



## Short Notice

# The Face of the Female Voltaire: Nicolaas Verkolje's Portrait of Christina Leonora de Neufville (1713-1781)

• LIEKE VAN DEINSEN\* •

An eighteenth-century grisaille was recently discovered in the Universalmuseum Joanneum in Graz (fig. 1). It is a portrait of a fashionably dressed woman in her study. She is portrayed writing: holding her pen gracefully between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand, she glances pensively over her left shoulder. The almost completely worn inscription on the back reveals the sitter's name and the year of her birth. It proves to be what is probably the only portrait of the eighteenth-century Amsterdam-born poet and philosopher Christina Leonora de Neufville (1713-1781). We do not know how De Neufville's portrait found its way to Graz. A relatively new inventory number on the back ('Inventar Nr. 275') suggests that the portrait was only listed as part of the museum's collection in the nineteen-sixties. However, on the basis of the portrait's characteristics – the dimensions, the choice of material and the gilded metal frame in the shape of a laurel wreath – it is evident that the miniature was once in an eighteenth-century collection of portraits of learned and literary figures from the Low Countries, better known as the Panpoëticon Batavûm. The Rijksmuseum currently owns eighty-one of the more than 350 original miniatures made for this collection.

< Fig. 1  
NICOLAAS VERKOLJE,  
*Portrait of Christina  
Leonora de Neufville*,  
1742-43.  
Oil on copper,  
11 x 9.5 cm.  
Graz, Universal-  
museum Joanneum,  
Alte Galerie,  
inv. no. AG 275.

### The Panpoëticon Batavûm

The Panpoëticon Batavûm, which roughly translates as 'All the Dutch Poets', was an eighteenth-century collection of portraits of authors.<sup>1</sup> The idea for the collection came from the Amsterdam painter and poet Arnoud van Halen (1673-1732) around 1700. He painted the portraits of poets, scholars and other cultured members of society on oval metal supports measuring around 11 x 9.5 cm. Each portrait had a gilded frame in the shape of a laurel wreath, the symbol of poetic homage. A cartouche at the bottom provided space for a strip of parchment bearing the writer's name. Van Halen had a wooden cabinet designed to house the rapidly growing collection in a fitting manner (fig. 2). In imitation of the popular collector's cabinets, it had a large number of flat drawers. Each drawer held eleven portraits, arranged chronologically, so that visitors could always take an episode from Dutch literary or intellectual history out of the cabinet.

Van Halen's initiative caught on. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the collection passed into the hands of literature lovers who each added new portraits to the collection or replaced examples with better likenesses. At its height, when the Panpoëticon was kept in the meeting room of the Leiden art society *Kunst*

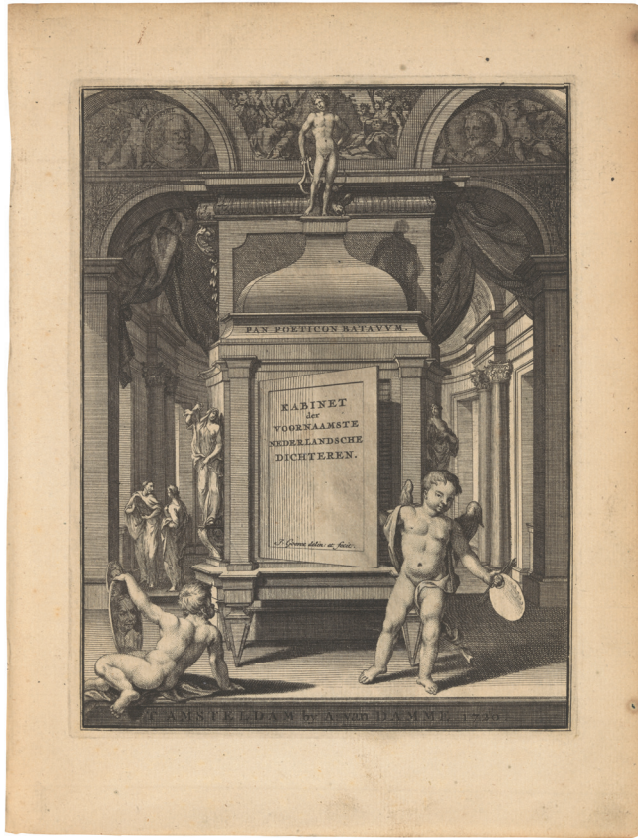


Fig. 2

JAN GOEREE,  
Engraved Title Page  
of Lambert Bidloo's  
*Panpoëticon*  
*Batavum*, 1720.  
Engraving.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum  
Research Library,  
318 c 17.

