DIE AUFKLÄRUNG IN DER ROMANIA

LUMIÈRES – ILUSTRACIÓN – ILLUMINISMO

Herausgegeben von Klaus-Dieter Ertler

BAND 13

PETER LANG

Klaus-Dieter Ertler / Yvonne Völkl / Elisabeth Hobisch /
Alexandra Fuchs / Hans Fernández (eds.)

Storytelling in the Spectators / Storytelling dans les spectateurs

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Cornelis van der Haven

From Anecdote to Anecdote: The Chaotic Order of Storytelling in Dutch Anti-Spectators around 1725[1]

Long before Justus van Effen's first spectatorial magazine in Dutch was published in the 1730s, the spectator was already an established genre in the Low Countries that would soon produce its satirical counterparts. The first Spectator-parodies appeared in the 1720s. One of the most successful authors of these satirical moral weeklies was Jacob Campo Weyerman, who explicitly mocked the spectatorial genre in his magazines. Dutch literary historiography created a strict dividing line between the spectatorial magazine and the satirical magazines of Weyerman, that often has been criticised over the last decades. This paper will focus on the differences and similarities between Weyerman's journals and the spectatorial genre. It will in particular investigate the way in which Weyerman's stories, kept together by series of anecdotes, relay on a kind of "chaotic order" that is different from the more classical rhetorical structure of spectatorial essay in the tradition of van Effen and others.

The Spectatorial Genre in the Netherlands

The rise and heydays of the spectatorial genre in the Low Countries is inextricably bound up with Justus van Effen (1684–1735) and his several spectatorial projects, most importantly of course *Le Misantrope* and his first and only spectator in Dutch language, *De Hollandsche Spectator*. This *Dutch Spectator* must have been very popular and at least 360 issues appeared in a period of about 5 years, between 1731 and 1736. Long before van Effen however, the spectator in fact was already an established genre in the Low Countries (Buijnsters 1966). This becomes clear from the first spectator parodies that already appeared in the 1720s. One of the most successful authors of these satirical "moral" weeklies was

1 This contribution is an adapted version of an article that was earlier published in Dutch: "De wanordelijke orde van Weyermans vertelzuchtige vertogen". In: *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 41, 2 (2018), 1–14. I would like to thank my colleague Lars Bernaerts for his feedback on the preliminary outcomes of this research.

Jacob Campo Weyerman, who was re-discovered over the last decades, because of the important pioneering work done by the Dutch literary scholar André Hanou and his collaborators (see especially Hanou 2002 and Altena 1992). Weyerman has set up many magazines during his lifetime and it was his aim to live from these investments, which was not so easy of course and many of these projects had a short life. His most famous projects were the *Rotterdam* and *Amsterdam Hermes* (1720–1722). Many of Weyerman's writings are written in a very flowery and ornate style, which is very difficult to translate. He is seen as an virtuoso in language, using surprising metaphors and he was well-known for his biting satire.

It is difficult to say where we should draw a line between the satirical magazine and the spectators. In general however, an author like Weyerman is not mentioned in Dutch literary historiography as an author of moral weeklies. Buijnsters points at the more fanciful style of the satirical magazine and the irregular structure and composition of the "essays" that often consist of a very loose train of anecdotes, the one after the other, without a clear line of argumentation (Buijnsters 1984, 39). Apart from style, also the content can be characterised as "anti-spectatorial". The idea of "unmasking" is dominant in his writing and refers to the secret and hidden vices of people who pretend to be virtuous. Weyerman himself was very clear in his profiling *against* the spectatorial genre. He was criticizing the didactic style of van Effen's *Dutch Spectator* that became one of the main competing initiatives in the magazine business from 1731 onwards. Hanou (2002, 39) refers to how Weyerman mocks the four contributors to van Effen's magazine as "camels" who serve their readers with bended knees while offering a quite simple language that would hardly be able to hide the ponderous content of those magazines:

> The [...] Spektator, a weekly, that is, according to a notice, supported by four authors, heroes of the pen, who bend their kneecaps like [...] camels do, who are packed up under their hinny saddles with a doleful weekly ponderous weight, only to give satisfaction to the taste and intellect of spelling readers [...][2].

