onttoog!"

"I ask a free entrance for my Anna as a friend;  
Allow, allow that we watch her.  
When she, compasses in her hand,  
Gives illustrious proofs of her elaborate mind.  
(...)  
Quietly approach, to let your eye view more.  
Did ever you see a more lovable woman?  
Did ever you see eyes that disclose more soul.  
Delighting Picture, does ever your brush paint  
Wisdom? Then paint that lady in your picture:  
Do you want to show learnedness in a loving light?  
Then derive your sketch from her I am looking at.  
Please, dear companion, forgive me that daydream  
Which, for a moment, withdrew myself, and you!" (transl.)

In this final part the art of painting is addressed: if ever your brush wants to paint Wisdom, then paint the lovely De Timmerman -- and Betje is taken along in a daydream which for a moment makes her forget everything around her. This is the tone of voice which is so characteristic of relationships between learned woman-friends: the admiration for the knowledge of that woman-friend is always intertwined with admiration for her interior and exterior beauty and with declarations of how sweet she is. The journey in the imagination of Betje and Anna takes them further along the poetesses de Neufville and Van Merken, and along the French learned woman Dacier, Madame de Lambert -- a great champion of woman-friendship -- and Madame de Scudéry: Betje knows her female examples very well! The poem ends with an Ode to Friendship, which is everlasting and which makes friends find each other back after death.

In this poem Betje travels, with her new friend, through her woman's past, which at the same time she takes possession of herself and puts at Anna's feet. It shows a thorough realization of being rooted in a female tradition. Other learned ladies are admired and that admiration is mixed with love. That love is of an entirely different kind than transitory lust: it is "Divine Friendship" (10). With this thought Betje links up with a literary/philosophical/religious way of thought (in the Renaissance rediscovered with the Classics,

and in the eighteenth century wide-spread), in which friendship is valued even higher than love between man and woman (11).

De Timmerman and Van der Horst open a series of the same kind of learned friendship for Betje, which I can only mention here: Cootje Best, Maria Kops, Coosje Busken and the most important one, Aagje Deken (12). Actually, Aagje is initiated into learnedness by Betje. She (Aagje) is well-read especially within the religious area and when she meets Betje, she has already had some intimate friendships with women which were embedded in heart-felt piety (13).

When, shortly after they have met, Wolff and Deken take up living together they already approach their forties. Together they create a life-style which reminds very much of the lives of their famous English contemporaries the ladies of Llangollen, and their learned woman-friends: a substantial part of the day is always spent reading, writing, studying and corresponding. In the garden is a small thatched "hermitage", meant specifically for writing and studying, the "silent cell", which is valued by other learned women too. With all her moves to Arnhem, Noordwijk and Epe, Elizabeth Maria Post has another one of those rural "study-cells" built in her garden (14).

All of her life Betje Wolff keeps this hunger for women who are intellectually her equals. "Jewels of our sex" she proudly calls them. She also has learned friendships with a few men (Loosjes, Grave, Noordkerk) but is doubly excited if she can find the intellectual stimulus with a woman. "Oh, I am so proud of the abilities of my sex!" (transl.) are almost winged-words from her mouth.

Betje had reason to be proud, for in the eighteenth century there were quite a few learned and educated women. Apart from writers -- Belle van Zuylen, E.M. Post, Juliana de Lannoy, Margriet van Essen - van Haaften, van Merken, de Neufville, Petronella Moens and her bosom-friend Adriana van Overstraten and others -- there were linguists such as Anna Elisabeth Buma and Johanna Corleva -- the latter published *Redeneerende Spraak-kunst and Schat der Neder-duitsche wortelwoorden* (1741) -- Maria Petronella van Elter - Woesthoven practised and taught astronomy, Agnes Waeywel wrote a book on mathematics in 1717, Johanna Helena Graaft published a book on botany and before then, as early as at the end of the seventeenth century, Titia Brongersma immersed herself in archeology and history, notably in Dutch hunebeds (gallery-graves). Elisabeth van Harwarden wrote theological books (1749-1750) and Josina Carolina van Lynden taught religion under the motto: There is but one Truth, no matter whether it is told by a woman or by a man.