*wordt door Arbeid Verkregen* (Art is Achieved through Labour; fig. 3), this tangible canon of Dutch literature contained portraits of at least 336 different authors. Some of them were even honoured with two portraits. The Panpoëticon was a literary crowd-puller throughout the eighteenth century. Hundreds of literature lovers, from the Netherlands and abroad, visited it. Many of them described their experiences in odes to the collection as a whole or to specific portraits.

### Women in the Panpoëticon

It was above all the portraits of female writers and poets that attracted the attention of contemporary poets. From its foundation, the Panpoëticon had to provide an *inclusive* overview of the literary and cultural figures in the Low Countries. From the outset a place

was reserved for women. Van Halen's efforts to include portraits of female authors in the Panpoëticon presented him with a challenge, however: the painter, who worked exclusively from existing images, was confronted with the poor availability of example portraits of female authors. Despite the huge rise in popularity, which authors' portraits – usually engraved – had experienced since the second half of the seventeenth century, there were very few images of female authors in circulation. Publishing portraits proved a stumbling block in female writers' public self-display: if public speaking and writing were already considered as challenges to the prescriptive definition of modest female behaviour, printing a picture of yourself for sale seemed all the more scandalous. Very few women writers



Fig. 3

PAULUS CONSTANTIJN  
LA FARGUE, *The  
Meeting Room of  
the Society Kunst  
wordt door Arbeid  
Verkregen*, 1774.  
Oil on canvas,  
72 x 87.5 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. SK-C-1775.  
On loan from Museum  
De Lakenhal, Leiden.

had portraits printed during their lifetimes. Among them was the poet Sibylla van Griethuysen (1621-1699), whose painted portrait is the only one of a woman in the Rijksmuseum's Panoëticon collection (fig. 4). If there was no example available, but Van Halen nevertheless felt that a female poet deserved a place in the cabinet, he occasionally changed his usual approach. Instead of a portrait he painted a memorial, probably an epitaph, in memory of the poet.<sup>2</sup> This was the case for Anna (1584-1651) and Maria Tesselschade Roemer Visscher (1594-1649). In the end at least eighteen female writers were given a place in the cabinet. The scholarly Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678) was even painted twice (figs. 5, 6).

Fig. 4

ARNOUD VAN HALEN  
(after a print by  
JACOB VAN MEURS),  
*Portrait of Sibylle  
van Griethuysen*,  
1700-32.  
Oil on tin, 11 x 9.5 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. SK-A-4591.





Fig. 5

ARNOUD VAN  
HALEN, *Portrait of  
Anna Maria van  
Schurman*, 1700-19.  
Oil on tin, 11 x 9.5 cm.  
Utrecht, Centraal  
Museum, inv. no. 1538.



Fig. 6

JAN MAURITS  
QUINKHARD,  
*Portrait of Anna  
Maria van Schurman*,  
c. 1735.  
Oil on copper,  
11 x 9.5 cm.  
Utrecht, Centraal  
Museum,  
inv. no. 2484.

### The Female Voltaire

De Neufville's portrait was placed in the cabinet around 1742-43 by the second owner of the Panpoëticon Batavum, the Amsterdam broker Michiel de Roode (1685-1771). Unlike Van Halen, De Roode was not a painter, but he did commission prominent portrait painters in the Republic to make miniatures (fig. 7). For the portrait of De Neufville, he approached Nicolaas Verkolje (1673-1746).<sup>3</sup> Altogether, Verkolje made four portraits for the Panpoëticon. As well as De Neufville he painted Reyer Anslø (1626-1669), Johannes Brandt (1660-1708) and Romein de Hooghe (c. 1645-1708). De Neufville's portrait is an exception. Instead of basing his portrait on an existing picture of the poet, Verkolje portrayed her from life. As such it reflects the shift in focus the Panpoëticon underwent after the death of its founder: whereas Van Halen chiefly painted the faces of cultural heavyweights of the Golden Age based on existing examples, De Roode also added contemporary poets to the literary canon that had been brought together in the Panpoëticon. Many of these poets – like De Neufville – did not yet have a portrait in circulation. We do not

know why De Roode, who usually commissioned Jan Maurits Quinkhard (1688-1772), asked Verkolje to portray De Neufville; he may have been a friend of the family. Verkolje had previously designed a label for the textile business run by David and Daniel de Neufville, two other scions of the extensive family of merchants.<sup>4</sup>

