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The power of the weaker vessels: Simon Schama and Johan van Beverwijck on women

LIA VAN GEMERT

Working on his famous book *The embarrassment of riches* (1987), Simon Schama must have been very pleased when he came across Johan van Beverwijck (1594-1647).¹ This 'society doctor', as Marijke Spies rightly called him,² took an active part in the social life of his home town Dordrecht: he was the official city physician and lectured on anatomy for surgeons, he sat on the boards of the library, of the orphanage and of the Latin school, and he was a member of the city council and of the government of the province of Holland (the 'Staten van Holland'). The inventory of his household confirms that he was one of the fairly well-to-do citizens of his day. About his private life we further know that he married twice and had eight children, of whom only three were to reach adulthood (ill. 1). Still, he found time to write several thousands of pages, many of them about women.³

Here, I will discuss two of his works: first *Van de wtneementheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts* (*On the excellence of the female sex*), published in 1639 and again – enlarged – in 1643, and secondly the trilogy *Schat der gesontheyt, Schat der ongesontheyt, Heel-konste* (*Treasury of health; Treasury of sickness and Surgery*), published between 1636 and 1645, and reprinted many times.⁴ *The excellence* is an apology for

1 S. Schama, *The embarrassment of riches. An interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age* (New York 1987); see also the translation by E. Dabekausen et al., entitled: *Overvloed en onbehagen. De Nederlandse cultuur in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam 1988).

2 M. Spies, 'Charlotte de Huybert en het gelijk. De geleerde en de werkende vrouw in de zeventiende eeuw' in: *Literatuur* 3 (1986) 339-350, esp. 342.

3 Biographical facts in E. D. Baumann, *Johan van Beverwijck in leven en werken geschetst* (Dordrecht 1910). See also: L. van Gemert, 'Johan van Beverwijck als "instituut"' in: *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 8 (1992) 99-106. John Loughman recently identified a picture of Van Beverwijck and his family (see also: J. Loughman, 'Een stad en haar kunstconsumptie: openbare en privé-verzamelingen in Dordrecht, 1620-1719' in: P. Marijnissen et al. (eds.), *De Zichtbaere werelt. Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad* (Zwolle 1992) 34-64, esp. 59-61).

4 J. van Beverwijck, *Van de wtneementheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts. Verciert met historyen, ende kopere platen; als oock Latijnsche, ende Nederlantsche Versen van Mr. Corn. Boy* (Dordrecht 1643), and J. van Beverwijck, *Wercken der genees-konste: bestaende in den Schat der gesontheyt, Schat der ongesontheyt, Heel-konste* (Amsterdam 1671-1672) 2 vols. I cite from the 1643 edition of *The excellence*; for the *Health* trilogy I used the edition of 1671-1672. I will refer to these works by using the abbreviations *Exc.* for *The excellence*, *H.* for *Treasury of health*, *Si.* for *Treasury of sickness* and *Su.* for *Surgery*. A Latin edition of *The excellence* (*De excellentia foemini sexus*, 1636) probably never existed (see A. A. Sneller, "'Indien zij een man geweest was ...'" A. M. van Schurman in het sociaal-literaire leven van haar tijd' in: M. de Baar et al. (eds.), *A. M. van Schurman (1607-*



Ill. 1. Van Beverwijck and his family, probably painted by Jan Olis (1640). Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest, inv.nr. 1290.

the superiority of women over men; the trilogy offers an extensive medicine chest for doctors and laymen. It is important to note that Van Beverwijck worked on them in one period of his life: between 1636 and 1645. Now the first question is, what view on Dutch women emerges from these titles: is there such a thing as an ideal picture in *The excellence* and a more realistic one in *The Health* trio? A second question is whether the picture reflects Schama's view of Dutch women as human beings with many different qualities, and how he explains this within the framework of seventeenth-century culture.

In all three parts of *The excellence* (on the nature of women, on the combination of learning and wisdom and on her virtues) the Dordrecht writer slyly shows that woman is not inferior, not equal, but superior to the man.⁵ This goes for her body and her soul.