The same Josina published *Logica of Redeneerkunde* in 1770 and in 1775 *Kort begrip der beschouwende godgeleerdheid*. And we go on like this for some more: Anna Maria Moens, Fenna Mastenbroek, Ida Saint-Elme, Etta Palm (one of the first Dutch fighters for women's rights), Johanna Gevaerts, Johanna Wijtenbach-Gallien, who even became doctor honoris causa at the University of Marburg and De Timmerman, Wolff's beloved older friend. In short: they existed, the learned women, and often they knew each other from close-by (15).

Now, what I want to demonstrate is this: The most remarkable thing about these learned women and writers is not really their love for women -- as it can be seen in E.M. Post and her friends, in Wolff, de Timmerman, van der Horst and other relationships of Wolff's, in youth -- and later friendships of Aagje Deken's, in Mrs. van Lennep and Miss Wägeli, the inseparable governess. That kind of love between women seems completely accepted (16), and does not seem revolutionary or role-breaking in the "construction of femininity" of the time (17). This is almost in flat contradiction with our days, in which as you know obvious love between women is a kind of resistance against the constructions of femininity which are now valid. The learned, writing friends were never attacked because of their intimacy among themselves (18). They simply seem to be able to use the possibilities which were offered them within that small élite-circle, by means of different view of sexuality and the separation between the worlds of men and of women. These friendships did not transgress the conventions. What did transgress the conventions was the ladies' learnedness which could thus justifiably be called a form of resistance (19).

That which may be called women's resistance in a specific period and in a specific social group, depends on what mechanisms put these women in their subordinate positions (in that specific period and in that specific social group). Said more simply: the kind of oppression determines the kind of resistance. A brief outline of the kind of oppression of the eighteenth century woman from the higher classes runs as follows: economically and juridically she is completely dependent on father or husband (20). Often she cannot choose her own marriage-partner. She often receives a bad education and apart from such amusements as clubs and balls and such duties as endless needlework and house-keeping -- even if she remained unmarried -- she has hardly any freedom of movement. She should be beautiful. She should embody feminine grace. In religion her place in God's creation was determined as that of a lesser kind of human being, a kind of man who did not turn out right, a being which is morally, physically and

intellectually inferior (21). In the course of the eighteenth century one also hears other things about the different disposition of women, their nature which is more sensitive and more tender-hearted, her great suitability for the role of mother and educator, just because she is "different".

Within this configuration women went beyond the limits of the space allotted to them if they dared to become learned. In doing so they entered upon male territory. I shall now first go into the learnedness. Later I will come back to romantic friendship.

## 2. The caricature of the "Savante"

Despite the fact that for women practically every possibility to do something with their knowledge was cut off, they practised scholarship. As long as, in doing so, women of their own accord improved their characters, as long as they "beautified" their minds, as long as they remained womanly, wrote the occasional charming poem, did not openly show their knowledge and did not neglect their house-keeping, they did not meet with much opposition. But there were limits. Those limits had only not been clearly determined yet when the learned women as a new category became discernible to public opinion. But under pressure of that growing discernibility of an alternative way of existence for women from the higher classes, men became nervous. The aggression and uncertainty of men discharges in a fantasy caused by fear and that is the "Savante". The first weapon that is put in position against learned women is ridicule, the caricature.

Lettered France already produced a series of venomous caricatures of the learned woman in the seventeenth century. In France there was already a culture of educated women in higher classes, who entered into history as the *Précieuses*. In Holland the learned woman remained incidental to such an extent, that men could afford to praise them no end: Schuurman reaped the highest praise from such an arch-sexist as Gats. He could easily praise her: the phenomenon would not spread anyhow. But in the eighteenth century the caricature begins to catch on in Holland -- in England too by the way, with the "salons" of the *Bluestockings* (22). Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes* appears in a Dutch translation in 1713. In spectacular expostulations, in novels and on pictures she crops up: the ugly, surly virago who studies all day long. She is absent-minded, "Welt-fremd", if she is married she will burn the soup, the servants steal and the children starve. In bed

she talks about Logic and if she does not hate men, she can only appreciate them for their knowledge. It is in her learnedness that the Savante discloses her boundless stupidity. It is clear: the Savante goes beyond the limits of the female domain, of female inferiority and of female attractiveness and for doing so is punished by being locked out of the social order.

