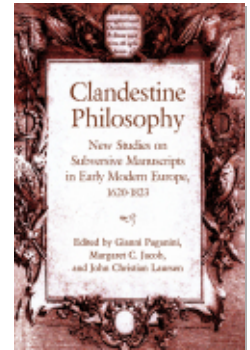




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The Science of Sex: Passions and Desires in Dutch  
Clandestine Circles, 1670-1720



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## PART THREE

# GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND NEW MORALS

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## The Science of Sex: Passions and Desires in Dutch Clandestine Circles, 1670–1720

INGER LEEMANS

“Grotius explains all those indecent passages in the Bible. Joseph revealed the crime of his brothers; that was to say that they buggered one another or gave each other a hand job.”

In the years 1678 and 1679 a young Dutch libertine sat down to make notes of interesting and outrageous things he had read and heard. His notebook developed into a fascinating collection of heterodox philosophical insights, libertine ideas, impudent readings of the Bible, humorous anecdotes, political opinions – mainly anti-Orangist sentiments – and plain gossip. The notebook ended up in the library of Utrecht University, where it was recently discovered. It has since received its first public notoriety through an edition of the original Latin text with an English translation, supplied with an extensive introduction.<sup>1</sup>

Although the editors have not been able to establish the notebook's authorship, its author evidently was a man of letters – the notes are written mostly in Latin – and of standing. He presumably played an active role in Utrecht politics, where he sided with the republican party. Possibly he had some connection to the circles around Spinoza, for he provides some intimate details of Spinoza's deathbed, and he may have been acquainted with Lambert van Velthuysen (1621/2–1685), one of Spinoza's main correspondents.<sup>2</sup>

Judging from the somewhat rough and often uncorrected Latin, the author did not intend his compilation for publication. The small size of the notebook suggests that he carried it in his pocket in order to make on-the-spot notes of interesting events and quotes. But he could also consult it in order to locate the underpinnings of a spirited argument.



Figure 6.1 Merry company, probably in a brothel (1699). Print by Jan van Somer (after Johann Liss & Jeremias Falck). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam RP-P-1895-A-18667.

Other famous notebooks from the same period served this function – for example, those of the radical pamphleteer Ericus Walten (1662–1697) and the jester Aernout van Overbeke (1632–1674).<sup>3</sup>

### **The Dutch Republic as the Sex Shop of Europe**

This tiny notebook opens up a world of underground manuscript practices in the Dutch Republic at the end of the seventeenth century. Initially it may seem surprising that the early modern Dutch Republic, with

its relatively open and highly developed international book market, still relied on clandestine manuscript production and circulation.<sup>4</sup> Many famous clandestine manuscripts originated from within the Republic – Spinoza’s *Ethics* (published 1677), the anonymous *Traité des trois imposteurs* (published 1712/1719), Adriaan Koerbagh’s *Een Ligt schijnende in duystere Plaatsen, om te verligten de voornaamste saaken der Gods geleertheyd en Gods dienst* (almost published in 1688, but censored before it was printed and distributed).<sup>5</sup> These examples highlight that many clandestine manuscripts eventually were also published clandestinely. In the highly competitive Dutch book market, in which publishers and printers were fighting for their livelihood, one could always find a daredevil who would accept a challenging manuscript and turn it into a publication, hoping to smuggle it onto the international book market.<sup>6</sup> Publishers could always employ the fictitious imprint of Pierre Marteau of Cologne to hide their trails.<sup>7</sup>

Even in the libertine underground of pornography the printed form seems to have been dominant. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Italian, Latin, and French pornographic texts – for example, Pietro Aretino’s *Ragionamenti* (1534), *L’École des filles ou la philosophie des dames* (1655), and *L’Academie des dames* (first Latin edition *Aloisiae Sigaeae, Toletanae, Satyra sotadica de arcanis Amoris et Veneris*, 1660) – were printed or reprinted in the Dutch Republic and from there distributed all over Europe.<sup>8</sup> The Netherlands had become “the sex shop of Europe.”<sup>9</sup> *Liefhebbers* (curious “lovers” of erotica, or lovers of loving) shared and exchanged the volumes of erotic novels among one another. Sometimes “liefhebbers” even happened upon complete pornographic illustrated volumes in the bushes.<sup>10</sup> The less fortunate could buy printed volumes of pornographic novels and copies of erotic engravings from street peddlers, who roamed the Dutch cities and countryside selling to young customers.<sup>11</sup> While Dutch Reformed ministers and churches tried to ban these blasphemous texts, and even personally visited publishers they suspected of being the brains behind these obscenities, booksellers kept on advertising new *snakerijen* (smut, rogueries) and hanging title pages with suggestive engravings in their shop windows to attract buyers.

The basic form for “livres philosophiques” seems to have been print. As printed texts were censored (which happened regularly in many of the Dutch provinces), confiscated, and even burned, new editions were printed in other cities or provinces so that copies remained in circulation. In this vibrant print climate there seemed to be less need for the

manuscript form than in, say, France, Italy, or Spain, where book markets and distribution channels were less developed or more heavily regulated.