1678). *Een uitzonderlijk geleerde vrouw* (Zutphen 1992) 139-157, esp. 183, note 41.) See also C. Niekus Moore, "'Not by nature but by custom"; J. van Beverwijck's 'Van de wtmentheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts' in: *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* (1994) In press. For an anthology of the *Health*-trilogy in modern Dutch, see: J. van Beverwijck, *De schat der gezondheid*. Ed. by L. van Gemert (Amsterdam 1992).

5 For a summary of *The excellence* see A. A. Sneller, 150-154.

One of Van Beverwijck's tactics is to refute stereotypes: if Eve's punishment was to obey Adam, the implication is that it was the other way around at first (*Exc.* I, 40). And: women are human beings, otherwise the men they give birth to, would not be human (*Exc.* I, 6). So, females are certainly not monsters. In addition to this kind of mockery there is more serious discussion, particularly on the medical-philosophical theories of Aristotle and Galen. For instance, anatomy shows that there is no difference between the sexes in the size of the brain (*Exc.* II, 7-8, 202). Further, it is often said that women cannot think well because they are cold by nature, unlike men, who are warm. Now Van Beverwijck declares that women benefit from their coldness because it cools the brain and thus prevents overheating. Besides, cool blood leads to greater intelligence ('verstand'), whereas the warm blood of men only gives them physical strength. Its coolness also makes the female sex steadier in matters of love and allows it to live longer, because it does not burn down as fast as the male (*Exc.* II, 8, 90; I, 36-38).

After arguments like this, Van Beverwijck goes on to practical consequences. Men themselves are responsible for the inferior cultural education of the other sex: if they can afford the servants to do the practical housewife's jobs, women should read good books to keep their minds occupied, because manual activities like embroidering or spinning give them a chance to listen to the idle talk of young men. Husbands need not fear that their learned wives will not obey them: women will understand their duties better, provided they are only asked to carry out honourable ones. And in church they will grasp more of the sermons (*Exc.* II, 13-18)!

The last proof for his thesis of superiority is delivered by an enormous range of about seven hundred women from classical, biblical and historical sources, all illustrating one or more virtues.⁶ In the meantime, the string of examples classifies the book as a 'catalogue of learned women', a tradition that had started in Italy with *De claris mulieribus* (ca. 1360) by Boccaccio, who in turn based himself on classical writers like Plutarch and Diogenes.⁷

6 In the second part of *The excellence*, Van Beverwijck cites poems by Dutch women like the sisters Anna and Maria Tesselschade Roemers' Visscher, Johanna Coomans and Anna Maria van Schurman. Some 20 years later this inspired Johan van Nyenborgh to include an ode by 'Sap[p]ho' Sibille van Griethuysen in his catalogue of remarkable phenomena. Nyenborgh writes: 'En dergelijcke Exempelen werden elders meer gevonden, maer die van der vrouwen geestrijcheyt geleertheit en anders meer af wil weten; kan by Beverwijck, in zijn uytneemtheit der vrouwen daer af leesen [...]'. J. van Nyenborgh, *Het wonder-toneel ofte lust-hof der histori-paerlen, van wonderbaere behoudensissen, mitsgaders vande vreemdigheden der gewassen ende gedierten op aerden, ende wateren, blixem, bergen, mineralen, menschen, machtige steden, gebouwen, rijckdommen, begraftejnissen, op en ondergang der werelds staten: als oock van 't paradijs, verschijnningen, eenige consten ende sin-gedichten, etc. meer* (Groningen 1657) 162-164 (italics Nyenborgh). With thanks to drs. Dorthe Schipperheijn. For the participation of women in the literary world of the Dutch Golden Age see M. Spies, 'Oudejaarsavond 1675: Cornelia van der Veer schaduwt Katharina Lescaillje als deze van het huis van haar vriendin Sara de Canjoncle naar dat van haar zuster gaat. Het vrouwelijk aandeel' in: M. A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (ed.), *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Groningen 1993) 282-287; and L. van Gemert, "'Maak vaerzen, leez en schrijf': dichtende vrouwen uit de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw' in: *Vooyts* 12 (1994) 66-74.

