

Side-roads to success: The effect of sideline activities on the status of writers*

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Abstract

The literary status of writers is strongly dependent on the critical attention given to their books in the daily and weekly press. Previous research has shown that this attention depends to a great extent on attributes that are external to the work in question, but are related to its institutional setting, notably the stature of the publisher and the critical reception of previous works by the same author. This article considers the options writers have at their disposal to stimulate or hold the interest of the critics. Following a theoretical outline of the types of activities authors can engage in, an analysis is performed on the relationship between 279 writers' involvement in a number of 'sideline' activities in the Dutch literary world and the degree of critical interest in the books of these writers.

Both the versatility of the authors' performance in the literary world and the extent to which they were involved in prominent institutions proved to have a strong positive relationship to the amount of critical attention their books received. A subsequent analysis confirmed the hypothesis that 'Publisher status' and 'Previous critical attention' are not the only external attributes that affect the amount of attention reviewers give to new works of fiction. The versatility of the author's performance in the literary world as well as his or her involvement in prominent literary institutions are also relevant.

1. Introduction

Journalistic criticism is crucial to the formation of a literary canon, in that it precedes other forms of criticism and effects an initial sifting and evaluation of the literature on offer. Research on the choices made by critics in the daily and weekly press indicates the existence of a 'reproduction mechanism' in their selection. In

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deciding whether to review a new title, critics seem to be influenced to a high degree by previous criticisms with respect to the author or publisher (see Van Rees and Vermunt, 1996; Janssen, 1994 and 1996). In general, only first works brought out by one of the major literary publishers have a chance of receiving a substantial number of reviews. A new publication by an author whose earlier work drew a lot of attention from the critics can also count on wide interest. However, for authors whose previous work received scant, negative, or even no attention, there is little hope that it will be any different for the new title they produce. It is even less likely that their work will ever become the subject of discussion by other branches of criticism, essayists, and the academic study of literature. Essayists and academic literary critics tend to 'reproduce' the initial judgement of journalistic criticism; they concern themselves almost exclusively with work by authors who have received wide and positive attention from journalistic criticism (cf. Van Rees, 1983; Rosengren, 1987; Verdaasdonk, 1985).

In the light of such findings, the author emerges as a more or less powerless object in the critical reception of a work, a plaything in the hands of the gods either favorably or ill-disposed toward him/her. Writers who know that the spotlight of criticism is focused on them, can sit back and relax. All they have to do is deliver new material at regular intervals to sustain critical interest. Authors whose work receives no attention can only hope that some extraordinary force will disrupt the reproduction mechanism and place their work in the floodlights.

Such an interpretation of the author's position, however, seems to underestimate the ability of writers to influence the interest in and appreciation of their work. In my view, the author plays an important role and critical reception partly depends on how the author presents him/herself to the literary world. Writers who do not restrict themselves to publishing books presumably have more of a chance of appearing and staying in the limelight.

In this article, these suppositions are further elaborated and supported using the results of empirical research. Section 2 gives a theoretical outline of the significance of a number of activities in which authors can participate in the literary world in addition to publishing books. The analysis in Section 3 is aimed at providing more detailed empirical support for the proposition that such 'sideline' activities have a positive effect on their careers, and, more particularly, on the critical response to their books. To that end, some of the assumptions made in Section 2 are transformed into a series of more specific hypotheses, which will be tested with the use of a data set on Dutch writers' involvement in a number of side-activities in the Dutch literary world and the amount of attention their work received from reviewers in the daily and weekly press.

2. Authors' intervention in critical reception

It goes without saying that publications form the basis of every writer's career or reputation. Whether one is considered a writer depends first and foremost on publications, not on diplomas or other formal criteria. A writer is not so much someone

who writes, but someone who is recognized as such. This recognition is expressed, above all, in the willingness of a literary publishing house to publish his or her writings.¹ Publications are a confirmation of someone's authorship and of the claims s/he can make on that basis. Thus, publications of new works in book form are a prerequisite for the interest of critics writing in the daily and weekly press.