Justus van Effen deals with the "problem" of female learnedness in *De Hollandsche Spectator* in 1733-34. A letter-writer feels the need to defend herself against the accusation of being a Savante, a wiseacre or know-it-all because she reads with her friends rather than gossip and laze about, which were the usual things to do for well-bred girls with empty lives as ornaments. She knows Molière and Boileau -- who described how marital life is in a state of "war" if the wife studies -- and her letter confirms how the caricature functions as an off-putting example, as a counter-mould of a norm, which will have to be formulated for the first time here. The caricature forces every woman who wants to read to defend herself against the accusations that are implied in *De Hollandsche Spectator* (23).

In particular such male territories as logic and mathematics are taboo. *De Philanthrope* shows a husband who suffered the bad fortune of marrying a woman who was trained in logic. Now she speaks to her servants in analytical terms, reasons over every household problem with "syllogisms" and wins every marital argument. The moral of these ridiculous scenes is: we know that she has no views for which she needs logic. Male logic in this expostulation is constructed as follows: The wife is not allowed to engage herself with the world outside the household for she is too stupid for that. If she proves not to be stupid, her knowledge serves no purpose for she is not allowed to engage herself with the world because she is too stupid for that (24).

A well-liked stereotype is the savante desecrating the sexual attraction between males and females. Molière described how savantes jumped on top of a "monsieur", not because he was such an attractive man, but because he knew Greek. The cheated husband from *De Philanthrope* also complains about a lack of interest in sex. "Just imagine how pleasant it is for a man to have a wife who, at night behind the curtains, twaddles about Categories, about Predicaments, about Premisses about Consequences and such fine things". The man also eavesdrops on a disputation between his wife and her friends who are also trained in logic. "Whether a woman who possessed a beautiful bosom, would be more attractive to a man if she

showed it uncovered completely, or if she covered it with a thin diaphanous scarf" (transl.). In the then ensuing disputation, which lasts for two hours, success is of course easily gained. The expostulation ends with the even more stereotype warning "that all men should be warned against such women; and that all unmarried girls should be taught, if ever they want to please a man, they should never go to learning such scholarship, or if they already knew such affairs, they should take great heed not to show anything of it to their lovers" (25)(transl.). Up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century this caricature is invariably successful (26). Later on the genre fades, because the type of the eighteenth century learned woman is by then extinct.

### 3. The Savante as a piece of social fiction

It seems important to me to acknowledge that the figure of the savante is a social piece of fiction. She does not exist in eighteenth century reality. She is a phantom, created by men who see around them that women falsify the old idea that they are intellectually inferior. Women enter into male territory around which the barbed wire has not been put up high enough, because the situation has never presented itself before. None of the expostulations against the savante which I have found up to the present, deals with a concrete person. Never is one woman in particular exposed as such a hated savante -- and that was impossible, for the women who were learned did not answer to that phantom-image.

Although the savante is a piece of social fiction, this fiction has an extraordinarily real influence on the lives of women. An example: In 1977 the poet Baroness Juliana de Lannoy, who would not hurt a fly, was awarded the first membership of the Maatschappij der Dichtkunde in the Hague (Society for Poetry). She had a heavy heart because she was afraid that other women would consider her a "savante"(27).

Later historians, both male and female, (Hertog, Moquette, Wolzogen-Kühr, even the feminist standard-work Van Moeder op Dochter (28)) have never realised that the "savante" was a constructed image of terror and they took the caricature to be reality. This is like a historian in the year of Our Mother 2083, who would write, on the basis of present-day caricatures that in 1983 "Amsterdam was given a start by hordes of lesbian women, in purple dungarees, wandering about with the castrating-knife in their hip-pockets. These women hated men!"

But in the eighteenth century, sadly enough, the women themselves too helped create the phantom. This is from the *Almanak voor Vrouwen door Vrouwen*: "Ladies, imagine, a woman who is the "chairwoman" of a society of learned men, who is a "Profesoress", who teaches and travels, would not it be ridiculous?"(29) In their character of Cornelia Hartog (from Saartje Burgerhart) Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken create a dreary, boasting savante. In many instances in her writings almost in and out of season, Wolff distances herself from the savante. In doing so she partly defends a humane kind of learnedness and wraps it up in a theory that one-sidedness impoverishes every human being, male or female. She sometimes adds that she considers pedantry ridiculous in both sexes, so in men too, but she does not see through the social fiction. I had an association with whole- or half-hearted feminists who -- in our days -- feel the need to declare for men's media "that they are not lesbian". "I am in favour of emancipation of course, but..." and then follows a ritual kick against the shins of the radicals, to justify themselves by pointing at others who are "worse" which is an old mechanism. But in the meantime the stereotype is created and it is suggested that those caricatural "men-haters" really exist. Betje Wolff does something similar in her attacks on savantes. She distances herself from the fictional image, to justify herself and to profile as an "acceptable" learned woman. She defends her position of learned woman, over the back of her own sex.