7 About this tradition: Spies 1986 and Sneller. See also: B. Rang, "'Geleerde vrouwen van alle Eeuwen ende

In its turn the trio on health can be placed in a tradition of medical writings, especially in so far as it is based on the classical doctrine of the four humours summarized by Galen (ca. 129-ca. 200). At the same time, new developments are introduced: Van Beverwijck believes in Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood and tries to expand on it. Furthermore, it is the first complete guide to health written in Dutch, and so interested laymen can understand it too.

Because Van Beverwijck's concept here is 'health in everyday life', he makes fewer distinctions between men and women. Both sexes are approached in the light of the ideas on the four humours. According to them, the little world or microcosm of the human body and the big world or macrocosm around it were made of the same four elements: air, fire, earth and water. Each human being had his own temper(ament), a specific mixture of these elements in terms of humours or fluids: blood, yellow bile ('gal'), black bile and phlegm. The trick was to keep the balance between these four, otherwise the dominating fluid would cause illness. This concept works on the physical and the psychological level.⁸

As the books on health are more practical than *The excellence*, they give a better account of the daily life of the female sex. Schama's bourgeois wives seem to do their job well: they do the shopping, cook, mend and clean. Reading between the lines, one finds many examples, of which I will give a few here. When the doctor advises a melancholic man to eat 'gerste-pap' (barley-porridge), his wife is going to cook it for him (*Si. II, 36*). Once Van Beverwijck saw a woman at a spinning-wheel having an epileptic fit (*Si. II, 70*) and another got rabies by mending the hole a mad dog had bitten into a cloak (*Si. II, 57*). Dutch women clean their houses better than Italian women and in Holland an epidemic of the plague could never spring from infected ropes that had been left behind a chest for twenty years or more (*Si. II, 158*). On the other hand, cleaning does not always prevent sickness, as is proved by the case of a Dordrecht woman who died after having washed infected clothes (*Si. II, 158*).⁹

Next to the practical jobs, there are many reports on true love: people can die of grief for their husband, wife or children (*H. 30*)¹⁰ and families hate to leave each other in dangerous situations (*Si. II, 160*). A young woman who cannot marry the man she loves, commits suicide (*Si. II, 40*);¹¹ a Greek wife only recovers from

Volckeren, zelfs oock by de barbarische Scythen". De catalogi van geleerde vrouwen in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw' in: T. van Loosbroek et al. (eds.), *Geleerde vrouwen. Negende jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis* (Nijmegen 1988) 36-64.

⁸ Van Beverwijck explains the system in *H. 19-20*. See also for instance N. G. Siraisi, *Medieval and early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, London 1990) 97-106.

⁹ Here the doctor mentions the commercial attitude of the Dutch: the woman had planned to sell the clothes at a price as high as possible.

¹⁰ Van Beverwijck reports the grief he felt when his first wife, Anna van Duverden, suddenly died of an illness she had contracted in Utrecht (1624; *Exc. III, 66-67*).

¹¹ Sometimes the works together give the complete facts of a woman's life. For instance in *The treasury of sickness* a melancholic woman, living in Basel in 1544, commits suicide (*II, 40*). *The excellence* explains this: she takes her life after having been raped (against her will!) by a man who could not stand her being married to someone else (*III, 154-155*).

melancholy when her husband comes home after a long time (*Si. II, 45*). Mothers protect their children like the cerebral membrane protects the brain: that is why the Arabs call the cerebral membrane 'mother' (*Si. II, 14*). Because she would not believe her child was dead, an Italian mother postponed the burial of her daughter, against the custom of the country. On the third day the child rose to live for many years (*Si. II, 78*).

