



Short notice

A Tale of Images and Words: The Panpoëticon Batavûm and the Failed Attempt to Publish a History of Dutch Literature

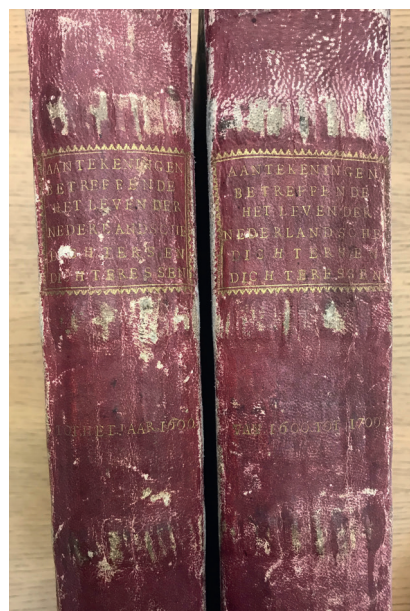
• LIEKE VAN DEINSEN* •

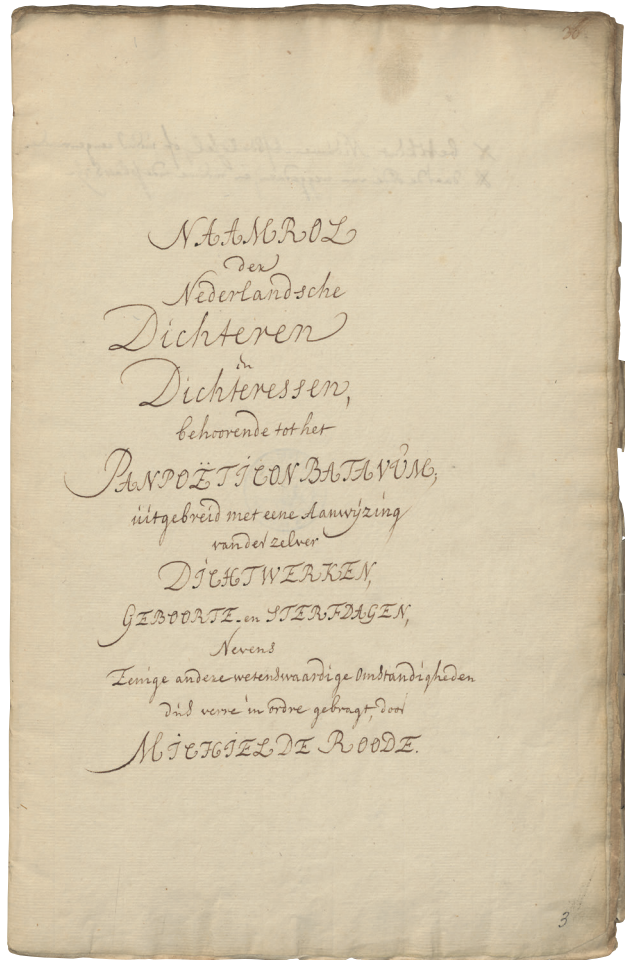
Two voluminous eighteenth-century manuscripts and an accompanying notebook were recently discovered in the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library's collection in Antwerp. They shed a unique light on the approach to the literary past in that period.¹ Although these three volumes were acquired in 1868, they had escaped the attention of historians of literature until now.² The title on the spine tells us that the manuscripts are *Aantekeningen betreffende het leven der Nederlandsche Dichters en Dichtersessen* (Notes Concerning the Lives of Dutch Poets) (fig. 2). The first volume contains biographical sketches of Dutch writers, scholars and other key cultural figures born before 1600 in chronological order. The second deals with authors born between 1600 and 1700.³ The 286 biographies cover more than four centuries of Dutch literary and cultural history: from the thirteenth-century historian Melis Stoke to the Amsterdam-born professor of rhetoric Jacques Philippe d'Orville (1696-1751). The entries always follow the same format with the name and – if known – the years of the birth and death of the author in question, but the biographical sketches differ considerably in scope and content.

< Fig. 1
JAN MAURITS
QUINKHARD,
*Double Portrait of
Michiel de Roode
and Jan Punt Sitting
in front of the
Panpoëticon Batavûm
with a Miniature
Portrait of Joost
van den Vondel*, 1738.
Oil on canvas,
69.7 x 59.6 cm.
Private collection.
Photograph:
RKO – Netherlands
Institute for Art
History, image no.
0000279722.