In most cases, however, book publications appear insufficient to incite or hold the interest of the critics, or more generally, to enable an author to achieve a position of importance. The literary world only offers a limited number of individuals successful careers, while there are many who aspire to such a career. Only a small number of authors who, in a given period are competing for the favor of the critics, can count on their full attention (Janssen, 1994: 34-77). The publications of most aspirants are not noticed or attract little interest. This holds true not only for new authors, but also for those with a respectable number of titles to their name. The latter can regularly observe how their books lose out not only to the latest products of famous writers, but also to newcomers who seem to achieve in a single blow the recognition they have worked for for years. There is only a select group of authors whose work is followed closely and continuously by the critics. For a much larger group, critical attention tends, after an initial period of intensity, to diminish and shift to a new consignment of writers.

The above suggests that, in many cases, authors must be willing to engage in other activities in order to become and remain the subject of discussion. A number of case studies can be cited that draw attention to the positive effect of a versatile performance by authors in the literary world on the critical reception of their work (Bel, 1993; Bourdieu, 1983 and 1993; Van Boven, 1992; Van Dijk, 1994; Janssen, 1994: 138ff.; De Nooy, 1993; Van Rees, 1987: 290ff.; Ritchie, 1988; Rodden, 1989). Authors who are active on several fronts seem to have more chance of focusing attention on their work than those who limit themselves to publishing new books. On the basis of these studies, various kinds of sideline activities can be identified that seem to advance the careers of writers and, more particularly, increase their chances of attracting and sustaining critical interest, notably, publishing creative work through channels other than books, activities of a reflective nature, and activities that contribute to their 'social capital'.

2.1. Publishing through channels other than books

Literary magazines form an important additional publication channel, because their circle of readers consists mainly of people who are professionally involved in the production or dissemination of literature (see Verdaasdonk and Seegers, 1990).

¹ Publications in literary magazines also comprise a form of recognition. For aspiring writers they can be a crucial step for gaining access to certain literary publishers (see Janssen and Olislagers 1986: 276ff.). Magazine articles alone are, however, in the long run insufficient for attaining the status of author. If such publications are not followed in a given time by publications in the form of books, which is the case for a great many of the newcomers who write in literary magazines (*ibid.*: 280ff.), it implies that a person's claim to be a writer has not received any further recognition and is therefore open to question.

The latter tend to keep a close eye on literary magazines since they chart new movements and developments in the literary world. Publications in literary magazines, such as poems, short stories, and excerpts from literary novels, can stimulate the interest of fellow writers, critics, publishers, and other experts and keep an author's work in the public eye while s/he is working on a new book.

Another important forum for authors are (international) literary festivals, which usually attract a large number of literary professionals. Thus, through performances at festivals writers can also draw the attention of critics and other people working in the field.²

Publishing through other channels is not strictly a sideline activity since it does, after all, involve his craft: creative writing. But, unlike book publications, contributions to magazines and festivals are not a prerequisite for critical attention. For the sake of clarity it should be noted that, in this article, the term 'sideline' is used to indicate all the activities an author undertakes in the literary world besides publishing books.

2.2. *Activities of a reflective nature*

Reflective activities, such as giving interviews about one's work, delivering lectures about literature, taking part in literary debates or polemics, and publishing critical writings are not only important for generating critical interest and increasing a writer's recognition among critics and the general public. They also provide the opportunity for authors to express their aesthetic views on literature and to clarify where they stand as a writer. In critical practice, much value is attributed to an author's comments on his/her own work and that of other writers. That such comments are regularly described as 'theoretical' statements says much about their importance. Critics assume not only that high-profile authors have an all-encompassing view of the nature and function of literature, but that they know how to integrate this view into their creative products. Such self-evaluation or commentary on literature in general, can therefore greatly influence the interpretation of a work, its central themes and the view of reality, literature, and authorship it embodies. Thus, interviews, lectures, essays, etc. offer authors the possibility of intervening in critical reception by making explicit their ideas and premises, but also by reacting to the critics' interpretation. In this way possible 'misunderstandings' can be 'set straight'³

² Van Rees' case study of the response of reviewers to the (first) six books of poetry by the Dutch poet Hans Faverey provides a good example of the positive effect of literary magazines and festivals on the critical reception of a writer's work. Faverey presented himself in a positive fashion by reading his own poetry at European poetry festivals (such as *Poetry International*) and by publishing several series of poems in literary magazines between poetry books. These activities appear to have made an important contribution to the positive evaluation of his work (cf. Van Rees, 1987: 286ff.).