All in all, Van Beverwijck's women in his books on health are an important constituent to a harmonic household, corresponding to the key concept of the Galenic doctrine, balance. Another aspect of this doctrine are the dichotomies warm-cold and moist-dry that come with the four elements. We have already seen that Van Beverwijck also mentions them in *The excellence*: for women, the compromise between the contrasts is that their coldness prevents the brain from overheating. The absolute model for reconciling these opposing factors is 'the learned maid' Anna Maria van Schurman, to whom the second part of *The excellence* is dedicated. She is so perfect that she does not have to pay attention to the differences, because she is above them (*Exc. II, 88, 96-98*).

In my opinion, Schama underestimated the influence of the medical principles in Van Beverwijck's work. Although he mentions its Galenic basis and describes the concept of moderation, to Schama reconciling opposing elements is a specific seventeenth-century Dutch activity, whereas to Van Beverwijck, the physician, it was no more than building on old classical ideas which had already circulated for centuries throughout Western Europe.¹² And in relation to *The excellence*, Schama fails to see what is really important: the doctor uses the old contrasts in a relatively new setting, that of the praise of women.

This brings me to a second objection against Schama's view on Van Beverwijck. He presents him as a typical Dutch doctor. But, as can be concluded from the examples above, Van Beverwijck's books contain much more than Dutch ideas alone. Whether reading in *The excellence* or in the trio on health, one finds women from all over the world and from all ages, taken from a great variety of sources, from the Bible to history books and from medical reports to travel stories. Of course, the doctor often deals with his own experience, his own practice, his own city and his province, Holland, but in reconstructing his feelings of identity, one should not forget that Van Beverwijck himself was highly aware that he was part of a

¹² For the Galenic influence: Schama (1987) 158, 632 note 47; (1988) 167, 629 note 47. On the other hand Schama neglects the fact that Van Beverwijck contributed to new medical theories, for instance in the *Steenstuck* (1638), a treatise on kidney- and bladder-stones, dedicated to Harvey, in which he expands the theory of blood circulation (*Si. II, 228-287*). Haitsma Mulier noted that Schama also neglects experiments by Swammerdam and Van Leeuwenhoek. See E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, 'Tekens en symbolen in het zeventiende-eeuwse Nederland: geschiedschrijving als emblematiek' in: *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden (BMGN)* 104 (1989) 43-50, esp. 47.

broader European network.¹³ Concerning another of Schama's themes, the Dordrecht writer does not talk of a special place the Dutch are supposed to occupy as God's own people, like the Jews in the Old Testament: in his *Introduction to the Medicines of the Province of Holland (Inleydinge tot de Hollantsche Geneesmiddelen)* Van Beverwijck states emphatically that God gave every area in the world precisely the right medicines for the diseases occurring there, and Holland is no exception (*Si*, I, 101-107).¹⁴

But there is more to be said on Schama's interpretation of our culture. One of the key points of his thesis is the tension the Dutch felt between the contrasts in their lives, for instance wealth and soberness, a tension they constantly had to reconcile. In his chapter about women he focusses on the (typically Dutch?) tension between the cleanliness of the housewife and the filthiness of the whore. In Van Beverwijck's work one certainly finds many contrasting statements, but it often happens to be an argument that is given *ad hoc*, as applicable only in a certain situation.

In *The excellence*, for instance, the doctor more than once claims the moral superiority of Eve over Adam (*Exc.* I, 5-6, 21, 40) and also wants to prove the self-denying love a woman feels for her children: she goes through a lot of physical pain, bearing and raising them, but forgets all this when she sees the fruit of her womb (*Exc.* III, 161; I, 8-9). In the chapter on childbearing in *The treasury of health* however, the pain of being in labour is considered the punishment for her sins, which she feels the more because she leads an idle, sedentary life. Besides, of all female animals, women are most hypersensitive and fearful (*H.* 206). But in *The excellence*, together with many women of various nationalities, Dutch heroines like Kenau Simon Hasselaarsdochter of Haarlem en Trijn van Leemput of Utrecht have no fear at all, at least not when their native town¹⁵ is at stake (*Exc.* III, 31-56).¹⁶ Also, the picture of the constantly busy housewife who cooks and cleans does not match that of the idle and lazy one who is going to give birth to a child. And although, as we have seen, *The excellence* is quite clear about the superiority of a woman's brain and intelligence over that of a man, in *The treasury of health* it is precisely