Altena (1992) is very critical however about the strict dividing line drawn in Dutch literary historiography between the spectatorial magazine and the satirical magazines of Weyerman. He admits that in the case of Weyerman the moral often is implicit or kept back because of his metaphorical language that is so difficult to read, but nevertheless, both van Effen and Weyerman would tend to reflect morally on the society of their own age and times, although using a very different style of writing (Altena 1992, 156). Still, Weyerman's unashamed exposed individuality and libertarian attitude to life certainly is intriguing, as it runs parallel to the moralising discourse of the moral weeklies by Van Effen and others, to which Weyerman strongly opposed. The history of the moral weekly thus also is the history of its counterpart, the satirical magazine that flourished not in the last place because of offering an alternative for the often ponderous moralising discourse of the spectatorial genre (Hanou 2002, 40).

2 "De [...] Spektator, een wekelijks schrift, volgens bericht onderschraagd bij een viertal schrijvers, welke penhelden hunne knieschijven toevouwen, op de wijze der [...] kamelen, onder de muilezels zadel bestapeld met die zwaarmoedige wekeiljkse vracht, alleenlijk om te voldoen aan de smaak en de bevatting der spellende lezers [...]". Quoted after Hanou 2002, 39.

From *vertoog* to Clusters of Anecdotes

Some of Van Effen's essays (*vertogen* in Dutch) have a classical rhetorical structure that enables the Spectator discuss one or more particular moral issues or problems. In his overview of how spectatorial essays can be structured, Sutherland would call this the "simple structure" of the periodical essay, essays that are more or less "coherent and unified, the subject being the unifying force" (Sutherland 1977, 140). In van Effen's essays we often recognize the structure of the *exordium*, to introduce the theme of the essay, the main part of his argumentation, the *narratio*, the *confirmatio* in which the speaker summarizes his main argument and a *conclusio*. In his essay about the Amsterdam theatre for instance (No. 27, 25 January 1732), the exordium immediately relates the Spectator's reflections on the theatre to the bigger questions of what the status of the theatre is, as a respectable or detestable institution, or one of the *adiaphora*, things that are neither good nor bad, having no specific connection with morality. After that, a narrative begins in which the author expands on the backgrounds of this discussion and then starts with his own argumentation that is focused on how to produce better plays in the local Amsterdam theatre. Introduced by a short contra-argumentatio, the most important arguments of the author are summarized in a confirmatio, ending with a clear conclusion that theatre authors should be paid in order to improve the quality of theatre plays.

Many of van Effen's moral essays have such a clear rhetorical structure, but not all of them. Some of them are rather chaotic and bring to the fore several smaller topics, without a clear line of argument or even an integral structure that connects these different themes through the main issue that the essay wants to discuss. Often there is no clear hierarchy of the different addressed topics, which means that these essay-forms can have a quite complex structure that seems to be

poorly conceived. In most cases however, Sir Spectator presents different smaller themes while forcing himself to choose only one in order to determine what will be the main question to reflect on the current issue. In the issue no. 213 (9 November 1733), for instance, the Spectator receives a letter from someone who found a piece of paper on the floor of the municipal theatre on which "Sir Spectator" had written down a list of topics to discuss in the coming issues of his periodical. The list presents to the reader a number of several fascinating themes, from the quality and dangers of wine consumption to moral reflections on overnicety. The Spectator however seems to punish his over-curious readership with reflections on what seems to be the most boring topic on the list, the necessity of making a new Dutch translation of the Psalms for singing in the church. Van Effen does not use this opportunity to write a more diverse essay in which he mentions briefly some more details about the topics that will be discussed in the following issues of his magazine.