### Manuscript Culture in the Dutch Republic

Still, manuscripts seem to have played an instrumental role in the development of radical enlightened thought in the Netherlands. The Dutch cities offered every philosophical text imaginable in print, and Amsterdam publishers like the Huguenot Pierre Mortier kept catalogues of manuscripts on offer.<sup>12</sup> Not all manuscripts made it into print, however, and some had to wait to be printed. Before being published, texts could be circulated among groups of friends and colleagues, to test their quality and potential for scandal. In the world of letters, this was standard practice: authors were obliged to help one another in striving for the best. This became even more important in the classicist poetical practice that was introduced in the 1670s. Sociability, shared effort, and criticism became cornerstones of the ideal of good authorship.<sup>13</sup> Manuscript production and circulation in this way became entrenched in social and literary practices.

In this essay I will explore the dynamics of Dutch clandestine manuscript practices between 1670 and 1720 by zooming in on two specific manuscript forms: notebooks (or books of compilations) and letters. I will analyse how these textual forms helped formulate new and radical ideas about sex and the passions. Up until now the history of philosophy has often only indirectly touched on the history of sexuality. Eroticism and attitudes towards sex have long been researched largely within studies on libertinism. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* tied sexuality research more closely to the history of philosophy as he described how sex developed from a primarily moral category into a category of knowledge, which eventually led to a vision of man as a complex psychological system driven by sexual impulses. The "scientia sexualis" that began to develop in the eighteenth century is distinguished by Foucault from the "ars erotica." The history of philosophy has recently set to out narrow the gap between discourses on sex intended for sexual arousal and those intended for theorizing sexual behaviour.<sup>14</sup> This chapter follows that line of research. I will argue that in the context of the new urban sociability, letters and notebooks helped piece together an initial coherent body of sexual knowledge, one that can be labelled "scientia sexualis" which combined eroticism with truth finding and thereby helped conceptualize sex as a distinct category of practice. Through its description of the development of a science of sex in the context of the Dutch

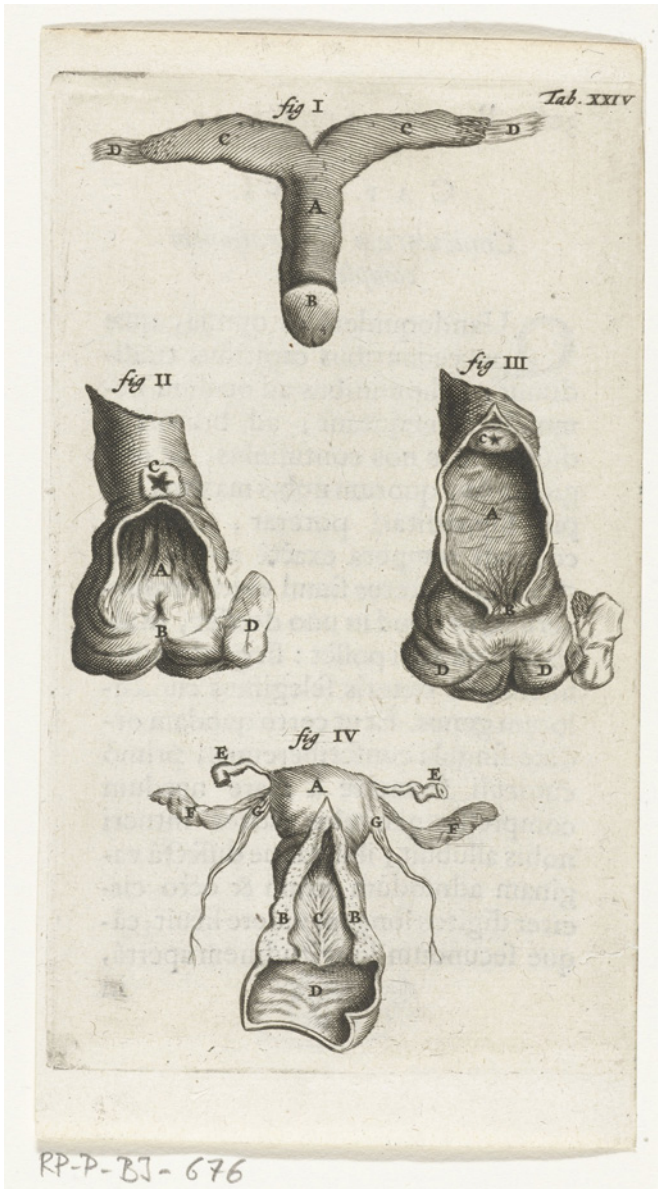


Figure 6.2 Anatomical analysis of the clitoris, vagina, and uterus. Book illustration for Reinier de Graaf, *De mulierum organis generationi inservientibus tractatus novus* (1672). Rijksmuseum: RP-P-BI-676.



radical Enlightenment and Dutch urban social practices, the chapter will also take issue with the all too exclusively British interpretation of “the first sexual revolution,” as it was proclaimed by Dabhoiwhala in *The Origins of Sex*.<sup>15</sup>

### **Scheming Orangists, Unruly Clitorises, and the Original Sin**

The Utrecht notebook places us in the middle of the fast-developing radical Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic of the 1670s. The beginning of the decade was marked by a radical shift from republican politics to more authoritative, monarchical rule, after the elevation to power of William III of Orange in 1672, which heightened the prominence of the more orthodox branch of the Calvinist church. Intellectual differences swiftly radicalized along the lines of political parties, and the number of clashes in the public sphere grew quickly as a result. As censorship became more strict, opposition to the suffocating power of church and government grew, and on both sides the debate intensified and became more aggressive.