> Fig. 2
Vols. 1 and 2 of
Michiel de Roode,
*Aantekeningen
betreffende het
leven der Neder-
landsche Dichters en
Dichtersessen*, 1732-44.
Paper, 330 x 200 mm,
247 and 302 folios
respectively.
Antwerp, Hendrik
Conscience
Heritage Library,
inv. nos. B 12610-1
and 2.

The accompanying notebook reveals that these rather dissimilar biographies and notes were not created by chance, but were written as explanatory notes to an eighteenth-century collection of portraits of literary and intellectual figures from the Low Countries, better known as the Panpoëticon Batavûm (fig. 3).⁴ The manuscripts were compiled by their second owner, the Amsterdam broker Michiel de Roode (1685-1771) (fig. 1).





They are an important piece of the puzzle in the history of this presently fragmented collection: the Rijksmuseum now holds eighty-one of the more than 350 original portraits. The texts contain a treasure trove of previously unknown information about the dates, attributions and creation of the portraits. Was a portrait, for example, painted *ad vivum* – from life – or did the artist base it on an existing example, and – if so – which? The manuscripts also shed a unique light on the functioning of the collection as a whole and – more generally – on the strong interaction between material and literary culture in the eighteenth-century Republic.

Culture in Order

Collecting was fashionable in early modern times. Stones, fossils, shells, insects, stuffed animals and all kinds of monstrosities were housed, arranged and exhibited in cabinets usually made of costly materials. These meticulously classified *naturalia* collections – which increasingly took on a semi-public character – were designed to give visitors an understanding of the wonders of God's creation.⁵ At the end of the seventeenth century, collectors also began to create classification models that proved useful for inherently cultural collections: while sets of insect specimens generated insight into the natural metamorphosis of larvae into

Fig. 3
Vol. 3 of Michiel de Roode, *Aanteekeningen betreffende het leven der Nederlandsche Dichters en Dichteressen*, 1732-44. Paper, 330 x 200 mm, 20 folios. Antwerp, Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library, inv. no. B 12610-3.



butterflies, chronologically ordered collections of inanimate objects such as coins, medals and books could be used to trace the evolution of culture.⁶ Around 1700, prompted by the growing ambition to create a taxonomy of the cultural past, the Amsterdam painter Arnoud van Halen (1673-1732) embarked on a unique project: he began to make a collection of the likenesses of prominent Dutch writers on the basis of existing prints and paintings (fig. 4). He painted their portraits on small oval supports of uniform size. Around 1719, in order to house the rapidly growing collection in a fitting manner, Van Halen commissioned the architect Simon Schijnvoet (1652-1727)

to design a wooden collector's cabinet. His choice of Schijnvoet shows how much Van Halen positioned his project in line with the contemporary collecting fashion and the fundamental interaction between art and science that underpinned it. Schijnvoet himself was an active collector and the owner of at least four cabinets of art and rarities; he also actively strove to bring the collections of his contemporaries to public notice.⁷ He was closely involved, for example, in preparing various descriptions of collections for publication, such as *D'Amboinsche Rariteitenkamer* by Georg Everhard Rumphius (1627-1702), and he made a contribution to the posthumous publications of the work of

Fig. 4
ARNOUD VAN HALEN
(copy after
CHRISTOFFEL
LUBIENITZKI),
*Portrait of
Arnoud van Halen:
Painter, Engraver,
Poet and Collector in
Amsterdam, 1725-32.*
Oil on copper,
14.5 x 12.5 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. SK-A-1738;
D. Franken Bequest,
Le Vésinet.

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717). In imitation of popular coin and medal cabinets, he incorporated dozens of flat drawers in the cabinet he designed for Van Halen. Each drawer had room for eleven portraits, chronologically arranged (fig. 5). This allowed viewers to always have access to an episode from the Dutch history of literature in the cabinet. This was the key idea behind Van Halen's initiative: to generate insight into the evolution of Dutch academic culture.

It soon became obvious that Van Halen's project surpassed the level of private interest and appealed to a more broadly supported desire to chart the Dutch literary past. While many early modern collections were broken up or absorbed into other collections, the Panpoëticon Batavûm stayed together throughout the eighteenth century. The cabinet passed into the hands of other art lovers, who added new portraits or replaced existing examples with better likenesses. These additions and changes were always meticulously

documented in the manuscripts. The collection reached its highpoint at the end of the eighteenth century in the assembly hall of the Leiden poets' society *Kunst Wordt Door Arbeid Verkreegen* (art is achieved through labour). It was there that the Panpoëticon Batavûm played a central role during the society's meetings and the collection inspired the members to develop various initiatives to further explore the literary past. What began as an individual plan grew into a full-blown attempt to chart the evolution of Dutch literary culture.