In the *exordia* of his essays, van Effen often presents his "alter ego" of the "Sir Spectator" as someone who is still undecided about what he would like to tell his readership, until the first sentences are written down on paper. Doing so, several topics can be touched upon before the main theme of the essay is determined. This literary technique is closely related to what scholars like Monika Fludernik (2003) would call a form of "natural narratology". Typical for the genre is the "natural" way in which Sir Spectator speaks to his audience, as if his reflections follow upon an everyday encounter on the street or in the coffeehouse. It is as if the author of the essay is strolling through his memory looking for a suitable topic to talk about, not feeling bound however to any particular expectations. No. 52 of *Le Misantrope* for instance begins as follows: "Je prétends aujourd'hui ne m'attacher point à un seul sujet, obéïr simplement à mon génie, & m'abandonner à mes réfléxions. Je commencerai mon ouvrage à tout hazard et je le finirai comme je pourrai" (van Effen 1742, 87). The narrative, in other words, can potentially go into any direction; during his stream of thought in this issue, van Effen starts recounting a childhood memory, then broaches other topics, finally arriving at a number of crucial questions about what a philosopher is or ought to be. Van Effen presents all of this as an experiment that may not be strictly worth repeating, but he does demonstrate the very flexible nature of the spectatorial essay's composition.

The Anecdote and Contingency

The role of the anecdote in Dutch spectatorial magazines has not been discussed extensively, with the exception of an article by P.J. Buinsters on the anecdote

in van Effen's work. Buijnsters emphasises the anecdote as an instrument for showing interest in personal details, "the small but poignant particulars that form the drawback of one's public life", for which he uses the term "reflexive-characterising anecdote" (Buijnsters 1989, 298–9). Buijnsters comes to the conclusion that many anecdotes in the spectators have a didactic intention. They form a collection of *petites histoires*, "secularised examples for the enlightened citizen" (Buijnsters 1989, 302–3). However, he suspects that the function of the anecdote in Weyerman's essayistic work is rather different from that in van Effen's work. This is evidenced by the sheer quantity of anecdotes that feature in Weyerman's work, and by the fact that the anecdote in his work is not restricted to a short "exemplum", but rather forms the most important structuring element of his essays.

In a well-known article on "New Historicism", the reading method developed by Stephen Greenblatt within the field of early modern literature, literary scholar Joel Fineman writes rather extensively on the relation between the anecdote and historiography. The anecdote often serves to support the forceful teleological structure that characterises many historiographic texts, consisting of a beginning, middle and end—with everything in the service of that ending—but it also has the potential to disrupt this structure. The anecdote can thus create an "effect of the real" that suspends the timelessness of historiographic discourse, as Fineman notes:

> The anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i.e., it does so only in so far as its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it reports (Fineman 1989, 61).

On the basis of the above, we could state that perhaps something similar counts for the genre of the spectatorial essay, and in particular for Weyerman's anti-spectators, which we will discuss below. Often, these seem to steer into the direction of a *conclusio* with a moralistic *pointe*, but they end up avoiding the pointe altogether (this is easy to conclude in Weyerman's work). Either this, or the structure of the endlessly expanding narration renders such an end point impossible in the first place. The anecdotal narrative style claims attention for itself, while not in service of the potential lessons to be learnt from the narrative, or of the knowledge to be gained. Just like historiography, we could describe the spectatorial essay as a narrative form with a certain goal in mind, a final point that we could describe as "making something public", "showing something", "announcing something": in short, a functional kind of writing working towards a certain final objective, apart from the question whether this

objective relates to a moral lesson or to the transmission of knowledge and vicissitudes.