³ In this regard, Van Boven (1992) demonstrates how, in the first decades of this century, Dutch female authors of so-called women's novels hardly concerned themselves with reflection on their authorship or literature in general. They did not engage in literary polemics nor did they rebel against literary predecessors. In short, they failed to take a literary stance and thus neglected the opportunity to influence the increasingly negative image of their work that emerged in literary criticism and thereby prevent it from falling into oblivion.

and potential objections by the critics anticipated.⁴ Furthermore, writers can provide criticism with new material for interpretation by pointing to 'neglected' aspects or themes of their work.⁵

2.3. Activities which contribute to a writer's social capital

Last but not least, we mention all those activities that may increase what can be called the author's 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 243), that is, the whole range of resources that flow from the possession of a more or less institutionalized enduring network of relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Such a network does not arise naturally nor can it be established by a single intervention. It is, rather, the result of a continuous effort.

While the possession of extensive social capital considerably simplifies life and work for people in general,⁶ it is of special significance for those with an artistic or literary profession. They must operate in a world where most activities take place on a freelance basis and are not controlled or regulated by format organizations, agreements or criteria (cf. Crane, 1976). In many situations, the various actors in this world cannot, therefore, appeal to one or another higher, impartial authority, but rely primarily on each other for the fulfilment of their ambitions. In such a situation personal contacts and feelings of mutual regard and friendship are crucial for achieving numerous objectives, such as being able to publish in a literary magazine, but also for finding sufficient copy for that magazine. The same applies not only to having a say in awarding literary subsidies, but also to recruiting members for literary advisory commissions, etc.⁷ The more writers are able to engage other and more influential colleagues, the more successful they will be in realizing various ambitions, including generating wide attention for their work.⁸

⁴ Becker (1982: 357) provides several examples of the various strategies writers and other artists follow to try to influence opinion on their work: "Since artists know that other art world participants make reputational inferences from their work, they try to control the work that becomes available for making such inferences. They destroy work they don't want considered, or label it 'unfinished'; if they are lucky, a court may (as French courts can) prevent the circulation of work they don't want publicly attributed to them. They distinguish categories of work, as contemporary photographers sometimes distinguish their 'commercial' work (not to be considered in assessing them as artists) from their 'personal' work (to be so used), according to the seriousness of their intentions in making it. They revise their work when they can, as Stravinsky and Henry James did".

⁵ It goes without saying that authors can follow another path to keep their work from getting stale. They can, for example, stimulate renewed interest in their work by revealing certain autobiographical particulars or by turning to other literary genres (cf. Janssen, 1994: 185ff.).

⁶ See, among others, Boxman (1992), Flap and Tazelaar (1988) and Granovetter (1974), where the influence of social networks on an individual's position in the labor market, regardless of his training and experience, is demonstrated. Whoever has been accepted into an extensive and varied network of personal relations has earlier access to relevant information possessed by other members of the network and moreover benefits sooner from the intercession of its influential members.

⁷ Cf. the research done on networks among German writers reported in Anheier and Gerhards (1991a,b).

⁸ This is true *mutatis mutandis* for other cultural sectors, such as the world of visual art and the music industry. Research by Crane (1987) and Ridgeway (1989) shows, for example, how, for young artists,

Thus, activities which help establish social relations with relevant agents in the literary field (fellow-authors, publishers, editors, etc.) are important for success. This social network is realized in activities such as participating in a literary jury, joining the editorial board of a literary magazine or the executive committee of a writer's organization, acting as an advisor or editor for a publishing house or a review medium. Depending on the status of these bodies and organizations and that of their members and contributors, such activities may increase the social capital of writers in the course of their career.