13 On the aspect of identity: J.L. Price, 'The dangers of unscientific history: Schama and the Dutch seventeenth-century' in: *BMGN* 104 (1989) 39-42, esp. 40-41; and W. Frijhoff, 'Identiteit en identiteitsbesef. De historicus en de spanning tussen verbeelding, benoeming en herkenning' in: *BMGN* 107 (1992) 614-634, esp. 618-619 and 629. Haitsma Mulier notes that Van Beverwijck studied in Padua and maybe took Aristotelian ideas about family life back to Holland (see Haitsma Mulier, 47).

14 For further discussion on Van Beverwijck's opinions about the Dutch overseas areas, see L. van Gemert, "'U kunst gelt over-al': een Dordtse arts tussen West en Oost' in: *Literatuur* 10 (1993) 16-22.

15 Van Beverwijck uses the word 'vaderland' ('native country'; *Exc.* III, 31), but means 'native town', where one is born and has one's civil rights ('borger-recht'). See M. Meijer Drees, 'Vaderlandse heldinnen in belegeringstoneelstukken' in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 85 (1992) 71-82, esp. 73.

16 Schama mistakes Trijn van Leemput for Kenau. The picture he uses, shows Trijn van Leemput, marching to the castle 'Vredenborgh' in Utrecht, as may be concluded from Van Beverwijck's subscription (*Exc.* III, 50; Schama 1987, 89; 1988, 99). That women are fearful is also denied in *Exc.* II, 264 and III, 166-208.



Ill. 2. Trijn van Leemput. From: *The excellence* III, 50.

their lesser power of comprehension and weakness of judgment that makes women more inclined to anger than men (*H.* 73). And what is worse, when children are stupid, this indicates that the woman's seed was stronger than the man's at the time of conception (*H.* 193).

As Spies and Sneller have rightly remarked, such differences in the view of women come from the genre or discourse in which Van Beverwijck is writing. Firstly, the two kinds of work have different purposes: the idealistic praise of the female sex versus practical behaviour in matters of health. Secondly, in the humanistic tradition of the Montaignian essay, readers did not expect a rectilinear argument, but more a show of various aspects of a case. And in turn, the writers did not expect their readers to put the advice given into practice.¹⁷

17 In her poem 'Lof-Dicht, Ter eeren van [...] Johan van Beverwijck [...] in part III of *The excellence*, Charlotte de Huybert argues that women should have the possibility to work as merchants and to hold public office. As Spies (1986) has shown, the tradition that not every word in such writings should be taken seriously, applies here too.

The break caused by the demands of reality applies especially to *The excellence*: as has been pointed out often before, women were allowed to develop their minds and skills, but their first task remained to marry and run the household properly. After all, the household was 'a little society or community [...] [that] provided the basic molecular structure' of society, as Schama puts it (*Exc. II*, 206-210).¹⁸ This matrimonial ideal also shows itself in remarks like: 'women's language is pure for they stay at home and do not travel to pick up traces of other languages, like men do. That is why your native language is called "mother tongue"' (*Exc. I*, 9); 'the word "Huys-vrouw"' ("housewife") means that a woman's task is to rule the house. God created her with soft flesh to indicate that she is supposed to live inside the walls' (*Exc. III*, 206-207).