The most important function of the anecdote, according to Fineman, is that it is able to disrupt abstract notions and create a sense of realness. This abstraction can relate to time, as is the case in historiography. Historiography would create a sense of timelessness, according to him, whenever historical events only prove to build towards a certain endpoint in the past or present. The anecdote does exactly the opposite: it creates a sense of time based on the description of a small, concrete occurrence. For Fineman, this is not only about "the effect of the real", but also about "the occurrence of contingency"—which we could rephrase as an emphasis on eventuality: the fact that something might simply "eventuate", occur, present itself, often without a clear reason or cause and without a certain aim. The emphasis in Weyerman's writing, I think, is on that eventuality, and drawing on what German scholar Barbara Naumann calls "Geschwätzigkeit als Ereignis", on the narrative craving of an event, the way in which it incites the author to produce literary *Geschwätz*: something in between chatter, prattle, gossip and slander (Naumann 2003, 113–7). At the same time, there is a constant connection with the coincidental and spontaneous. Monika Fludernik stresses the latter notion in her well-known *Towards a natural narratology* (1996). The "natural" quality of literary language, according to her, is contained in the spontaneity of an utterance—for example, a coincidental twist in an everyday conversation. This can be compared to the tradition of "conversational storytelling", which has strong ties to older oral traditions, in which the audience is directly addressed and the borders between fact and fiction are continually blurred (Fludernik 2003, 14–5).

This last aspect is highly relevant to the spectatorial genre and to Weyerman's magazines, which constantly toyed with the friction between fact and fiction. He repeatedly suggests a sense of realness, after which he abrogates the same suggestion. For him, the anecdote is not a crowbar that serves to consciously evoke a sense of realness; rather, his narrative mode is attached to the anecdotal, the narrative craving as it were. Weyerman allows the "eventual" to prevail over that which juxtaposes it, the formal coherence of the essay and that which it should necessarily work towards (a lesson, a pointe, a vicissitude). If there is any kind of necessity at all in his essays, it would be the telling, the act of telling itself. In other words: a desire to tell.

The Dissector of Failings (1723–1725)

Now, if we indeed take a closer look at the genre of the "anti-spectator" in the work of Weyerman, or better to say: the satirical version of the spectator occurring just

before heydays of the genre in Dutch after 1731, we will see that the standardized essay form of van Effen's earlier French spectators is not observed at all and that is indeed the "desire to tell" that takes centre stage. Weyerman's essays were famous because of their unrestrained disorder, rambling from one topic to the other. If we should use the Sutherland's terminology his essays have a "topical structure", presenting a chain of different topics, without a clear line of argumentation, producing a fragmented narrative, hold together solely by the voice of the narrator (Sutherland 1977, 144–6). One of his initiatives was *Den Ontleeder der Gebreeken* (*The Dissector of Failings*), that appeared in the years 1723, 1724 and 1725. The first issue of *The Dissector of Failings* is somewhat programmatic and presents the new project of Weyerman as an attempt not to bore his readership with long talks but with "naakte, natuurlyke, en vrolyke Ontleeding"—"bare, natural, and funny analysis". This adjective of "natuurlyk" seems indeed characterize the style of Weyerman. It is the same style as mentioned in regard of the *exordia* by Van Effen, but now stretched to the length of complete essays, written in this informal and somewhat conspirational way of addressing his audience, as if he is addressing friends or relatives. This feigned intimacy is used to suggest hidden meanings behind his often obscure stories that seems to push his writing in the direction of mere anecdote and gossip.

Not only when it comes to style, but also in terms of presentation, it is tempting to interpret *The Dissector of Failings* as an early parody of the spectatorial magazines. It sports a motto, an aphorism and a frontispiece, as well as an "explanation" of the illustration in which writer and colleague Gysbert Tysens praises "Lord Jacob" as a moralist, as a man who uses his pen to separate virtue from vice, and as a capable gardener who combats the immoral weeds of eighteenth-century society. However, the fact that the motto is derived from Juvenal may make the reader rethink its intention. "Omne in praecipiti Vitium stetit": immorality has reached its climax, its peak—and can only fall down from here. It is of course not moral education, but satire that is crucial in Juvenal's universe (Copley 1941, 219–21). The "dissecting knife" that Weyerman wields according to the first issue (11 October 1723), turns out be—at least in a dream—a "silver skimmer" that Mercury hands him in the second issue (18 October 1723), in order to "skim [...] the failings that are bubbling forth, from the capricious heads of your contemporaries, indiscriminately" (Weyerman 1724, 14). Thus, the Dissector dissects each and everyone's failings, also, or perhaps particularly, the failings of those who believe themselves to be guardians of the right morality. "Skimming" (*schuimen* in Dutch) can either mean "purifying" or "removing the surfacing best component", which introduces an ambiguity into the alleged moral intentions of Lord Dissector. It is not a coincidence that the moral in *The*

Dissector often remains implicit or opaque, or that the quasi-moralist pointe undermines the essay's earlier-mentioned didactic intentions.