The Utrecht notebook seems to reflect this cultural climate. The author is keen to collect any kind of smut he can find on the House of Orange, who are all tyrants in his eyes: “When William II of Orange died, the Italians believed that he had been poisoned, and they said: ‘*The Dutch are coming to their senses.*’ On the death of a tyrant, Pluto’s *The Prince’s descent into hell*, in order to break the god of the Styx with love. Boozing is rampant among the wicked” (66). He has also found the secret meaning of the word Orange in this anagram: go Nero! (167). Many persons cited by the author are men of higher ranking, of former Utrecht regent circles, who had been ousted from office after the rise of William III.

Overall, however, the tone is light, exploratory. The author seems fascinated by all the secrets he is able to unveil through his social circles. Apart from politics, he seems to have a special interest in Spinozist Bible criticism and in many other bodies of radical thought. The notebook also displays a fascination with all things sexual. More than one third of his entries (60 of 167) are about sex, sexual organs, and the centrality of the libido in all human endeavours. His fascination with sex focuses in part on classical mythology: on Priapus cults and Bacchanalia. Another part of the author’s fascination with sex seems to be rooted in his open attitude towards new scientific approaches, for example, anatomical research. He is curious about natural phenomena, such as the clitoris. The organ had just been “discovered” in medical research.<sup>16</sup>

The very first occurrence of the word in the Dutch language is from 1650, in a book by the famous medical doctor and anatomist Nicolaes Tulp: “hoewel dese Clitoris niet altijdt uythingh, soo quamse somwijlen voor den dagh” (although the clitoris was not always externally visible, it sometimes appeared”).<sup>17</sup>

Some twenty-five years later, the author of the Utrecht notebook is fascinated by this female organ and especially by the size it may acquire, providing a woman with the opportunity to assume the male role in sex and become a tribade (lesbian). The notebook author gossips: “The wife of Jan Lammersen, the envoy of this magistrate, is a lesbian, and if the French had not protected her, she would have been expelled from the city by the magistrate. She has an enormous clitoris” (115). Entry 17 narrates: “From Van Someren: There was some lesbian here, who had such a protruding clitoris, that she had fucked many decent married women. For fear of being discovered, she ran away.” Entry 120 educates: “Gerard Blasius in his notes: Often the clitoris sticks out like the male penis, particularly among those who either as ignorant girls or as very lascivious adults touch and rub it frequently. Sometimes it grows to a very big size; there is example in Platter and Tulp. Mr Panqrall saw it extended and stretched out to such a size in a prostitute that it would equal the dick of a boy of twelve years old.”

The author thus shows a great deal of interest in various aspects of the female sexual organ: its normal and aberrant proportions, its relation to sexual behaviour.

This sexual curiosity becomes truly radical when the author takes a materialist turn and declares that the libido is the driving force behind all human endeavours: “The poet Abba, treating of the cunt and coitus, said: ‘If this mill would come to a halt, the world would soon perish’” (106). Since Adam and Eve and the original sin, he posits, sexual desire has propelled us forward. The author probably derived these ideas from the writings of the Dutch libertine Adrian Beverland (1650–1716), a student at Leiden, whose learned but highly scandalous work was censored and led to its author’s imprisonment and banishment. Around 20 of the 167 entries in the Utrecht compilation manuscript can be traced back to Beverland’s unpublished master’s thesis titled *De prostibulis veterum*, a radical compilation of humanist knowledge, specifically about sexuality. Beverland’s main thesis in this erotological compilation is that the libido is the driving force in human behaviour. Karen Hollewand’s chapter in this volume provides an in-depth analysis of Beverland, his work, and the censorship of his manuscript and printed texts.<sup>18</sup>

The author of the Utrecht notebook almost certainly had a direct connection to Beverland or one of his friends, since he seems to have had access to the manuscript of *De prostibulis veterum*, not just to the printed text, which was published in a small number of copies in the autumn of 1678.<sup>19</sup> The manuscript had been circulating during the first months of 1678 among a select circle of Beverland's friends. It was not until October 1679, after Beverland published a second version of the text as *De peccato originali*, that he was arrested, censured, and banned from the university and the provinces of Holland. By then, his ideas had spread through printed text, manuscript versions, notebooks, and conversations.



Figure 6.3 Merry Company. Jan van Somer (after Johann Liss, after Jeremias Falck), 1699–1700. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam RP-P-1937-1720.