A History in Images and Words

Besides a material dimension, the collection had a strong textual side to it. Many of the enthusiasts who visited the Panpoëticon Batavûm over the years were inspired to write poems praising the collection.⁸ Soon after the completion of the wooden cabinet, and in all probability at the insistence of the founder Van Halen, a voluminous publication about the Panpoëticon

Fig. 5
Reconstruction
of the drawers and
the open cabinet
door in 1738.
Computer
visualization (2016)
by Lieke van Deinsen
and Timothy
De Paepe.



Fig. 6
 JAN GOEREE,
 Engraved title page
 of Lambert Bidloo's
Panpoëticon
Batavûm, 1720.
 Amsterdam,
 Rijksmuseum,
 Research Library,
 318 c 17.



Batavûm appeared. In 1720, the Amsterdam apothecary Lambert Bidloo (1637-1724) published an ode running to almost three hundred pages in which he gave readers a detailed report of his acquaintance with Van Halen's collection (fig. 6). He discoursed upon the portraits in the cabinet one by one and gave his imagination free rein.⁹ It was from reflections like these, in which the individual objects were linked together in a meaningful chain,

that the collection derived its value; in a more general sense they contained the nucleus of the process of building knowledge that was inherent in early modern collections. 'It was,' as the historian of science Lorraine Daston put it about the functioning of early modern collectors' cabinets in general, 'not the objects themselves but rather the responses they were intended to evoke that impressed the contents of the cabinet with a certain unity.'¹⁰



Het Pauselijk kabinet

De afbeeldingen hier vertegenwoordigen de pausen van Rome die de geschiedenis van de kerk en de wereld hebben veranderd. Het kabinet is vernoemd naar de 12 pausen die de kerk in de 17e eeuw hebben geleid. Het kabinet is vernoemd naar de 12 pausen die de kerk in de 17e eeuw hebben geleid.

The Papal cabinet

The portraits here represent popes from Rome covering the papacy during a significant period of church history. The cabinet is named after the 12 popes who led the church in the 17th century.

Kabinet de pausen

De afbeeldingen hier vertegenwoordigen de pausen van Rome die de geschiedenis van de kerk en de wereld hebben veranderd. Het kabinet is vernoemd naar de 12 pausen die de kerk in de 17e eeuw hebben geleid.

Kabinet van pausen

The portraits here represent popes from Rome covering the papacy during a significant period of church history. The cabinet is named after the 12 popes who led the church in the 17th century.

Frans Groenewald (1608-1702),
architectuurhistoricus, geograaf en dichter
1608-1702

Adriaen Pieterz van de Venne (1608-1682),
schrijver en dichter
1608-1682

Corneille van der Poel (1707-1819),
historicus en dichter
1707-1819

Frans Groenewald (1608-1702),
historicus, genealoog en dichter
1608-1702

Adriaen Pieterz van de Venne (1608-1682),
schrijver en dichter
1608-1682

Corneille van der Poel (1707-1819),
historicus en dichter
1707-1819

< Fig. 7

Photograph of shelf in current layout in the Rijksmuseum; the portraits are not placed in the original, chronological order.

In order to stimulate and direct this process of attribution of meaning, early modern collectors themselves also engaged in exegesis. Many of them published catalogues of their collections, and prominent collectors like Levinius Vincent (1658-1727) and Joachim Oudaen (1628-1692) also marketed printed companions to their collections; others, like Schijnvoet and (in all probability) Van Halen, asked writers among their friends to take on the task as guides and devote publications to their collections.¹¹ It was the interaction between these physical and textual dimensions – between the things and the words – that gave a collection its meaning.¹²

Whereas Bidloo's ode to the Panpoëticon Batavûm can still be regarded in many respects as the private account of the visit of a notorious bookworm, De Roode went a step further in his endeavour to provide the collection with a systematic textual commentary.¹³ Soon after he acquired the cabinet in 1732, and possibly inspired by the separate notes Van Halen had already written, he embarked on the meticulous compilation of biographical and bibliographical information about the authors in the portraits and their (most notable) works. With great care, he compiled his entries – which form the core of the manuscripts in the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library – from scraps of information in circulation about the different authors, usually in print, supplemented with information that he was sent, not seldom by the descendants of the authors in question. This tells us that De Roode ultimately intended to have his work published: he regularly included references to fragments of text – possibly as instructions for a future compositor – which he wanted to insert into the final version of his descriptions. However, for unknown reasons, De Roode never managed to publish the fruits of this hard work.