The Dissector features a lot of stolen work, for the most part taken from older English magazines such as that of Abraham Cowley (Van de Wetering 1995 and Bruggeman 2018). This is, however, not true for everything in *The Dissector*. There are many contributions with a semi-autobiographical undertone. Lord Dissector, as Weyerman's alter ego, lives in Rotsenburg in Utrecht, the country estate to which he moved in 1722 with his partner Adriana de Visscher. Or we can find him elsewhere, at the river Vecht, near Breukelen, where he used to live in the heyday of his writership around 1725 (van Vliet & Sprangers 2013). Some of the issues are partly or fully dedicated to the author's dwelling and his adventures and encounters there. Many essays for instance deal with a curious location, like the narrator's own residence, close to the city of Utrecht, where encounters with different kind of people take place, providing the author the opportunity of presenting to his reader character sketches of different curious personalities from Utrecht and its surroundings. The narrative also can be purely fictional, like in the case of the story told by the arm chair (see below), although the suggestion of gossip related to personalities his readership may have been familiar with, never is far away.

What distinguishes the essays by Weyerman from those written by van Effen, is that its main structural characteristic often is not the theme of what should be an example of moral reflection, but a topical element that seems to be discarded from any moral reflection. The most popular narrative technique however in Weyerman's magazine is the description of remarkable events, which provides the author the opportunity to present to his readers several particularities about the world around him in a very natural and informal way. It is telling that these "ongemeene Voorvallen", "remarkable noteworthy events", are mentioned on the title page as one of the magazine's selling points. Finally there also are the real Spectator-parodies, when the author presents to his reader a "moral issue" where there is none, like his "Bespiegling over de Rygsnoer van een Juffers Tabbered-lyf": "Reflection upon the lace of a Lady's corset" (No. 11, 20 December 1723), in which the several functions of the "Lady's lace" are discussed, focusing on techniques of lover's to undress ladies and about how the lace of the robe becomes the main object of desire, as possessing it means of course the ultimate conquest of the beloved woman.

Many of his essays however are linked to what can be called an urban event culture (see also Naumann 2003, 113), as most of them are focused on every day incidents and occasions that occupied urban middle and higher classes of cities like Utrecht, Amsterdam and The Hague. However, the intention of the narrator

is not in the first place to provide moral reflection on such events, but to produce seemingly unstructured "natural" narratives about what—as if by accident—just happened close by, like in his home-town Utrecht. This looseness and noncommittal attitude is not a by-product of Weyerman's narratives. It rather seems to be his main goal *not* to pay explicit attention to form, structure and the outlines of his narrative. Rather the absence of all these elements, is his selling point. His essays are characterised by the "talkativeness of the event" (see the earlier reference to Naumann), the way in which the discussed event enables the author to produce literary *Geschwätz* and highlights his desire to tell.

Giving Birth to Stories

One of the "noteworthy events" Weyerman discusses, is the birth of Lord Dissector's child, in the issue released 16 July 1725. This birth forms the precursor for a number of ironic remarks directed at his readership, emphasising the importance of "Voorzichtigheyt", precaution or prudence, in marriage. The "Jongeman die het Huuwelyk van binnen bestudeert", the "young man who studies the interior of marriage" *before* he gets married, is a shining example of *prudentia*, according to the writer (Weyerman 1726, 313). So far, this seems the classical opening of a spectatorial essay. The instrument with which to train the reader in this prudence is Lord Dissector's own "Ondervinding", "experience", as a young father attending a "Kindermaal" (children's meal), the feast served to guests after each birth. However, this quasi-moral and philosophical *exordium* is brusquely interrupted by the narrator, who seems to call himself to order, concluding his "Lacoonian introduction" and proceeding with a description of the facts of the children's meal. Like the entering of the guests, mostly ladies, who he receives with the "painful politeness of a wise man, who needs to pronounce the marital YES" (Weyerman 1726, 314)[3]. The ironical tone of the scene has been set and the message to the reader is clear: look before you leap, because before you know it, you will be a husband "drunk and with a hand filled with tears" (i.e. the baby). Subsequently, Lord Dissector describes the celebratory occurrence (the birth of the child) in a way that is not celebratory at all.