#### 4. Battle of the sexes: learnedness as the frontline

In the eighteenth century the position of the woman seems to be strongly in motion, if we go at the large number of treatises on the nature and place of women, and the large number of farceplays of the kind of *De broekdragende Vrouw* (1722), *De Ontvoogde Vrouw* (1693) the latter being an imitation of *Klucht van Onverstant of het Vrouwen Parlement*, third reprint 1730. Those farceplays keep insisting, as usual, that the man is in charge (30). Extremely vicious about women is *De Rechtbank tegen de Ydele, Korselige ende Wispelturige Vrouwen. Wraeksucht der Weduwen: Mitsgaders der regeersuchtige Vrouwen. Geeft ook vonnis over den Lof van alle Deughdsame en Godvreesende Vrouwen, (...) door Joseph Zwetnam. Oock is hier achter by gevoeght, een t'Saemenspraeck, of de Vrouwen Menschen zijn of niet (sic)-1730.*

Less charming is also the *Corpus juris foemini, of Wethoek der vrouwen. Handelende van den oorspronck der vrouwe-regering*

onder den keizer Heliogabalus: derzelve plechtige oprichting, en daarbij gebruykte ceremonien, enz. Uit het Lat. en Hoogd. verz., en op eene luchtige trand verhandeld, door een liefhebber der vrouwen. Alkmaar, etc. 1759. This "lover of women" as he calls himself, amply discusses, with every historical proof he can think of, how disastrous it is when women rule. The first-mentioned book, *De Rechtbank*, contains the stereotype series of arguments against women, most of which can be traced back to the Middle Ages -- e.g. in *Querelle des Femmes* -- a debate from the fourteenth century -- and even back to the churchfathers: woman is wicked, she is the gate of hell, pull off the skin and all that is left is slime and mucus. See to it that she does not try to boss over you, widows and older women are of the most dangerous kind, they do not have a soul, etcetera. All of it age-old patriarchal folklore, it is the muddy stream of fear and hatred of women which flows through the entire history of the western world.

But the element which is added to it in the eighteenth century, ridiculing learnedness in women, is completely new. *De Geleerde Vrouw*, of der Jansenisten godgeleerdheid vervallen tot het spinnewiel (1731) (also known as *De pietistery in de hoepelrok* (1740), *De verstrooide Vrouw verbeterd* (1787) and once again *De geleerde Vrouw, blyspel* (1797) -- not seldom these were translated from abroad where this theme was also very popular -- these are farce-plays of a new kind. The contemporaries saw learnedness as an escape of women from the higher classes, and they themselves made the connection with the escape which took place in the lower classes at the same time; there it became discernible that a number of women escaped by dressing up as men and working as sailors, soldiers or craftsmen (31). Women should remain in their places, for see, says *De Denker* in 1766, what kind of disasters happen if they leave their places:

- "a female government is of a lesser advantage to a state (...) and the Dutch countesses Ada, Margaretha and Jacoba prove that female rule has repeatedly caused Civil Wars".

- "Brave Women are often lascivious; Semiramis, Thalestris and those females in our days who become soldiers, give proof of that".

- "Does not Anna Maria Schuurman also demonstrate that very extensive learnedness often leads women to gross errors? and should not one show the example of Mrs. Dacier to prove that learned women usually are extremely cantankerous and censorious creatures?" (32)

The hermetic web of oppression which closes around women gets torn in the eighteenth century and for the élite of women from

the higher classes that tear is situated at education and learning (33). In that sense it can be seen as (one of) the frontline(s) in the battle of the sexes in the eighteenth century.