His meticulously compiled manuscripts were stored in the bottom drawer of the cabinet, where they could be consulted by visitors during their study of the individual portraits and the relationships between them.

This did not mean, however, that the publication plans were shelved. Soon after the Panpoëticon Batavûm had passed to *Kunst Wordt Door Arbeid Verkreegen* in 1772, the society's board revealed plans to 'publish a complete Work, encompassing the Lives of the most prominent Poets and Poetesses of our Fatherland', based on De Roode's manuscripts.¹⁴ His work was supplemented in various places – probably by Cornelis Heyligert (1743-1803), the society's secretary. An unfinished transcript of De Roode's manuscripts, which suggests there may well have been plans for publication, probably also stems from this time; it is now lost.¹⁵ The society's board also staged various competitions in which they asked for definitive biographical sketches that could serve as supplements and called on the members of the society to share their thoughts with them about the required elements of the ideal writer's biography.¹⁶ Despite the lofty ambitions and energetic start, however, it proved difficult to decide on the specific form of the publication – for instance how to deal with the various unfinished classifications in the notebook that accompanied the manuscripts. The main sticking point as far as the society's board was concerned appears to have been whether it should follow the chronological history of literature as shown in the Panpoëticon and described by De Roode, or publish a reference book with entries in alphabetical order. Decades later it had still not come up with a satisfactory answer to this question. Once again, the publication failed to materialize and at the same time it began to become clear that the way the cabinet had been put together no longer met the requirements.

A Parting of the Ways: From Collector's Cabinet to Library

In 1809, when the board of the by then penniless *Kunst Wordt Door Arbeid Verkreegen* offered their star possession to Louis Bonaparte for the new Royal Museum – the forerunner of the present Rijksmuseum – the King of the Netherlands said no on the advice of the museum's new director of collections, C.S. Roos (1754-1820). Aside from the 'very mediocre' quality of the individual portraits – 'awful pictures' as Roos disparagingly described them – the value of the collection as a whole also no longer proved to be self-evident. Roos refused to purchase it 'only because they are all the same size and because they just fit into the drawers in a cabinet and can be locked away'.¹⁷ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the way the literary past had been approached a century before seemed hopelessly old-fashioned.

The rejection decided the fate of the collection. It remained together for some decades until it fell into the hands of an art dealer called Samson in 1849. Motivated by the pursuit of profit, he sold off the collection bit by bit. As a result, the portraits ended up in art collections throughout Europe. The manuscripts De Roode had so carefully compiled in order to gain greater understanding of the collection were separated from the portraits. In 1868 they surfaced in Brussels at a sale of a part of the book and manuscript collection of the eminent Belgian Duke Engelbert Augustus of Arenberg (1824-1875), where they were purchased for eleven Belgian Francs by the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library.¹⁸ This is how they found their way into a place that was then reserved for the study of the literary past: the library.

NOTES

* With thanks to Steven Van Impe and Ton van Strien. This research was supported by NWO Rubicon grant no. 019.1735G.017.

- 1 Antwerp, Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library, inv. no. B 12610 1 to 3. For a detailed bibliographical description see Amédée Dermul, *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de la ville d'Anvers, Gembloux/Paris 1939*, pp. 63-64.
- 2 They were added to the inventory books on 18 July 1886. *Stamboek Hendrik Conscience Erfgoedbibliotheek, dl. 2: 11.714-23.419*, no. 13458.
- 3 In all probability there was a third volume, devoted to poets born after 1700. In any event entries were made for it. Although the second volume stops at folio 356, the index continues to folio 374, the biography of the Amsterdam playwright Anthony Hartsen (1719-1782).
- 4 For a detailed history and reconstruction of the collection see Lieke van Deinsen, *The Panpoëticon Batavum: The Portrait of the Author as a Celebrity*, Amsterdam 2016.
- 5 Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1550-1750*, New York 1998. For the Dutch context,

see Eleonora Bergvelt and Renée Kistemaker (eds.), *De wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735*, Zwolle 1997.