2.4. Relative importance of sidelines

It is not a straightforward matter to assess the importance of the above activities in the critical reception of a work. Keeping in mind their different nature, it is nonetheless plausible that they do vary in importance. Both the publication of creative work through additional channels and reflective activities form a part of or are at least related to the primary occupation of writers, producing creative work. Furthermore, reflective activities place an author in the same field as critics, which does not hold for sidelines in organizational or administrative areas. With this in mind, the former are likely to have a stronger effect on the critical reactions to a work than the latter, which are usually activities farther removed from what is seen to be the writer's primary occupation on which he or she should chiefly be judged.

In contrast to both publications of creative work and the literary views advanced by writers, the other auxiliary activities fail to provide critics with any useful reference points for characterizing a work. Their influence on the reception of a work therefore seems to be limited and in most cases difficult to trace, certainly in so far as the appraisal of its nature and quality are concerned. The importance of these activities probably lies foremost in their potential for drawing critical attention to a work and winning the goodwill and support of people in a position to promote it. Authors who do not engage in such activities, deny themselves the opportunity to generate critical interest by that means. It is, however, unlikely that critics will react negatively with regard to the quality of their books.⁹ Writers who do not publicly reflect on their authorship or literature in general seem to run a greater risk. Critics, after all, assume that authors of stature have an all-encompassing view on the nature and role of literature, which, like the critics, they are able to articulate. If a writer fails to prove that s/he has such a literary outlook, doubts concerning the quality of his/her work can arise.

It is doubtful whether the significance of one or the other side-activity for the critical reception of a work can be determined with sufficient exactitude. Most of the activities

informal contacts with (established) fellow-artists and other persons in the art world play an important role in gaining access to galleries. Furthermore, research on the significance of social networks for studio musicians (Peterson and White, 1989: 248ff.) shows that session musicians, in fact, do help each other get work and, at the same time, employ various strategies of exclusion in order to restrict competition.

⁹The opposite situation probably arises sooner: that the (numerous) other sidelines allow critics to question his or her literary qualities.

cited above have multiple effects. For example, the publication of a number of short stories in a particular literary magazine can focus attention to a work, but may also have far-reaching consequences for its image (cf. De Nooy, 1993). Moreover, depending on who the other contributors of a magazine are, they can place the author in a network of more or less 'useful' social relations.

What counts in all these activities is that they turn a writer into someone to be reckoned with, especially if they are associated with prominent institutions (prestigious juries, leading newspapers, etc.). Just as book publications make someone a writer, each of the other activities provides a further confirmation of that status and an increase in his or her chances of obtaining the appropriate treatment, that is, winning recognition of other participants in the literary world. This recognition does not necessarily imply appreciation of an author's performance or work; it basically means that other literary agents, including the critics, feel compelled to respond to his or her achievements.

3. Literary sidelines and critical interest

As has been said, the effect of the various activities that can influence a writer's reputation is hard to assess. Therefore, the analysis which follows does not pretend to be definitive. Rather, my objective is to furnish more detailed empirical support for the proposition that involvement in strategies and activities as outlined above, advance a writing career. In particular, the aim is to substantiate the assumption that the critical response to a writer's books is not only affected by external attributes such as the critical reception of previous work and the status of the publisher, but also by the author's range of action in the literary world. To that end, some of the assumptions made in the previous section are transformed into a series of more specific hypotheses, which will be tested with the use of a data set on Dutch writers' involvement in a number of activities and the critical interest in their works. For stylistic convenience, in what follows, I will use '(critical) attention' or '(critical) interest' to refer to 'the amount of attention a writer's book publications receive from critics in the Dutch daily and weekly press.

3.1. Hypotheses

- (Ia) There is a positive relationship between the extent to which writers make use of additional publication channels and critical attention.
- (Ib) There is a positive relationship between the extent to which writers engage in so-called reflective activities and attention.
- (Ic) There is a positive relationship between the extent to which writers perform other (organizational, advisory, administrative) activities and attention.
- (Id) The more versatile a writer's performance in the literary world, *i.e.*, the greater the number of different activities undertaken, the more attention his/her books receive.
- (Ie) The greater the involvement of writers in activities associated with prominent institutions, the more attention is given to their book publications.