After this, he introduces some short character sketches of the guests based on their appearances. Subsequently, the narrator calls himself to order, trying to tame his own desire to tell and urging himself to describe the actual party and the conversations involved:

3 "...de pynlyke Beleefdheit van een wys Man, die het Huuwlykx JA moet pronuntieeren".

> It is remarkable that painters tirelessly make counterfeits, and children, which seems to be the case until this date, because instead of informing the readers of the occurrences and discourses of a children's party, I entertain them with describing Neurenburg dolls, et cetera. But that's it, it is enough, I will send away the guests' shadow, and start with the baby shower[4].

A remarkable detail is the metaphor of the "Children", with which the narrator refers to the birth of an endless stream of new narratives, which form the foundation of his own near unstoppable narrative craving—an image that we will see again shortly. The feast as such starts taking the shape of social torture for the young father. We can interpret this quite literally: the screeching of "kakelende Klappeyen", "cackling women", who congratulate with exuberant expressions of joy, can be seen as heartfelt good luck wishes, but they rather seem to have the function of rupturing the father's eardrums.

Alcohol plays its part and the celebratory gathering results in a discourse that is anything but moralistic, and in which it is mostly the ladies who are speaking. Marriage, the birth of a child and the duties of a good husband and father disappear from view altogether. The wine-fed talkativeness of the present guests becomes overbearing, and introduces a topic that might be familiar to the reader who has read the motto well (Juvenal again: "Quid enim Venus ebria curat?"—"Why would Venus care if she was drunk?"). The most important conversation topic ends up being an adulterous neighbour who has her husband work in a bed sheet shop, while she spends time with an officer. This fact is denounced, but the most dominant of the party, Mademoiselle Margo, pleads for the adulterous woman like a member of the English House of Commons, arguing that she has the right to her own pleasures, just like the "suppressors they have birthed" (Weyerman 1726, 317).

Her story is rudely interrupted, not by the other women, but by the story of a by now drunken officer who has been removed from service. His report culminates, again, in an exaggerated character sketch of a degraded "Ruyter", a horseman, who seems to symbolise the failing of manhood, resembling the cuckold featured in the women's conversation. In his turn, the horseman is

4 "Het is raar dat de Schilders onvermoeit zyn in 't maaken van Konterfeytsels, en van Kinders, en dat blykt in my tot dato deezes, want in stee van myn Leezers te onthaalen op de Verrichtingen en Discoersen van een Kinderfeest, onderhou ik die met de Beschryving van Neurenburgsche Poppen, en et cetereas. Maar basta, 't is genoeg ik zal de Schaduw der Gasten den bons, en het Kraamfeest zyn Begin geeven" (Weyerman 1726, 316).

interrupted by Ms. Albeschik, who puts an end to the chaotic tale and manages to silence everyone with an anti-moral message contained within an aphorism that is clearly understood:

> Well, well, crooked boot-greaser, (Ms. Albeschik cried out), are you on again about powder mills and Solinger blades! Rather talk about how a woman whose husband is too lazy, or cleverer than lazy, can constantly and discretly conceive a child with her neighbour, whereby she escapes the scorn of infertility, all according to the old saying: there is no harm in that if it brings forth a beautiful child[5].