It was De Neufville's recently acquired fame on the publication of her *Bespiegelingen voorgesteld in dichtkundige brieven* (1741) that prompted an invitation to sit for a portrait in the Panpoëticon Batavum. Soon after she made her literary debut with a translation of Pierre de Morand's *Childeric* (1736, translation 1738) she ventured on a collection of six philosophical letters in rhyme. The first three were adaptations of Voltaire's essay *Discours en vers sur l'homme* (1738).<sup>5</sup> She set out her own philosophical views in the others.<sup>6</sup> Her *Bespiegelingen* would make De Neufville famous. In two poems written on the occasion of her addition to the cabinet, Pieter Boddaert (1694-1760), a Middelburg lawyer, wrote of De Neufville's growing reputation.<sup>7</sup> His 'Op de Afbeelding der weledele jonkvrouwe Christina Leonora de Neufville, geschilderd door den Heer

Verkolje' for the most part follows a traditional portrait poem for a female author. Boddaert begins by praising her appearance and female beauty, but soon arrives at the reason for her literary fame, that is her artistic talent and intellectual ability:

This elegant image of a maid, even  
more beautiful in life,  
Shows us clever De Neufville on the  
panel.  
What lustre will she not bring to the  
Pan Poëticum?  
A poet, gifted with so much skill and  
intellect  
That she delights ear and heart of those  
who read her poetry,  
Which will cause her noble name to live  
for eternity.<sup>8</sup>

Boddaert answered his own question as to the enduring nature of her fame in the verse that followed. Abandoning the literary conventions, he did not praise De Neufville as an example for her sex, but zoomed in on the relationship between the poet and the celebrated philosopher:

Thus Verkolje's hand captured  
Neufville in a painting,  
That clever maid, the jewel of the  
metropolis on the IJ,  
To give Pan Poëticum a new lustre.  
Voltaire's poetry, closely followed by  
her in Dutch verse,  
Shows that her art does not yield to his:  
Her fame will live as long as the  
Frenchman's.<sup>9</sup>

She would go down in the history of literature as the celebrated Dutch translator of Voltaire. A few people even saw her as his female intellectual counterpart.

### The Fragmentation of the Collection

The fame her inclusion among the literary heavyweights in the Panpoëticon Batavûm brought De Neufville prov-

ed temporary. In the afternoon of 12 January 1807, the meeting room of the *Kunst wordt door Arbeid Verregen* was reduced to ruins when a ship full of gunpowder exploded near the Rapenburg. The disaster also struck the Panpoëticon Batavûm: the wooden cabinet was badly damaged and the portraits were strewn across the floor. The gunpowder disaster marked the end of the heyday of the collection, which had functioned as a tangible and dynamic canon of Dutch literature for more than a century. After two unsuccessful attempts to sell the damaged Panpoëticon to Louis Bonaparte for the new Royal Museum collection, the cabinet found its way into the hands of the Amsterdam art collector Anthonie Kluijtenaar (?-1849) in 1818. Kluijtenaar owned the Panpoëticon Batavûm until his death. Although no new portraits were added to it, what was left of the collection remained intact. This changed in 1849 when the Panpoëticon was bought by an art dealer called Samson. His desire for profit far outweighed the knowledge that the collection had embodied the pride of Dutch liberal arts for almost a hundred and fifty years. No trace of the wooden cabinet has been found from that moment on. The collection of portraits was sold off in lots and scattered throughout Europe.

De Neufville's portrait surfaced in June 1865 at an exhibition of portrait miniatures in the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was a loan from Charles Bowyer, who owned ten more portraits from the Panpoëticon (in all probability the contents of one drawer of the cabinet), among them the portrait painted by Hieronymus van der Mij (1687-1761) of the Leiden lawyer Theodoor van Snakenburg (1695-1750).<sup>10</sup> The portraits were sold as one lot to a Mr Deen on 15 and 16 February 1906 by Christie's, London, at the sale of Bowyer's estate.<sup>11</sup> Deen owned them until his

Fig. 7

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.  
Photo: RKD  
Netherlands Institute  
for Art History,  
image no. 0000279722



death. On 5 June 1916, De Neufville's portrait was again put up for auction in Amsterdam as part of an 'important set of ten miniatures on copper with gilded brass frames of the period painted in grisaille and colours', all now attributed to Hieronymus van der Mij (1687-1761).<sup>12</sup> The lot remained unsold.

A subsequent clue to the whereabouts of the portrait can be found in the interleaved and annotated author's copy of Ernst Wilhelm Moes's *Iconographia Batava* in the Rijksmuseum Reading Room. In it one of the then members of staff had noted that in 1933 the portrait had been a stone's

throw away from the museum in the antique shop owned by a Miss Jans Denys on Nieuwe Spiegelgracht.<sup>13</sup> At some time in the decades that followed the portrait must have found its way to the Universalmuseum Joanneum in Graz. It can be seen there now – separated from the rest of the surviving portraits that once formed part of the Panpoëticon Batavûm.