### The First Sexual Revolution: Manuscripts and “Merry Companies”

The Utrecht Notebook opens up questions about the development of *scientia sexualis* in the seventeenth century and the role that manuscripts played in this process. In his recent study *The Origins of Sex*, Dabhoiwala states that around 1700 a first sexual revolution took place, a groundbreaking change both in the way people thought about sex and in the ways they behaved sexually. Although Dabhoiwala presents this as a shift in Western European civilization in general, nearly all of his research materials and arguments relate to England.<sup>20</sup> It is in England that he traces a radical shift in the discourses on sexuality and in the disciplining of sexual behaviour. Urbanization and the Reformation, as well as Enlightenment philosophies regarding the autonomy of men and reason, had all paved the way for more sexual freedom. As church and government control slackened, people began to act and talk more freely, celebrating and researching sexual passion in images and texts as well as through their actions. No longer was lust regarded as a sin; now it was a useful impulse for human actions, and one to be celebrated.

Dabhoiwala’s book presents a convincing account of the fundamental shift in attitudes towards sex and the accompanying development of the science of sex. But it is far from clear that this development should be restricted to England, whose neighbour across the North Sea was another highly urbanized commercial society where the Reformation and the early Enlightenment paved the way for new attitudes towards sexuality. As related above, in the second half of the seventeenth century the Dutch Republic developed into the sex shop of Europe, with its own home brand of erotic literature and visual depictions.<sup>21</sup> This fast-expanding body of texts encompassed pleas for openness about sex, for open and tolerant laws on prostitution, and for treating men and women as equals, since they had basically the same body/mind structure and the same libido.<sup>22</sup>

What role did manuscripts play in this process? As the Utrecht notebook indicates, manuscripts were a means to collect information. Since no coherent body of thought was available in textual form, those interested in *scientia sexualis* had to collect bits and pieces of information from various sources. The Utrecht author used both published texts and manuscripts, not only Beverland’s but also those of other scholars. For example, in entry 7 the author indicates that he gleaned information from a manuscript by “Liefing” (perhaps this points to Jacob Liefinck, a Utrecht city councillor and a critic of the Orangist faction). Most of his information, though, seems to have been derived directly from people.

Although some of the proverbs, epigrams, and jokes in the notebook can be traced back to (classical) texts, the author nearly always stipulates a different source: one of his friends or colleagues, who presumably told him this anecdote. Entries usually start with indications – for example, “from Beverland,” “from Van Someren,” “from De Witt.”

The author uses strategies from the commonplace book tradition.<sup>23</sup> In this respect his notebook closely resembles the one kept by Aernout van Overbeke. A lawyer in The Hague, and later an admiral with the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) and a literary author, van Overbeke collected jokes, anecdotes, and noteworthy quotes and wrote them down in a notebook.<sup>24</sup> His collection of nearly 2,500 entries is strongly biased towards all things sexual and scatological. As van Overbeke seems to have intended to ultimately publish his work, he was cautious in naming people and sometimes even censored his own work. The notebook was never published, but its contents were almost certainly distributed among his friends and colleagues, as he used the notes for lively conversation in the merry companies he attended. Wherever he went, van Overbeke was sure to be able to entertain the company.

As these notebooks indicate, merry companies were an important social context for the development and distribution of libertine thought. In the seventeenth century, the “merry company” also fascinated painters and authors. In the Dutch Republic, it even evolved into a specific genre. It seems that in the collective imagination, the merry company and the brothel scene provided social contexts for erotic explorations, both in action and in words, as is clear from the many depictions of songs and poems being sung and read by young people during their merry gatherings.<sup>25</sup>

The merry company, with its sparkling conversation, provided a popular format for erotic prose. One of the most radical examples of this is the pornographic novel *De doorluchtige daden van Jan Stront, opgedragen aan het kakhuys* (Mighty deeds of John Shit, Dedicated to the Shithouse, 1680; Part II, 1696).<sup>26</sup> In both volumes of this novel, merry companies serve as vehicles for pornographic explorations. In the first volume the protagonist Jan Stront joins a group of friends at an inn to eat, drink, and discuss “everything that comes to our mouths.” To hide their real names, the friends constantly borrow different ones from both famous and less familiar people: classical authors, *philosophes*, lawyers, kings, famous ladies. Thus a “dialogue of the dead” unspools between such different persons as Aristotle, Spinoza, Erasmus, Cardinal Cusa, Gravelle, Anna Viterbitensis, Galenus, Pliny, Ronsard, Magdalena, Rabbanus Maurus, Sophanisba, Caesar, Herodotus, and so on. This short list reveals





Figure 6.4 Jan van Somer, a jester embraced by a lady (around 1690).  
Rijksmuseum RP-P-1890-A-15454.

that women were already playing an important role in merry knowledge production.

Most of the knowledge discussed by Jan Stront and his friends in the first volume is taken from the baroque satire *Le Moyen de parvenir* by Béroalde de Verville.<sup>27</sup> This famous knowledge compilation and joke book was reprinted in the Netherlands in 1675. The author of *Jan Stront* may have owned a copy, but another option is that bits and pieces of the book were handed down to him in manuscript form. In *Jan Stront* little is left of the original structure of the *Le Moyen de parvenir*. Structured dialogues are taken apart, scrambled, sampled, and pieced together again, sometimes so as to form a completely different line of thought. The original text seems to have been intended as a satire on humanist learning, constantly defying logic and structure; the author of *Jan Stront* seems to have taken the next step by again mixing together all the pieces of the “encyclopedia” and reassembling them in his own knowledge collage.