- (IIa) Activities that form a part of or are related to a writer's primary occupation (use of additional publication channels and reflective activities, respectively) have a greater effect on critical attention than activities in organizational or administrative areas.
- (IIb) More important, however, than the extent to which writers engage in any (single) sort of sideline activity are the versatility of their performance in the literary world and the extent to which they are active in prominent institutions.
- (III) Attention is not only affected by the critical interest in a writer's previous work and the stature of the publishing firm, but also by the versatility of the writer's performance in the literary world and his or her involvement in prominent institutions.

3.2. *Data and measures*

The above hypotheses were tested against a database with details of all the new Dutch-language fiction titles (including poetry) that appeared in the Netherlands in 1978. The inventory of titles in the database was drawn up by consulting the relevant issues of *Boekblad*, the independent Dutch book magazine. It is published every week and contains an extensive bibliography of newly published books in the Netherlands and Flanders. The 388 new Dutch-language fiction titles in 1978 were produced by 323 authors. Writers only represented by posthumous editions or by joint publications with other writers were not considered. These two groups numbered 44 authors, thus leaving us with a total of 279 for the present study.

In the previous section, three clusters of literary sidelines were distinguished:

- (A) Publishing creative work through channels other than books;
- (B) Reflective activities;
- (C) (Other) activities contributing to a writer's social capital

Obviously, undertaking a complete registration of such activities for more than 275 writers would have been too time consuming. The record of involvement in each cluster was confined to those activities that could be recorded relatively easily. To reduce the risk of classifying writers too readily as in-active, each of these activities was recorded for the 3-year period prior to their new book publications, that is for the period 1975-1978. However, it should be noted that a writer's participation in the above clusters of activities (notably cluster B) was operationalized with only a few examples. Therefore, the extent to which such activities are performed is probably underestimated.

The inventory of the three clusters of literary sidelines for the period 1975-1978 contains the following six activities:

CLUSTER A

(1) *Publication of creative work in literary magazines*

Using the BLTVN (Bibliography of Literary Magazines in Flanders and the Netherlands), an inventory of creative work (poems, short stories, excerpts from

literary novels or novellas) in literary magazines was taken. This inventory involved eighteen Dutch literary periodicals: *Bzzlletin*, *Chrysallis*, *Gedicht*, *De Gids*, *Gist*, *Hollands Maandblad*, *Horus*, *Kentering*, *Maatstaf*, *Mandala*, *Naar Morgen*, *Raam*, *Raster*, *De Revisor*, *De Schans*, *Tirade*, *Tijd Schrift*, and *WAR*. The total number of publications per author in the magazines cited was recorded.

CLUSTER B

(2) *Essays and other critical contributions to literary magazines*

Drawing on the BNTL (Bibliography of Dutch Linguistics and Literature) and the *BLTVN*, each author's critical contributions to the above eighteen magazines were recorded.

(3) *Critical writing for the daily and weekly press*

With the help of the review database at Tilburg University, which consists of all the literary book reviews and articles on literature that appeared in the Dutch press between 1975 and 1980, the contributions on literature made by each author in Dutch dailies and weeklies were counted.

CLUSTER C

(4) *Serving as an editor of a literary magazine*

Drawing on Bakker (1985) it was determined whether each author served as editor of one of the above-mentioned magazines. Editorships of periodicals not covered by this survey were established by consulting the relevant issues of the magazines themselves. The total number of editorships was recorded for each author.

(5) *Member of a jury for awarding literary prizes*

Memberships on juries were inventoried through Michaël et al (1986). The total number of memberships was recorded for each author.

(6) *Performing administrative or advisory functions in the Dutch literary world*

The inventory of administrative and advisory functions was drawn up by consulting the annual reports of the Dutch Association for Writers and Translators and the institutions and organizations involved in awarding subsidies and prizes for literature: the Dutch Arts Council, the Foundation for Literature, the Dutch Literature Society, the Jan Campert Foundation, the Prince Bernard Foundation, the City of Amsterdam Art Foundation, the City of Rotterdam Art Foundation, and provincial cultural councils. The total number of functions was recorded for each author.