Thus, Van Beverwijck wants to educate his own daughters to the level of Anna Maria van Schurman, but he expects them to manage the household of their future husbands as well (*Exc. II*, 18-19, 98).¹⁹ When, in *The treasury of sickness*, a widow recovers from consumption and remarries, according to the doctor she maintains her health by the bond of marriage, which is very good for 'the weaker vessels' (*Si. II*, 135).²⁰ In *The excellence*, the famous poem for Anna Roemer Visscher by Johanna Coomans from the province of Zeeland carries the same message. Coomans puts her finger on the weak spot: Anna is well educated and highly gifted, but she is not married (*Exc. II*, 182-183).²¹ Fortunately for her, the woman to whom part one of *The excellence* is dedicated, Anna van Blocklandt, is safely encapsulated: she is married (to Cornelis Boy, who wrote most of the poems in the catalogue), and also the daughter of a learned father, Pieter Brandwijck, Lord of Blocklandt. There is even a picture, 'The Sound of Music in the Van Blocklandt family', in which the four children each sing in their own key, while father Pieter stands proudly in the background (*Exc. II*, 189). By contrast, Anna Maria van Schurman was allowed a special place in the bulwark of men's learning only because she was not married

18 Schama (1987) 388; (1988) 389-390.

19 Van Beverwijck's first wife, Anna van Duverden, apparently was well educated. The doctor reports that she knew the value of reading as much as he did, because her father stimulated her to it from her childhood onwards (*Exc. III*, 67).

20 'Soo gesont is den bandt des Houwelijcks voor de swacke vaetjens!' (*Si. II*, 135). In *The treasury of health*, Van Beverwijck states that women are generally seen as weak vessels ('[...] de Vrouwen, die voor swacke vaetjens doorgaen [...]'; *H*, 30).

21 Van Beverwijck includes another remarkable poem by Coomans: 'Wapenschild, Alle eerlicke Iongmans toe-geeygent'. Coomans reacts to the 'Wapenschild alle eerbare maeghden toe-geeygent' in the *Maechden-plicht* by Jacob Cats (1618) and offers young men a perfect tongue, to use only the honourable way (*Exc. II*, 177-182). It seems to me that Cats annoyed Coomans in the severe way he addressed himself to women, so she in turn points out that men have their moral duties, too. Van Beverwijck was aware of the discrepancy in the judgement on women and men. In the chapter on the (many) virtues the Dutch expect from the female sex, he suddenly observes that a woman must be a virgin when she marries, but that an inexperienced bridegroom is considered a softy (*Exc. III*, 116). For further discussion on this double standard see M.Th. Leuker, 'De last van 't huys, de wil des mans ...': *Frauenbilder und Ehekonzepte im niederländischen Lustspiel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Münster 1992) 141-149 and Van Gemert (1994).



Ill. 3. The Van Blocklandt-family. From: *The excellence II*, 189.

and therefore did not risk confusing the demands from the two domains.

The message is clear: women may not cross certain borders which would bring them into the men's world. Van Beverwijck openly admits this in the section on the capacity of women to become doctors (*Exc. II*, 118-141). After many examples of their practical medical wisdom, he states that he does not want to tell too much, otherwise women might thwart professional physicians.²² At the beginning of the chapter, the poet Boy had already joked: 'Your art is women's work' (*Exc. II*, 119). We find the same opinion concerning midwives: they may do their job on their own – provided they have passed a special examination – but they are restricted to help the woman in labour, cut the navel string, dry-nurse the child and be on the alert for a few days. When in doubt, they should immediately contact a real doctor (*H*. 206-210).²³

22 In the medical works, too, women heal patients (for instance *Si. II*, 112, 132), although sometimes they do not use medicines correctly (*Si. II*, 94).

23 Schama's interpretation that Van Beverwijck would not allow midwives to work on their own, is not correct (1987, 526; 1988, 523). The doctor states that after having passed the inquiry, which he himself took care of at Dordrecht, the ladies were allowed to practise (*H*, 208; *Si. II*, 11).

Up to this point, one could say Van Beverwijck fits into Schama's model: the doctor presents us with the tension between the various views on women from weak to strong, and the compromise between them comes from the fact that he writes within a certain tradition, in which one can argue ad hoc and is not expected to take full responsibility for all one's words. But again, this is not all. There is one sort of remark that I have not mentioned so far: Van Beverwijck's sexual observations. They occur especially in the books on health and show another cliché concerning women, their appetite for sexual pleasures.