### *Scientia Sexualis: Jan Stront and the Utrecht Notebook*

The second volume of *Jan Stront* is a completely original piece of work that focuses more exclusively on sex. In this volume the protagonist Jan Stront sits with some of his colleagues (lawyers like himself) and female friends (some of whom are schooled prostitutes) to discuss things sexual. During these conversations a highly overt form of sexual materialism is formulated. The author declares over and over that sex is the most important driver of human conduct. He attempts to paint a new universe composed of animated bodies in motion, mechanisms driven by the laws of pleasure.<sup>28</sup> The genitals are described as separate entities, acting autonomously. Jan Stront thinks marriage is an insult to the genitals, which have professed such tender love to one another that they would be saddened to know they were mistrusted. In the end, the genitals do indeed take over. The conversation concludes with a merry group sex scene.

*Jan Stront* seems to be rooted in the same social and intellectual realm as the circles of Aernout van Overbeke and the Utrecht notebook author. We encounter the same kind of light-hearted sexuality, with the same kind of curiosity about all things sexual, and with sex employed as a form of criticism of traditional authorities and axioms. *Jan Stront* also tell jokes about van Overbeke, and some of the related anecdotes and puns are quite similar.

I think there is a distinct possibility that the author of *Jan Stront* was also the author of the Utrecht notebook. There are many similarities between

the texts and between their social contexts. As I have argued before, the author of *Jan Stront* may have been Pieter Elzevier, one of the very last – and not so successful – descendants of the once mighty Elzevier publishing family.<sup>29</sup> Pieter was raised in the world of books and even practised publishing for a while in Utrecht. Between 1668 and 1675 he published several books in Latin and French. Pierre Bayle criticized Elzevier for publishing a Priolo's *Ab excessu Ludovici XIII. de rebus Gallicis, historiarum* in Latin; according to Bayle, a French-language version would have given the book notoriety. During his short span as a publisher, Pieter Elzevier obviously favoured the scandalous side of the book market: he published *Journal du journal, ou censure de la censure* (1670) and the *Traité de la politique de France* by Paul Hay Marquis de Chatelet, under the fictitious imprint of Pierre Marteau.<sup>30</sup> After his brief time as a publisher, Pieter Elzevier embarked on a career at the bar, swiftly making his way into politics as a city councilor. In 1684, conflicts with William III caused his downfall as a regent, after which his public life seems to have ended.

These episodes place Pieter Elzevier in the same circles as the notebook author, with his overt dislike of Orangist politics and his bookish interest in clandestine literature. Both authors share a fascination with sex and aim to gather as much information as possible to piece together a *scientia sexualis*. Both have a special interest in the language of sex, duly listing current terms, synonyms, and playful ways to describe the male and female genitals and the act of sex. See for example entry 151, which deals with the linguistic aspects of Dutch names such as *Trullaert* (Dickens), *Clootwyck* (Ballwick), and *Miss Contstorf* (Arseton). While entry 151 explains that *futuere* (to fuck), originally meant “to plant, to sow,” this is further explained in *Jan Stront* through an anecdote of someone who first shits in a woman's lap (fertilization), after which he can plant and harvest. Some of the named persons also overlap – for example, “Wesel.” The second volume of Pieter Elzevier's book of bawdy songs and poems, *Den lacchenden Apoll* (first volume, 1667; second, 1669), was edited by Dominicus van Wesel. In the Utrecht notebook two entries (46 and 123) indicate a certain “Wesel” (not identified) as the source of information.

But even if the texts were not written by the same person, it is interesting how the same fascination with all things sexual found its way in these different textual forms, and how the two different texts overlap in their radical obscenity, formulated in the context of a new form of sociability. As Joan DeJean has recently argued, during the seventeenth century a new form of obscenity was developed, a radical epistemological form of the obscene that was perceived as a serious threat to traditional authorities.<sup>31</sup> The threat posed by this body of thought lay not just its blasphemous





Figure 6.5 Arnold Houbraken, Engraving of Original Sin, in *Verzameling van uitgeleezene keurstoffen* (1713). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Research Library: 318 F 23:1.

nature and its possible consequences for moral ideals, for the sanctity of marriage and other cornerstones of religious life; it also raised the danger that this kind of overt sexuality would now spread across all social groups. Eroticism and materialist philosophy had long been the province of noblemen and restricted groups of scholars; with the development of print culture and new forms of sociability, a new form of obscenity now threatened to spread across the urban community, and not only among men.

Similar observations are made by Jonathan Israel and Margaret Jacob in their studies of the radical Enlightenment: libido is a possible instrument of radical equality, for the male and female libidos basically function in the same way.<sup>32</sup> In terms of sex, everyone can be an expert, a lowly prostitute even more so than a noble or wise man. These claims, which are put forward in obscene publications and manuscripts, formulate an egalitarian vision of mankind.<sup>33</sup> The Dutch Republic played an important role in the development of this new attitude towards sex.