##### 5. The women called back

In the course of the eighteenth century such magazines as De Denker, De Philanthrope, De Filosooph, De Verrezen Hippolytus, De Hollandsche Spectator, De Hollandse Patriot, De Nederlandsche Spectator and De Algemeene Spectator (34) -- magazines which were widely read within the middle classes and certainly by women too (35) -- supply not only caricatures but also, more "constructively" so, a stream of reformulations on the woman's place. Women's new learnedness is tied down, the tear in the web is mended again. In doing so small concessions are made to women. Cornelius van Engelen in De Filosooph (1766): a woman is allowed to read books which teach her, without any noticeable exertion, and which make her more sensible, without her losing her liveliness or charms", books by "good Poets (...) Ethical books (...) good Spectators, amusing Satires, moral Novels"; also "some elementary Physics" to become the more impressed with God's miraculous creation and finally Biblical and secular history. The aim of a woman's education is to make her "a pleasanter companion to her husband" and a better housewife, mother and educator. For women reading is not studying, it is merely to "beautify their minds", a useful amusement and a "pleasant way of passing time" (36) (transl.)

The female charms are a fetish in the discussion: Van Effen thinks women should keep their hands off physics, mathematics and astronomy, but that knowledge of "the true and unshakeable grounds of Religion and Moral Philosophy, of honourable virtue" does not infringe their female grace (37)(transl.). The bare bones of beauty and sensitivity are thrown to the women as a consolation-prize for her physical and intellectual inferiority. In the world she should remain out of sight. Did not even Pericles say to the women of Athens: "attempt for no other virtues than for those which are of your sex; follow modesty, which is natural to you, and believe that the biggest praise you can earn lies in that neither good nor bad is spoken of you". The studious young girl Keetje, who writes a letter to Mr. Denker asking if she may not study the "male virtues", is told by Denker how a man is stronger, more courageous and nearer perfection than a woman. He was created

to God's image:"so it appears that they are a man's duties, to rule the republic with wisdom, to enlighten Man with Scholarship, and to defend the country with braveness.(...) Women on the other hand, with their lesser strength body, and their less sublime soul, are for those reasons less able to work for the common benefit of the republic; it is best that they confine themselves to the ruling of their households, the love for their husbands, the education of their children and the well-being of their servants". The female virtues are "those silent virtues, which become even more charming, when they are covered with the veil of modesty and that is why such an orator as Pericles rightfully says: "that for women the biggest praise lies in that neither good nor bad is spoken of them": to know that the general public does not speak of her; for if women work only for the specific happiness of their husbands and families, then neither can they be praised by the general public" (39).

Thus women are pushed away: intimidated on the one hand, flooded with praise for their beautiful feminine characters, they are manoeuvred away from the study to the drawing-room, from the republic to the family, from public reputation to the "silent virtues", from scholarship to simple little moral books, from thinking to sensitivity.

But in this somber men's choir we also hear two women's voices: Betje Wolff and Elisabeth Maria Post too consign women back to the feminine domain, which is described so circumstantially and appreciated for the first time in the eighteenth century. Wolff, together with Deken increasingly develops into a national educator of women and formulates, along with the men, the task of the woman as a mother (40). And when Post has a wiser womanfriend teach the younger one about feminine reading-matter, her recommendations would not be unbecoming in the company of the gentlemen of De Denker and De Filosooph (41).

More progressive contemporaries took those new ideas about "suitable" tuition for women and a "suitable" education to be a kind of emancipation, to be progressive. We, in the twentieth century, can see that with these eighteenth century ideas about their own female domain a new prison created for women, against which feminists would have to revolt again some hundred years later. The formulation of the right to tuition and education, in as far as it would make a woman better mother, wife and educator, created a new hermetic web of oppression from which the escape through learnedness was cut off for good.

It seems to me that there are a lot of indications that, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a female domain slowly configurates, and that women have accepted that world of women, which was provided with weight and moral nobleness, that they would profit from it. The process shows a suggestive parallels with the process that Nancy Cott describes in *Bonds of Womanhood* (42).

#### 6. Friendship "sanctified by Virtue"

But now back to the bosomfriendships of the learned women. The fact that love between women was not a frontline in the battle of the sexes, does not render it less interesting. At The Congress I would like to tell something about Elisabeth Maria Post, about whom I can only say a little something right now. Post's novel *Het Land* represents a kind of love between women which could very well go together with the locking up of women in their private domain, in morals and in religion. In that confinement (for that is what their world looks like to us) women found a kind of fulfillment. Perhaps striving after moral perfection, with the help of friendship, supplied them with a large sense of self-esteem, perhaps even with a sense of moral superiority (43).