ACTIVITY LEVEL CLUSTERS A, B, AND C

The writers' activity level in cluster A was measured in terms of the total number of publications of creative work in the literary magazines cited.

The activity level in cluster B was measured in terms of the total number of publications about literature in literary magazines and the daily and weekly press.

The activity level in cluster C was measured in terms of the total number of functions they performed (including editorships, jury memberships, and memberships on boards and advisory commissions).

VERSATILITY OF PERFORMANCE

The number of different activities undertaken by each author was recorded, *i.e.*, how many of the six activities he or she performed in addition to publishing books. Thus, each author was given a score between 0 and 6.

ACTIVITY LEVEL IN PROMINENT INSTITUTIONS

The proportion of publications and functions which involved prominent periodicals/organizations was recorded for each writer.

The latter are defined as follows: Prominent literary magazines are those with a print run of more than 1000 (*Bzzlletin, Gedicht, De Gids, Hollands Maandblad, Maatstaf, Raster, De Revisor* and *Tirade*). Prominent dailies and weeklies are those with a nation-wide circulation which allot a large amount of space to book reviews and other pieces on literature. Prominent juries include those awarding the following prizes: the P.C. Hooft Prize, the Literature Prize of the Low Countries, the prizes of the Jan Campert Foundation, the Poetry and Prose Prize of the city of Amsterdam, the Martinus Nijhoff Prize, and prizes awarded by the Dutch Literature Society. Prominent administrative and advisory bodies are the boards and commissions of the Dutch Association for Writers and Translators, the Dutch Arts Council, the Foundation for Literature, the City of Amsterdam Art Foundation and the City of Rotterdam Art Foundation.

CRITICAL ATTENTION

Critical attention for the writers' books was measured by the total number of reviews in Dutch dailies and weeklies. The record of reviews is based on the collections available in the NLMD (Dutch Literary Museum) and the NBLC (Dutch Library and Reading Centre). These collections are fairly complete as regards the national daily and weekly press. The list of regional media for which the reviews were systematically collected includes one-third of the existing regional daily news-papers (cf. Janssen, 1994: 42ff.).

In order to test hypothesis III, the 92 new authors in the data set were disregarded. Obviously, in deciding whether or not to review work by a new name, reviewers cannot take into account the interest previously shown by their colleagues. For each of the remaining 187 authors, his or her previous work was recorded.

PREVIOUS ATTENTION

Critical attention for writers' previous titles was measured by the total number of reviews these titles received in Dutch dailies and weeklies.

PUBLISHER STATUS

The status of the publishing houses was assessed by calculating, for each firm, the average number of reviews devoted to their publications in 1978. On the basis of these average scores, each publishing house in the data set was assigned a ranking score from 1 to 37, which was used in the analysis as a measure of its status within the Dutch literary field at the time.

3.3. Results

Table 1 presents an overview of the writers' involvement in literary activities. The first column gives the proportion of authors who engaged in at least one of the recorded activities (for all clusters combined). About one-third (0.35) combined the writing of a new book with one or more other activities in the literary world, whereas the majority of writers apparently did not. The next column shows that less than 15% of the writers were active in prominent institutions. The remaining three columns report the proportions of active authors per cluster. Comparatively many authors published creative work through other channels. The proportions of authors engaged in activities of a reflective nature (Cluster B) or who performed advisory, editorial or administrative functions (Cluster C) were considerably smaller.

Table 1
Proportions of writers who engaged in sideline activities: total, prominent institutions and per cluster

	TOTAL	PROMINENT INSTITUTIONS	CLUSTER A	CLUSTER B	CLUSTER C
'Active' writers	0.35	0.13	0.28	0.18	0.12
'Non-active' writers	0.65	0.87	0.72	0.82	.88

Note: $N=279$. See section 3.2 for a detailed description of how the writers' engagement in activities was measured.