### *Scientia Sexualis* in Letters and Correspondences

Sexuality, original sin, hermaphrodites, and clitorises were also topics in another manuscript form: letters. In early modern correspondences, numerous letters can be found that are concerned with the science of sex. Medical doctors and researchers in anatomy corresponded on all aspects of the human and animal body and their sexual organs.<sup>34</sup> Beverland is discussed – for example, by Constantijn Huygens, who visited the man in England in 1692: “J’ay esté l’autre jour chez ce Beverland, qui a demeuré quelque temps avec Vossius, et a escrit le livre que vous scaurez de *Pecato Originali*, pour lequel il fust banny de l’Hollande. A l’intercession de Monsieur Halewijn et autres il aura sa grace du Roy. Il me fist voir sa Bibliotheqe qui est de livres choisis, et un grand nombre de tailles douces parmy les quelles il y en a de belles. de desseins il n’en a point.”<sup>35</sup>

Many of these letters remained unpublished, but some of them were collected and printed in order to expand their audience. This was the case with a correspondence I would like to discuss as a case study. The letters were written by the Dutch painter Arnold Houbraken and sent to several of his male and female friends and pupils. Houbraken published a collection of these letters anonymously in 1712 under the title *Philaléthes’ Letters*. The same year, he published a follow-up: a tractate on religion and the passions, this time in the form of a dialogue he conducted with his pupil “Eusebius.” Together, these were published under a new title in 1713.<sup>36</sup>

As Jonathan Israel has written, *Philaléthes’ Letters* can be seen as “especially symptomatic of the underground Radical Enlightenment of the

early eighteenth century.” In his very first letter, to a certain “G.L,” Houbraken references Beverland’s work with a rereading of the role of the snake in the seduction of Eve to original sin. Houbraken was a painter and a theorist of art, yet here he departs from his interest in visual depictions of biblical scenes. He scorns painters like Rembrandt and De Lairese for painting biblical fantasy stories. Embracing accommodation theory, he declares that the Bible should not be taken literally when dealing with original sin. The snake is just a figure that has been woven into the historical tapestry, according to Houbraken. The essence of the episode lies in Eve’s act, which was induced by desire. He states that desire is a necessary element of human life and credits a certain J. Pel with this opinion.<sup>37</sup>

Houbraken praises the famous Dutch playwright Joost van den Vondel, who apparently did understand the essence of Eve’s act and who highlights her physical attractiveness in his play *Lucifer* (1654). This intriguing reading of Vondel’s work (he is not often seen as a radical thinker)<sup>38</sup> can also be found in the Utrecht notebook, where the author praises Vondel for his radical insights: “*The fall of the angels* was written very elegantly by Vondel, and about the tree of life in paradise it also hints tacitly that it was not a tree but a penis” (134). And Vondel was not the only poet who was inspired by the radical potential of the first act of physical love between Adam and Eve. One of Beverland’s friends wrote a pornographic poem about the first sexual act:

But actually; his Wife, egged on by t’ Devil’s talk  
 Is eager now to know the powers of that tree  
 She comes with hollow hand, and at her Husband’s Stalk  
 Most eagerly she grasps, she tempts him thus to feast,  
 To sample of the fruit hidden between her thighs.  
 Good Adam stands perplexed, but to her winks and nods  
 He finally gives in; He sees the red so shy,  
 He sees her luscious flesh, perfected by the gods  
 He sees her tender face, and hears her sweet voice laugh.  
 His chastity is raped. And underneath it all,  
 His hellish firebrand rears, his miracle-working staff.  
 Go to and fight, the long eternity is thine,  
 Engendered in your seed; you’ll be God’s equal,  
 O, Adam had been caught; Before him, Eve, supine,  
 Gives herself up to him; he finds he is unable  
 To resist, receives her, and she him; And at the height  
 Of ecstasy body joined soul, separate no more,  
 Together ate the fruit, the sweet but banned delight,  
 One body God created, where two had been before.<sup>39</sup>





Figure 6.6 Arnold Houbraken, erotic engraving of satyrs spying and preying on nymphs (ca 1700). Rijksmuseum: RP-P-1885-A-8991.



Figure 6.7 Arnold Houbraken, erotic engraving of satyrs spying and preying on nymphs (ca 1700). Rijksmuseum: RP-P-OB-48.944.



Figure 6.8 Arnold Houbraken, erotic engraving of satyrs spying and preying on nymphs (ca 1700). Rijksmuseum: RP-P-OB-48.946.



Figure 6.9 Arnold Houbraken, erotic engraving of satyrs spying and preying on nymphs (ca 1700). Rijksmuseum: RP-P-1885-A-8995.



### Houbraken's Radical Eroticism

Houbraken's interest in the workings of sexual desire is evident in his other work. He designed engravings for love poems and kissing songs by his colleague Jan van Hoogstraten (1710),<sup>40</sup> and he composed several explicitly erotic engravings. Voyeurism especially fascinated him. Many of his engravings depict peeping satyrs, cats and dogs, and artists with eyes full of lust. His interest in voyeurism seems to have stemmed from its being inherent in artistic practice. The artist's observing gaze is turned sexual by the mimicking behaviour of the peeping cats and dogs.