## NOTES

- \* With thanks to Barbara Kaiser, Christine Rabensteiner and Jenny Reynaerts. This research was supported by NWO Rubicon grant no. 019.173SG.017.
- 1 For the history of the collection see Lieke van Deinsen, *The Panpoëticon Batavum*, Amsterdam 2016; Lieke van Deinsen, *Literaire erflaters. Canonvorming in tijden van culturele crisis*, Hilversum 2017, pp. 149-248.
  - 2 *Arnoud van Halen's Pan poëticon Batavum verheerlijkt* 1773, p. xvi.
  - 3 *Ibid.*, p. xxi.
  - 4 Paul Knolle and Everhard Korhals Altes, *Nicolaas Verkolje 1673-1746: De fluwelen hand*, Zwolle 2011, pp. 140-41.
  - 5 Lotte Jensen, 'Christina Leonora de Neufville', in Wiep van Bunge et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, London 2003, pp. 728-29. For the Dutch branch of the De Neufville family, see Abraham Cornelis de Neufville, *Histoire généalogique de la maison de Neufville*, Amsterdam 1859, pp. 191-205.
  - 6 For her philosophical ideas, see Michiel Rudolf Wielema, 'Christina Leonora de Neufville. Wijsgerige poëzie onder invloed van Christiaan Wolff', *De Achttiende Eeuw* 24 (1992), no. 2, pp. 155-74.
  - 7 *Arnoud van Halen's Pan poëticon Batavum verheerlijkt* 1773, p. 219.
  - 8 'Dit sierlyk Maagdebeeld, in 't leven ruim zo schoon,  
Stelt schrandre De Neufville ons op 't panneel ten toon.  
Wat luister moet aan 't Pan Poëticum niet gegeven  
Een Dichteres, begaafd met zo veel kunst en geest,  
Datze oor en hert verrukt van die haar Dichtwerk leest,  
't Geen haren edlen Naam voor eeuwig zal doen leven?'
  - 9 'Dus bragt Verkoljes hand Neufville in schildery,  
Die schrandre Maagd, 't sieraad der Waereldstad aan 't Y,  
Om 't Pan Poëticum een nieuwen glans te geven.  
Voltaires Poëzy, door haar in Neêrduitsch dicht  
Gevolgd, toont, dat haar kunst niet voor de zyne zwicht:  
Ook zal haar roem zo lang als die des Franschmans leven.'
  - 10 *Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures on Loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1865*, London 1865, p. 251.
  - 11 Under lot number 157 there was 'A Set of Eleven Oval Portraits of Dutch writers of the 18th Century, painted upon copper in grisaille, slightly heightened with colour – one of the series is signed Vander My, and dated 1743 – in gilded lead frames (one frame missing)' (Lugt no. 64030). From the annotated copy of the sale catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the lot was sold for eight guineas to Deen. With thanks to Marja Stijkel and Yvonne Bleyerveld.
  - 12 'Belangrijke serie van tien Miniaturen op koper met koperen vergulde lijsten uit den tijd geschilderd in grisaille en kleuren'. *Oude en moderne schilderijen, Japansche verzameling, Chineesch porselein, Delftsch, marmeren beelden en bronzen groepen, ameublementen, enz. Afkomstig van wijlen den Wel.Ed. Heer Jacques Deen, Amsterdam. Verkoopig: 5 en 6 juni 1916 [...] C.F. Roos & Co, Amsterdam, 1916 (lot no. 15j)*. Aside from the portrait of De Neufville, the Panpoëticon lot contained portraits of Jan Goeree (1670-1731), Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719), Joos Lambrechts (c. 1491-1556/57), Willem van der Pot (1704-1783), Ysbrandt Vincent (1641-1718), Jan de Marre (1696-1763), Theodoor van Snakenburg (1695-1750), Johannes Steengragt (1692-1743) and an unknown 'Man in Armour', which was most probably intended to be the portrait of Joan van Paffenrode (1618-1673). The eleventh portrait, which was still part of Bowyer's collection, proved to be missing.
  - 13 Ernst Wilhelm Moes, *Iconographia Batava: beredeneerde lijst van geschilderde en gebeeldhouwde portretten van Noord-Nederlanders in vorige eeuwen*, Amsterdam 1897-1905 (annotated author's copy Study Room, Rijksmuseum Research Library), p. 139. For Jans Denys's antique shop, see Jan Frederik Heijbroek, *Kunst, kennis en kwaliteit: De Vereeniging van Handelaren in Oude Kunst in Nederland 1911-heden*, Zwolle 2007, p. 20.