In Section 3.1 it was hypothesized (*Hypotheses Ia-Ie*) that critical attention is positively associated with the extent to which writers engage in each cluster of activities, the versatility of their performance, and their activity in prominent institutions. Table 2 presents the simple correlations (Pearson's r) between the five 'sideline activity' variables and attention. As hypothesized, each of the variables is moderately to highly correlated with the latter.

In order to gain insight into the effect of each activity on critical interest (*Hypothesis IIa*), a multiple regression analysis was conducted with the writers' activity level in clusters A, B, and C as independent variables. Table 2, Equation I, reports the results. The three variables together account for 31% of the variance in reviewer attention. Each of the variables contributes significantly to the explained variance. The beta coefficients reveal that a writer's activity level in cluster A is a more important predictor than the other variables. This means that hypothesis IIa is only partly confirmed. Contrary to what was hypothesized, the beta coefficients indicate that involvement in reflective activities (Activity level cluster B) and the extent to which other (advisory, organizational, etc.) functions are performed (Activity level C) have an equally strong effect on critical attention.

However, the versatility of a writer's performance and his/her involvement in prominent institutions are expected to be of greater significance than his/her activity level in each separate cluster (*Hypothesis IIb*). To test this hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was performed with all five activity variables as predictors. The results are given in Table 2, Equation II.

Table 2
Multiple regression analysis of Critical attention with three sets of predictors

Variables	<i>r</i>	Equation I Beta	Equation II Beta	Equation III Beta
1. Activity level cluster A	0.49***	0.36***	0.13*	0.13*
2. Activity level cluster B	0.39***	0.18**	0.10	
3. Activity level cluster C	0.38***	0.17**	0.05	
4. Versatility of performance	0.58***	-	0.31***	0.34***
5. Activity level in prominent institutions	0.55***	-	0.21***	0.27***
		$R^2=.31$ ***	$R^2=.41$ ***	$R^2=.40$ ***

Note: N = 279; *r* = Pearson correlation coefficient; R^2 = proportion of explained variance; Beta = standardized regression coefficient. See section 3.2 for a detailed description of how the dependent and independent variables were measured.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Using all five variables as predictors, the proportion of explained variance amounts to 0.41. We find that only the variables 'Versatility of performance', 'Activity level in prominent institutions' and 'Activity level cluster A' make a significant contribution to the explained variance. As can be seen from Table 2, Equation III, these three variables alone account for 40% of the variance in critical attention. The beta coefficients indicate that 'Activity level cluster A' is less important than both other predictors. Furthermore, the versatility of a writer's performance appears to be somewhat more important than his or her activity level in prominent institutions.

The other variables (Activity level clusters B and C) have significant zero-order correlations with 'Critical attention', but do not make a significant contribution to the explained variance. It does not follow that these variables are of little or no importance. Both variables are highly correlated with 'Versatility of performance' (Pearson's *r* amounts to 0.63 and 0.66, respectively), which is probably why their contribution to the explained variance is negligible, once the latter variable has been taken into account. It is one thing to conclude on the basis of this analysis, that the versatility of a writer's performance is a better predictor of critical attention, and that his or her activity level in clusters B and C does not enhance predictability over and above 'Versatility of performance'. It is erroneous, however, to conclude that the first two variables have no effect on the critics' attention for a newly published book.

In order to establish whether an author's sideline activities still have an effect on reviewer attention, once the effects of the stature of the publisher and previous critical attention are taken into account (*Hypothesis III*), a multiple regression analysis was performed using Publisher status, Previous attention, Versatility of performance, Activity level in prominent institutions, and Activity level cluster A as predictors, the latter three variables being the ones that contributed significantly to the explained variance in the previous analysis (see Table 2, Equation II).