Again we have to realize that Van Beverwijck was a professional doctor and looked at women's desires with a medical eye. More specifically, within the Galenic framework there was a kind of disease called 'hysteria', caused by the dominance of the melancholic humour. It literally made the uterus rise and bounce against the stomach. Women, especially young ones and widows (*Si. II*, 44, 294), could be troubled by this so much that they seemed to die and went into a coma for several days. The best medicine for this was to have sex (so: to marry). With a wink, Van Beverwijck adds that it is convenient if one does not have to borrow the medicine from a neighbour (*Si. II*, 295), but when he tells of an Italian woman who recovered only after having sex with fifteen men in one night (*Si. II*, 47), one wonders whether this is a medical view or a joke.

When it comes to joking, there are many examples: there is Socrates, who took two ill-tempered women to learn to control his patience and who, when they called him names and poured urine over his head, said that rain and thunder often come together, and there is Euripides, who was reported not to like women except between the sheets (*H. 26*). Further, the only explanation why women want to carry our children and bear them in pain is that they like sex so much, even to the extent that they want it every day, whereas other animals all stick to a fixed mating season. And when a man points out that one should not have sex on the so-called 'dog days', they answer that the dog nights are not forbidden. Immediately after bearing a child, some women even manage to make men crawl in their bed (*Si. II*, 179-180).²⁴ Making love does not exhaust women as much as men and the female lust for sex makes them neglect dangers of contagious diseases like scurvy or syphilis (*H. 250*, *Si. II*, 213, 158).

Focussing on the theme 'women and sex', another cliché attracts attention: the fact that Van Beverwijck many times uses diminutives like 'vroukens', 'het soet Hertjen', 'vaetjens', (all variations on 'little women', for instance: *Si. I*, 91, *Si. II*, 43, 69, 89; *H. 195*; *H. 30*, *Si. II*, 135) and also rails at them as 'snol', 'verschrompelde teutebel' or 'wijs-neuse Trip' ('tart', 'shriveled frump' and 'obstinate bitch'; *Si. II*, 158, 213; *Si. I*, 11). To indicate men he uses fewer synonyms, which are more

²⁴ Van Beverwijck points out that there should be no sex just after having given birth. In his advice on food for the young mother, he writes that the uterus will shrink of itself. If it needed anything it would be sex, but that is not suitable until the lying-in time is over (*H. 209*).

neutral, like 'someone' or 'a person' and hardly any diminutives. From this view of females as sex maniacs and from the offending jokes, I conclude that Van Beverwijck wrote the books on health with a male public in mind. This would also explain his remark in *The excellence* that women should not become real doctors. In my opinion Van Beverwijck did not consider it possible that women would really study his guide to hygiene. The Dutch language should enable especially more men to enter the medical world.

Thus, Van Beverwijck presents not only the high, idealistic view of women but also the low, contemptuous one. This makes him a perfect example of Schama's thesis of contrasts: Van Beverwijck comments on both the learned, chaste housewife and the desires of the whore. Schama also thinks the Dutch had to find a way to reconcile to their conscience the various polarities in their life. If this was so, one would certainly expect it in Van Beverwijck's case, otherwise he would not have slept a wink. Furthermore, one would expect Schama to present the Dordrecht writer as a case to support his view, but he does not. Why not? I think because Schama's interpretation of the Dutch Golden Age is not completely correct.