All abrupt transitions—from the ironic narrator, to the cackling women who crave to tell stories, to the drunken soldier and then back again to the women—seem to serve the purpose of distracting the reader's attention from the topic introduced at the beginning of the essay: what lessons a soon-to-be groom can learn from hearing the experiences of a young father. There is no real clue to the story, and the answer is that there are as many different experiences as there are people. This is shown through individual reflections and the opinions about marriage and adultery that tumble over one another in this conversation. In this sense, naturally we could state that the chaotic and absurd character of the ladies' and officer's indecent testimonies confirm the statement introduced in the beginning: that prudence (foresight) in marriage is a difficult thing and "Ondervinding", experience, is what matters. This particular experience is based on a party that has gone out of control, a "social" gathering that has failed to set limits on the desire to tell, but does provide the reader (and the young father) with an insight into confessions about the true "moral" love of these ladies, who at first glance seemed so demure.

Behind the apparent chaos of the essay, there is an "ordered narrative craving" supported by the loosely connected motives of the young and insecure father, the cuckold in the ladies' stories, their talks about their indulgences, and the officer as the personification of lost manhood. In the end, all of these issues belong to the terrain of experiences gained in and through marriage.

5 "Zo zo verroeste Stevelsmeerder, (riep Mejuffrouw Albeschik) praat jy weer van Kruydmolens en van Solinger Klingen! Praat liever, dat een Vrouw wiens Man te luy, of nog slimmer is als luy, altoos met discretie een Kind mag verwekken by haar Gebuur, waar door zy de Schimp ontwykt van Onvruchtbaarheyt, en dat is volgens het Oud Spreekwoord: Daar geschiet geen Kwaad daar een Schoon Kind van komt" (Weyerman 1726, 320).

The Declaiming Arm Chair

We could summarise the "structure" of the essay discussed above as starting with a classic (but ironic) *exordium*, a number of comical character sketches, followed by the tales of the characters present. These stories lapse into a flood of words without apparent ending and which can only be stopped abruptly, almost necessarily *in media res*, without obvious pointe.

In issue 34 (29 May 1724), the story of the speaking arm chair, too, opens with a classic *exordium*, which offers critical reflection on the ephemerality of human beauty. However, this moral quickly is overtaken by testimonies of the talking Arm chair, who endlessly speaks about the sexual adventures that have taken place on its seat (Weyerman 1724, 265–9). This burlesque-like imitation of the Spectator genre starts off with a clear moral exhortation addressed to an overly vain friend, "who is as effeminate as a shop owner in Mechelen lace". The young man looks at himself in the mirror and cries out, astonished: "Parbleu, Sir Dissector, I am the Hague May-pole [daisy] of young men!", after which Sir Dissector scorns him, calling him a Narcissus who Time will deal with, calling his attention to the destructive force that ephemerality will exact on his life and limb (Weyerman 1724, 266). Sir Dissector is in excellent shape, seemingly ready to continue on about ephemerality, but he is brusquely interrupted by another speaker. The story that follows seems to have only a loose connection to Sir Dissector's speech, and presents itself as a wonderous Adventure: "I would have stretched this speech into infinity [...], when a wonderous Adventure, neither true nor believable, occurred, and in the following way"[6]. (Weyerman 1724, 266) The adventure is the speaking Arm chair's life story; this is the chair in which the Dissector's friend has sat down in, after the admonition he received.

Twice, an image of an infinite expansion is connected to speech: the Dissector's story is capable of infinitely expanding, but so is the exposé that follows. The Arm chair's narrative is almost literally born out of a swelling, a blowing up of itself: the chair is represented as a flower bud that *has to* burst, that *has to* speak—and only this narrative craving can and should interrupt the narrative craving of the story that Sir Dissector has just started. At first, the Arm chair speaks inarticulately; but soon enough, it has expanded so much that it speaks—and cannot stop. Here, the association with the sickly is clearly present, including a reference to eating a suspicious mushroom (an "ambiguous mushroom"), who makes the chair "cackle wholeheartedly". The chair is compared to an impregnated

6 "Ik zou dit Vertoog hebben uitgerekt tot in 't oneindig, [...] toen 'er een wonderlyke Avontuur, die zo min waar als waarschynlyk is, zig opdeê, en dat op de volgende wyze".