Table 3, Equation I, reports the results. The five variables account for 81% of the variance in critical attention. With the exception of 'Activity level cluster A', they

Table 3

Multiple regression analysis of Critical attention with Activity level cluster A, Versatility of performance, Activity level in prominent institutions, Previous attention, and Publisher status as predictors

Variables	Equation I Beta	Equation II Beta
1. Versatility of performance	0.15**	0.15**
2. Activity level in prominent institutions	0.12**	0.12**
3. Activity level cluster A	0.01	
4. Previous attention	0.47***	0.47***
5. Publisher status	0.35***	0.35***
	R ² =.81***	R ² =.81***

Note: $N = 187$; R^2 = proportion of explained variance; Beta = standardized regression coefficient. See section 3.2 for a detailed description of how the dependent and independent variables were measured.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

all make a significant contribution. Table 3, Equation II, shows that these four variables alone account for more than 80% of variation in attention. As is apparent from the standardized regression coefficients the effects of 'Previous attention' and 'Publisher status' are greater than both the versatility of a writer's performance and his or her activity level in prominent institutions. Nevertheless, the effect of the latter two variables on the attention given to a work is substantial.

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

The main objective of this article was to provide more detailed empirical support for the proposition that critics' response to works of fiction partly depends on the manner in which their authors present themselves to the literary world, i.e., on their activities other than publishing books. Writers who are active on several fronts seem to have a better chance of attracting the critics' attention than those who limit themselves to publishing new work in book form. To substantiate this assumption, a number of more specific hypotheses were formulated, which were tested against a data set of Dutch writers' involvement in various 'sideline' activities and the subsequent degree of critical interest in their books.

Critical attention was found to be positively associated with the extent to which writers engaged in three clusters of auxiliary activities that were distinguished in this article. Involvement in activities that form a part of the primary occupation of writers (publication of creative work through additional channels) proved to have a greater effect on critical interest than activities of a reflective nature (critical writing for newspapers and magazines) and the performance of functions in other (advisory, organizational, administrative) areas.

However, the versatility of the writers' performance in the literary world and the extent to which they were active in prominent institutions were found to be more

significant in explaining the variance in critical attention than the extent to which they engaged in any (single) sort of sideline-activity.

A subsequent analysis confirmed the hypothesis that 'Publisher status' and 'Previous attention' are not the only external attributes that affect the amount of attention new works of fiction receive from reviewers. The results indicate that attention depends also, though to a lesser degree, on the versatility of an author's performance in the literary world as well as on his or her range of action in prominent institutions. The empirical data presented here demonstrate that authors can influence the formation of critical opinion on their work and are thus not dependent on the whims of (critical) fate for their fame and reputation. It would, however, be going too far to conclude that they have their literary fate in their own hands. Reputation building and canonization are not the work of individuals but of a collectivity as Bourdieu (1980) and Becker (1982), among others, have argued. Moreover, the possibilities for individual critics and authors to influence the image of a work are regulated and restricted by both institutional norms and practices and structural relations and developments within the literary field. For example, an author's literary statements can only affect the characterization of a work if critics attribute particular insight to that author into his own work. The impact of author's statements therefore has an institutional basis, consisting of the critical premise that the creator of a work is, by definition, in the best position to adduce the underlying intentions and meanings of that work or to judge the critics' assessments on their merits.

Furthermore, it should be noted that how authors act in the literary world cannot simply be regarded as something they choose for themselves. The more limited range of action of the majority of writers does not necessarily mean less willingness to intervene on the fronts investigated. It can also be connected to the limited possibilities of these authors or to the weak demand for them to perform certain activities. The connection established between writers' involvement in literary sidelines and critical interest in their work could well be double-edged in nature. On the one hand, engaging in or failing to participate in these activities, as my study indicates, influences the amount of critical attention given to a work; on the other hand, this attention is probably co-determinant for the 'margin of manoeuvre' an author enjoys in the areas concerned. Thus, authors standing squarely in the critical limelight may have fewer difficulties in getting their work published in a certain magazine if they wish and may sooner be approached to join the editorial board of a leading periodical or serve on an important literary jury than their less celebrated colleagues. Finally, the research presented here concentrated on the effects of certain activities and did not consider the underlying mental and social characteristics of the writers involved. However, these are probably vital in order to explain why an author does or does not take action on the fronts investigated and has more or less difficulty achieving various objectives in the literary world.

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