In the doctor's work I see no signs of spasmodic soothing of conscience. Van Beverwijck just places the contrasts of life next to each other. In the same period he writes an idealistic thesis and a practical medicine chest, without commenting on that fact itself. In this, Van Beverwijck resembles other Dutch seventeenth-century writers. Constantijn Huygens, for instance, wrote a lot of 'high' poetry about his wife Suzanna – a real Petrarcan 'Star' ('Sterre') – but chose the low farce when he wrote *Trijntje Cornelis* (1653). And a theatre man like Gerbrandt Bredero places scenes with highborn people next to dialogues between simple folks in the same drama. This combination of high and low can also be found in the work of another Amsterdam contemporary, Abraham de Koning. Even more than Bredero, he combines the two kinds of person in one scene and lets them develop the story together. The apparently contradictory elements require no reconciliation.²⁵ Equally, there is no compromising concerning the contents of these plays: as Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has shown, people did not expect a consistency of argument but were pleased by *ad hoc* reasoning. In Bredero's *Moortje* (1617) this results in a negative comment on slavery by the man Ritsart, who has bought a slave himself and in whores being railed at by their visitors. Moreover, two of the major characters here, the whore Moy-aal and the sponger Kackerlack, have tongues that easily speak as the situation requires. We see the same thing in tragedies: there the chorus usually speaks or sings according to the state of affairs on stage.²⁶

²⁵ G.A. Bredero, *Rodd'rick ende Alphonsus* (1611), *Griane* (1612) and *Stommen Ridder* (1618); A. de Koning, *Hagars vluchte ende weder-komste* (1616) and *Simsons treur-spel* (1618). In Dutch the combination-scenes are called 'minderemansscènes', but they would be better characterized as 'minderemensscènes'.

²⁶ See M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, 'Moraal en karakter: lezingen van Moortje' in: *De Nieuwe*

Again, we may judge the seventeenth-century genres or discourses and hold them responsible for the various contradictory remarks that were made within one framework and let the reconciliation come from that framework itself. But the problem goes deeper and the truth lies beyond this. The real question is: did the seventeenth-century Dutch writers really feel the tension Schama postulates and did they feel the need to compromise? Given the absence of remarks about reconciliation in his work, I conclude that Van Beverwijck did not: to him, as a fairly well-to-do citizen, the facts were probably just aspects of a multifaceted reality, and knowing that, he slept well.

My conclusion is that the need to reconcile is Schama's and this raises the last question: where does his feeling of tension come from? I think this has to do with the genre which Schama in his turn chose: history as a story. By this we have entered the paradigm of the narrative. It is interesting to see that much of the criticism of Schama as 'a fiction writer' relates to this paradigm too: I mean the boundaries between fact and fiction in his narrative. The narrative paradigm also includes the concept of coherence. Schama himself has explained in an interview that he always strove for 'a coherent literary form'.²⁷ In my opinion this made him invent 'the concept of tension and reconciliation'. In other words, Schama searched for one denominator to label Dutch seventeenth-century culture and to provide a clear story line with a beginning and an end. In fact, he created a sweet dream.

Taalgids 78 (1985) 224-234, esp. 226, and L. van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door? De functie van de rei in Nederlandstalig toneel 1556-1625* (Deventer 1990). The combination of high and low shows itself still more intensely, on seventeenth-century paintings: often a woman represents virtue and vice at the same time. McNeil Kettering pointed out that the various contexts behind those pictures are not mutually exclusive, but stand next to each other and result in what she calls 'a plural view'. See A. McNeil Kettering, 'Ter Borch's ladies in satin' in: *Art History* 16 (1993) 95-124, esp. 115.

²⁷ P. Brill, 'Er is geen antwoord, er is alleen het debat. Interview met Simon Schama' in: S. Schama, *De ark van Noach of 'de onrijpe nectarine'? Visies op Nederland in de negentiende eeuw.* ([A'dam] 1989) 4-11, (eerder verschenen in *de Volkskrant*, 14-10-1989), esp. 8-9. Although Schama stressed the fact that storytelling cannot do without a study of archives and the accurate use of reliable sources, part of the criticism of his book concerned the inaccurate use of sources and the inclination to speculate. Price wrote: 'Protagonists of history as literature, must beware of the danger of writing history as fiction' (see Price, 42). For the discussion of the narrative paradigm see J.G. Barry, 'Narratology's Centrifugal Force: a Literary Perspective on the Extensions of Narrative Theory' in: *Poetics Today* 11 (1990) 295-307 and A. Rigney, 'The Point of Stories: on Narrative Communication and its Cognitive Functions' in: *Poetics Today* 13 (1992) 263-283.