Note

Pieter van Wissing, *In louche gezelschap. Leven en werk van de broodschrijver Philippus Verbrugge, 1750-1806*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2018, 272 pp. ISBN 9789087046699.

Among the many remarkable figures the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic produced in the dregs of society, the hack writer Philippus Verbrugge (1750-1806) is particularly interesting. Verbrugge also happens to have left behind a great many sources on his life and work, neither of which have been studied thoroughly up until now. Pieter van Wissing's *In louche gezelschap* (*In shady company*) aims to fill this gap, but does more. It is both a biography and a sketch of the seamy side of life in the Dutch Republic in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Philippus Verbrugge was a soldier's son who was supported by the States of Holland to study theology at Leiden University. After finishing his studies, he started his career as a minister in the small village of Koedijk. It turned out to be a short calling: only two years later he was dismissed as the consequence of a succession of arguments between himself and his superiors. Being without an income, Verbrugge turned to hack writing. This was a relatively lucrative business in the early 1780s, when patriots and orangists fought each other fiercely with the pen. Starting with some patriot publications, Verbrugge ended up writing and editing in the service of stadtholder William V. His seditious writings led to a detention of eleven months in 1783-1784, during and after which he remained active. His person and writings became part of an increasing number of controversies and conspiracies, in which he not seldomly distorted the truth and acted as an opportunistic blackmailer and schemer. His marriage – possibly with a prostitute – was also highly controversial, but he nevertheless managed to obtain a doctoral degree in law at Duisburg. After that, Verbrugge had to put up with repeated setbacks: a personal publication ban, a

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rift between himself and his patron William V, banishment from Holland (first temporary, then permanent), and a second detention.

Van Wissing chose to organise the details of Verbrugge's life around eight 'roles' his protagonist 'played', from scholarship student, clergyman, hack writer, and journalist, to prisoner, blackmailer, intrigant, and exile. These are the eight chapters of the book, arranged more or less according to the chronology of Verbrugge's life. It is a pity that Van Wissing does not reflect on the concept of 'role' and related issues such as image and self-image, but the chosen structure works out well. Focusing on these various roles allows Van Wissing to present a rich image of many aspects of the second half of the eighteenth century in the Dutch Republic and abroad.

This is especially the case because there is not much Van Wissing considers common knowledge. He elaborates extensively on subjects like formal procedures around the appointment of clergymen, the organisation of the stadtholder's staff, or the organisation of the care for disabled orphans in the early modern period. Excursions like these are very informative and contribute to the appeal of the book, especially for a broader public. Indeed, it seems the book is aimed at a wider audience than just scholars. The tone is anecdotal, arguments often lack foundations, and Van Wissing frequently refers to present-day phenomena, such as 'fact-checking' or student's ragging. Still, for scholars this study could also be worthwhile, either as a starting point for further research, or as a supplement to existing research. Chapter 6, for example, on Verbrugge as a blackmailer who tried to profit as much as possible from his rift with the stadtholder, offers a rare and detailed glimpse of the stadtholder's politics of literary patronage and the position of a hack writer in his service.

Scholars wishing to use this kind of information, however, will face one insuperable difficulty: the way Van Wissing cites his sources. He mentions hardly any source in the running text, and is also very sparing with references in footnotes. This makes it impossible to use or relate to most of the information gathered in the study. Moreover, many of the sources mentioned in the footnotes are not to be found in the bibliography, since Van Wissing chose only to include those sources that occur in the footnotes more than once. To give just one example: a text that could be crucial, as it is titled 'Phillipus Verbrugge', cannot be retraced through the book's bibliography.

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