*Het Land* consists of letters from two bosomfriends, Eufrozyne, who lives in the city, and Emilia who lives in the country. The very first letter is straight to the point:

"I still bless, my dear Emilia, the happy moment that so coincidentally brought me to you -- and made me know the most sensitive of hearts. The friendship you offered me is an inestimable treasure to me. -- Again and again, I feel with silent joy, my happiness -- Your image is before my eyes constantly. When I wake up in the morning my first thought is: Emilia! And then I thank Providence, which made me find in you a dear companion on the path of life" (44)

For all emotional needs the friends find satisfaction with each other. A woman-friend can fill the heart of a woman completely. Already in the first letter the friendship -- with a reference to Gellerts' *Ode aan de Vriendschap* -- is amply praised as being of a higher kind, as a way of triumphing over "dull matter". Friendship arises from a harmony of souls, and is fed by virtue and religion. Friendship grows need and "continues in the other world" -- which accounts for the great desire of Romantic friends to be buried together (45). The aim of this relationship is to stimulate each other's happiness by way of "improving our minds", to become thus

already here on earth, more or less heavenly. Emilia is the wise one -- she lives in the country, closer to nature -- who educates the city-girl Eufrozyne. "Piety" she writes to Eufrozyne, "equally dear to both of us will strengthen our bond and will make us try to outdistance one another on the path of virtue!" The further entanglements of this ladies' love and Post's personal life I will keep for later.

The many theoretical digressions on friendship in *Het Land* sounds almost identical in other places in Dutch and European literature (46). There are many literary relationships: Post knew the *Freundschaftliche Frauenzimmerbriefe* of Sophie von Laroche. There are quite a few similarities with the love-friendships between Emilia and Friederike in the novel-in-letters *Karl von Burgheim* by Miller (47). *Het Land* is almost the store-room for ideas on friendship particularly for the sensitive German Enlightenment (48). I also want to find out what was the spreading and the influence of the Dutch translation of *Millennium Hall*, another country-idyll, and the vade mecum of the Romantic Friendship (49), which appeared in 1765 as *De Beminnelykheid der Deugd in 't Algemeen, en der mensch-lievendheid in 't byzonder: vertoond in de samenleving van eenige juffrouwen, op eene vermaaklyke Landhoeve, genoemd Millennium hof.*

The romantic friendship in the writings of Post is, similar to friendship in Aagje Deken's early writings, embedded in religion. Myriam Everard is right in her article on the youth-friendships of Aagje Deken, when she describes these friendships as a spiritual tie, despite the physical language. In an era when religion determined life to such a great extent, it is not to be expected that such an important relationship as friendship would conduct itself outside religious values. On the other hand I do believe that theory and practice did not always coincide -- from letters of Betje Wolff's it is clear that there was kissing, cuddling, amorous walks hand in hand, pressing to bosoms and sleeping together (Deken "sleeps with Troostje", Wolff sleeps with Hansje Grave and dotes on her bed-fellow (50). Perhaps these activities do not fall within the category of "lust", but they are extremely worldly. I believe that the form of the friendship did not only depend on ideas on friendship in common, but also on individual temper and zest for life. Post was probably far more "spiritual" and unphysical than Betje Wolff.

Everard also points out to the defense of bosomfriendships, which Aagje gives in *Stichtelijke Gedichten*, a defense which suggests that these friendships were not quite unproblematical and acceptable, as Faderman suggests (for instance: "No cold

soul can contain such a love/She is cowardly, low and disgusting in her eyes" and "they who dare scoff at Friendship"). For this interesting problem I have the following suggestions: I believe that Aagje is alone in these defences. Post never defends Romantic woman-friendships against attacks from the outside. Aagje Deken however, was of humbler descent and knew the moral of the lower middle-classes, craftsmen and servants. Common people knew love only as sexuality between man and woman as a "lower passion". If women from the common people had sexual relationships, then these fell within the category of the lower passions and indeed examples of convictions are known (51). Aagje Deken is in between those two worlds: she knows what common people think about sexuality, but she also knows the literary/religious complex of ideas around Friendship -- and as such friendship is higher, spiritual, it is very much an elite-ideal, attainable only for people with noble powers of the soul. With her defense Aagje emphatically rallies round the banner of the religious upper-class ideal: her friendship is not of the common kind. Aagje enters into that dialogue and this defense, because, as a figure in between two classes, she knew the other point of view. The case seems comparable to that of the Scottish boarding-school keepers described by Faderman (52), whose noble friendship had to be defended against low accusations too: there we also find a confrontation of two different valuations of friendship.