(and fallen) damsel, the mushroom turns out to be a phallic symbol, and the pregnancy refers to the impending birth of his endlessly expanded tale: "The Arm chair began to swell, like a young damsel who has consumed an ambiguous mushroom, not while walking, casually, but while falling, accidentally"[7] (Weyerman 1724, 267). Ostensibly, this speaking is related to the moral that has just been announced, as the chair will speak about the fleeting "nieuwmodische Schoonheden", "newly fashionable beauties", who have inhabited its seat, as it declares. This reference to fleetingness is soon buried by an endless series of enjoyable anecdotes: from the story of the seamstress who sewed the Arm chair's seat and was "embroidered" herself at the same time, to love-related escapades of those who have been seated on the arm chair and/or were mounted on it.

The Arm chair's "Declamation" suddenly stops, but is continued in the next issue. The reader can enjoy a sequel to the adventures, but is also surprised by a remarkably serious ending. The swollen adventure is punctured by what seems to be a pointe, one which nevertheless addresses the theme of ephemerality, namely death and all that follows. The Arm chair adopts a despondent tone:

> Life is approaching us, with a chain of iron cuffs, and death says his goodbye to us, through the breaking of those chains, yet that these break as easily as an Indian a coral or amber necklace, I can't believe, even if I'm just an *Arm chair*[8].

After this, his voice is smothered, "it seems", he says, "that Death's moral lesson comes to quiet my eloquence" (Weyerman 1724, 280). Right when the spectatorial mode appears to take up its role again, speech is silenced—but not before having uncovered something of the pointe and the moral lesson, which once again reinforces the ambiguity of Weyerman's writing.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the classical rhetorical structure that characterises at least some of van Effen's essays seems to be completely absent in Weyerman's *vertogen*. In the case of Weyerman gossip and slander often precedes over moral instruction and the moral hierarchy between an audience that is listening to a well-educated teacher is questioned in most of his texts, not in the last place by Lord Dissector

7 "De *Leuning stoel* begon te zwellen, gelyk als een jonge Juffer, die, niet ter loops, maar ter vallens, een dubbelzinnige Champignon heeft geconsumeert."

8 "Het leeven nadert ons, met een schakel van yzere boeijen en de dood neemt zyn afscheid van ons, door 't verbreeken van die Ketens, doch dat zulks zo gemakkelyk toegaat als of een Indiaan een Koraale of een Barnsteene Snoer, op aarde, in stukken laat vallen, geloof ik niet, al ben ik maar een *Leuning stoel*" (Weyerman 1724, 280).

himself, subverting his own moral authority. Moral problems are addressed, but they do not create textual coherence by providing for instance recognizable examples from daily life that enable the reader to reflect on these through a clear moral lesson at the end of the essay. However, what creates a kind of coherence and unity in what seems to be a discursive chaos of anecdote following upon anecdote is the "wild structure" of spoken human discourse as such, which the author tries to catch in written text, dishing up the apparent nonsense of daily speech that still contains lessons based on daily experiences—but only if we are ready to read between the lines of Weyerman's "moral essays".

According to Fineman, historiography from the Classical period onwards has been dependent on the anecdote in order "to let history happen". The interruption of a recounting of facts with the use of anecdotes was deemed necessary for this. The historiographer uses the anecdote while keeping its contingent effect under control, a balancing act that is crucial in the art of writing history (Fineman 1989, 61). Weyerman exerts little effort to limit the potentially disintegrating effect of anecdotal writing. One anecdote leads to another anecdote, and so the spectatorial narrative's presumed endpoint (such as a moralistic pointe) remains out of reach. The craft of Weyerman's spectatorial essays lies in their anecdotal fragmentation, which could potentially be the endpoint of historiography (but which rarely occurs, according to Fineman). Weyerman is not afraid to allow his essays and narratives to "derail", and have them conclude in an abrupt or very open-ended way. In the worst case, we can interpret this as an inability to properly conclude a story, but at the same time, we can state that Weyerman invites the reader to allow his/her imagination free rein, again and again, in playing the game we tend to call *literature*.

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