- 6 Cf. Barbara Benedict, 'Reading Collections: The Literary Discourse of Eighteenth-Century Libraries', in Ina Ferris and Paul Keen (eds.), *Bookish Histories. Books, Literature, and Commercial Modernity, 1700-1900*, Norfolk 2009, pp. 169-95; Lieke van Deinsen, *Litteraire erflaters. Canonvorming in tijden van culturele crisis*, Hilversum 2017, pp. 65-109. In early modern times there was in any case no question of a strict distinction between nature and culture.
- 7 For the collection practices of Simon Schijnvoet, see Bert van de Roemer, *De geschikte natuur. Theorieën over natuur en kunst in de verzameling van zeldzaamheden van Simon Schijnvoet (1652-1727)*, Amsterdam 2005 (unpublished PhD thesis).
- 8 Many of these poems were collected and published in *Arnoud van Halen's Panpoëticon Batavum verheerlijkt*, Leiden 1773.
- 9 For Bidloo, see also Ton van Strien, 'De schatkist. Lambert Bidloo's Panpoëticon Batavum', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 130 (2014), no. 3,

- pp. 236-60; Lieke van Deinsen and Ton van Strien, 'Gebabbel van een bevoegen lezer. Lambert Bidloos verkenning van vergeten schrijvers', *Vooy's* 35 (2017), no. 1, pp. 133-44.
- 10 Lorraine Daston, 'The Factual Sensibility', *Isis* 79 (1988), no. 3, p. 458. For a theoretical perspective cf. also Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 97-115.
- 11 Respectively: Levinus Vincent, *Wonder-tooneel der Nature, Geopent in eene korte beschryvinge der hoofddeelen van de byzondere zeldzaamheden daar in begrepen; in orde gebragt en bewaart door Levinus Vincent*, Amsterdam 1706; Joachim Oudaan, *Roomsche mogentheid, in gezag en staatbekleeding der oude keyzeren*, Amsterdam 1664; Abraham Bogaert, *S. Schynvoets muntkabinet der Roomsche keizers en keizerinnen*, Amsterdam 1695.
- 12 Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*, London 1994, p. 65; Eric Jorink, *Het 'Boeck der Natuere'. Nederlandse geleerden en de wonderen van Gods schepping 1575-1715*, Leiden 2005, esp. chapter 5.
- 13 Lambert Bidloo, *Panpoëticon Batavum, kabinet waar in de afbeeldingen van voornaame Nederlandsche dichteren, versameld ... door Arnoud van Halen, en onder ... aanmerkingen, over de Hollandsche rym-konst, geopend*, Amsterdam 1720.
- 14 'een volledig Werk, behelzende de Levensbeschrijvingen der voornaemste Dichteren en Dichteressen van ons Vaderland ... in het licht te geeven', *Arnoud van Halen's Panpoëticon Batavûm verheerlijkt*, Leiden 1773, p. xxv.
- 15 Cf. *Catalogue de livres anciens, rares et curieux, provenant du cabinet de Mr. N ...*, Fr.-J. Olivier, 6-9 July, Brussels 1868, inv. no. 1111bis (annotated copy KBR, Brussels, 3639 R 140/11).
- 16 Jan Jacob Verheul, *Prijzverhandeling over de vereichten in eene levensbeschrijving der dichteren, uitgegeeven door het genootschap: Kunst wordt door arbeid verkreegen*, Leiden 1790.
- 17 'alleenlijk omdat dezelve van één grootte zijn en omdat ze in Laadjes in een Kabinetje netjes passen en weggesloten kunnen worden'. Letter from C.S. Roos to the Director General of the Wetenschappen en Kunsten (sciences and arts). J. Meerman dated 15 August 1809. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Archives, *kopieboeken van uitgaande stukken*, 1809-10, pp. [5-6].
- 18 *Catalogue* 1868 (note 15). With regard to the identification of the anonymous 'Mr. N' as the Duke of Arenberg, see J. Deschamp, 'Olivier, Franciscus Johannes, antiquaar, veilinghouder en uitgever', in J. Duverger et al. (ed.), *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, Brussels 1964, vol. 10, pp. 483-91. Cf. also the letter from C.P. Serrure to Charles de Brou, the duke's librarian, dated 23 June 1868: 'Lors de mon dernier voyage à Bruxelles, j'ai vu chez M. Olivier les livres destinés à la vente du 6 juillet prochain. Je ne lui en ai rien dit – mais j'ai vu immédiatement que cela provenait de l'Hôtel d'Arenberg' (During my last trip to Brussels I saw the books that Mr Olivier was going to sell on 6 July. I said nothing to him – but I immediately saw that they had come from the Arenberg House). With thanks to Pierre Delsaerd who alerted me to this letter and who together with Elly Cockx-Indestege is preparing a monograph about the *Collection spéciale* of the Duke of Arenberg.