Houbraken's interest in things sexual was linked to his general interest in the passions and sensations. The second part of *Philalèthes' Letters* is a long treatise on the centrality of the passions. Taking a Cartesian turn, he begins by breaking down all known truths. Unlike Descartes, however, he rebuilds a system of information not from reason but from the passions: *I feel, therefore I am*. To acquire knowledge about man, nature, and God, we need a sensitive body, one that brings us information through seeing, feeling, sensing, smelling, and tasting.<sup>41</sup> As a true classicist artist, Houbraken thus weaves the passions and sensations into a fabric for truth finding. He derives some of his ideas from the writings of the Académie Royale on the passions but combines them with completely different types of texts, such as the Spinozist logic of Petrus van Balen and the Cartesian medical theory of Dutch physician Cornelis Bontekoe.

Houbraken seems to be well read in radical Enlightenment philosophy – in Spinoza, Bayle, Deurhoff, and Balthasar Bekker. He agrees with Bekker that biblical references to miracles and other supernatural phenomena should not be taken literally. Together with the radical Reformed minister Frederik van Leenhof, he argues that heaven is not a place but a state of mind, a state of happiness. Yet Houbraken is also clearly a deist, declaring that God is a watchmaker, the “designer of the world.” To one “Miss N.N.” he writes that it is impossible to prove that one religion is truer than another, since they all make mistakes. Houbraken concludes that he must start all anew, for “we all have learned to echo the articles of faith like parrots, and therefore have no real knowledge of God or religion.” He compares religion to a marketplace: as proper merchants, ministers sell their services to the public. From their pulpits they all shout: this is the path, walk it!

Small wonder that the Dutch Church Council immediately tried to censor *Philalèthes' Letters*. The Holland synod drew up a list of all the “afschouwelijcke gevoelens [horrible sentiments] van Philalèthes.” When the Dutch government could not be convinced that the book should

be banned, the Church Council decided to drop the case, since it had heard that the publisher was having a hard time selling copies of the letters. It did, however, pay a visit to the author to set him straight. Houbraken apparently confessed his “groot leedwesen” (deepest regret) and said he was prepared to offer satisfaction. He never did, because shortly after the churchmen’s visit, he left the country, for England.



Figure 6.10 “The Artist and His Model.” Print designed by Arnold Houbraken and engraved by Nikolaas Verkolje (c. 1690). Rijksmuseum RP-P-OB-17.59.



Figure 6.11 “The Artist and His Model.” Anonymous copy after the print by Arnold Houbraken. Rijksmuseum SK-C-15.



### Letters, Manuscripts, and Radical Sociability

Houbraken's case can tell us more about the role of manuscripts in radical Enlightenment culture in the Netherlands around 1700. Apparently, most of his ideas originated in discussions with pupils, colleagues, and other interested men and women. Sending one another letters was one way for them to exchange ideas. Houbraken also talks about manuscripts that were sent to him. And from a letter to an anonymous lady, we learn that he had sent her the manuscript of *De gemeene leiding tot de godsdienst afgebroken* (1713). She sent it back to him, and through further letters they engaged in discussion on the topics of his tractate.

As the case of the notebooks revealed, manuscripts functioned within various urban, sometimes underground forms of sociability. In his youth, Houbraken had belonged to Prodesse et Delectare, one of the many artistic societies founded in that period. After moving to Amsterdam, he began to participate in more underground kinds of gatherings, where theology and philosophy were discussed. He attended Collegiant gatherings in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, where he witnessed "word battles." He was delighted when his friends won and the "enemy" was forced to sound the retreat, utterly defeated.

The military imagery is striking and intentional. Houbraken brings up this story of the Collegiant meetings in the middle of a paragraph on natural law, contract theory, and the development of governance. He describes how after an initial peaceful state, mankind started to quarrel and seek the rule of law. However, governance turned into tyranny, with church and monarchy supporting each other. This church/government arrangement, according to Houbraken, is the reason why people are raised in only religion only and enjoy no opportunity to seek what is the best religion for themselves. To free the people from the monopolization of knowledge, a real fight is necessary. Thus, Houbraken learned to "arm" himself with logic, to flank his enemies' ambushes, to attack their fortifications.

Houbraken paints a lively picture of the underground debates in Amsterdam. One night a certain Jan Prik debated with Lemmerman, who held meetings behind the Rozengracht. Prik was a disciple of the famous Socinian author Daniel Zwikker ("a man of notorious scholarship, forced to practice in secret in Amsterdam because of his strange opinions"). Lemmerman apparently was quite famous by then as one of the sharpest debaters of Amsterdam. Prik felt compelled to attend

Lemmerman's meetings to test him out. Prik won the debate, which was on "whether God will punish men for sexual immorality."

Houbraken talks about a public debate on whether the devil did physically appear before Christ, or whether he was just a mental image. The debate was held between a friend of the Houbraken circle and a certain Mr Van Kuik, over two days, 13 and 27 January 1693. Van Kuik lost the argument to reason, for "reason does not need scripture, but the Bible certainly needs reason."<sup>42</sup>

By his own account, the no-holds-barred debates started to bore Houbraken. He understood that they were more a matter of *overdwarsen* (one-upmanship), fuelled by vanity and the wish to become famous among one's peers in the underground. So he opted for another form of sociability more in line with the ideal of "brotherly love" and the desire to gain insight into complex matters. That is how he ended up writing letters, circulating manuscripts, and engaging in more private small-group discussions. Eventually he tried to expand his public by looking for a printer to publish his manuscripts.

This last step was not taken lightly. When Houbraken finally decided to publish his letters and manuscripts, he did so cautiously and reluctantly. In a letter to one D.v.S., he wrote:

You seem to think that I should (as my good friends have long been pressing me to) make some of my writings available to the public in print; but is it not enough that you (in your role as friend) have access to them? What would I expect from such a move, in a world of diverse passions? Do you wish me to give anger the opportunity to soil my writings with its poisonous bile?<sup>43</sup>

But in the end, Houbraken felt it his duty to inform the public of how they were being kept ignorant by church and state. People, he believed, should start to school themselves. So this manuscript ended up in print, and on the doorstep of the censoring bodies of the Dutch Republic.

### Conclusion

The Dutch Republic as "Magazine de l'Univers" hosted a highly developed market for printed works, yet manuscripts still played an interesting role in the development and distribution of radical thought. Notebooks



Figure 6.12 Arnold Houbraken (design) and Nikolaas Verkolje (print), “Two different versions of a man who tries to seduce a woman with an erotic drawing” (ca 1700). Rijksmuseum RP-P-1911-196 and RP-P-1911-195.

and letters were important elements in the knowledge dynamics of new and partly underground kinds of sociability. Private notebooks served as compilations of different bodies of knowledge, passed on in manuscript form, in printed publications, or orally, through personal contact or social gatherings.



Figure 6.12 Continued

Manuscripts functioned in various social contexts. They were used in merry companies, where libertine conversations could be held. Here, notebook jokes could be tested and the new knowledge could be gathered. In this context, the science of sex was explored, sometimes

in combination with the *ars erotica* of seduction. As well, scholars and interested *liefhebbers* helped build up the *scientia sexualis* through letters, schooling one another on everything that concerned sex and the passions. Another kind of sociability in which manuscripts functioned was that of artistic societies. In art societies, sociability and a critical attitude were seen as central to the ideal of good authorship. Manuscripts were used to register the findings of the companies and the progress made, and were passed on to the next generation as a means for instruction in the arts and the passions. Manuscript circulation was thus also entrenched in the social practices of the art world. But the development of radical thought seems to have been strongest in the social world of the heterodox underground, of religious and philosophical groups convening for debates in the urban environments of the Dutch Republic. Here too, manuscripts fuelled the discussion.

All of this strongly suggests that manuscripts were not primarily private documents. In the Dutch Republic, they functioned within various forms of sociability, distributing knowledge that often could not enter the printed public sphere. In line with existing radical ideals regarding open debate and the need to educate the public, Dutch scholars and *liefhebbers* experimented with different forms of knowledge exchange. The new *scientia sexualis* that was compiled by means of these different knowledge routes, as well as in the collective imagination, was a product of egalitarian knowledge exchange. The example of *Jan Stront* exemplifies this statement, in that it imagines various groups of men and women from different social backgrounds exchanging knowledge about sex, from classical and modern sources, from personal experience to hearsay. These novels and notebooks can be read as indications of a sexual revolution that developed in relation to the radical Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic.

## NOTES

- 1 P.M.L. Steenbakkens, J.J. Touber, and J.M.M. van de Ven, "A Clandestine Notebook (1678–1679) on Spinoza, Beverland, Politics, the Bible and Sex: Utrecht, UL, ms. 1284," *Lias* 38, no. 2 (2011): 255–65. The quote about Grotius is from entry 28. For a scan of the MSS, visit <http://bc.library.uu.nl/seks-politiek-en-godsdienst-zeventiende-eeuws-utrecht.html>.
- 2 About Velthuysen, see his entry in Wiep van Bunge et al., eds, *The Dictionary of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2003). See also Henri Krop, "Spinoza en het calvinistisch

- cartesianisme van Lambertus Van Velthuysen (1622-1685),” in *Spinoza en het Nederlands cartesianisme*, ed. Gunther Coppens (Leuven: Acco, 2004), 61–78.
- 3 Rindert Jagersma (University of Utrecht) is preparing an edition of the *Memoriael* by Ericus Walten in the context of his PhD project on this radical pamphleteer.
  - 4 On censorship in the Netherlands, see I. Weekhout, *Boekcensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden: de vrijheid van drukpers in de zeventiende eeuw* (Den Haag: SDU, 1998); M. Matthijssen, ed., *Boeken onder druk. Censuur en pers-onvrijheid in Nederland sinds de boekdrukkunst* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2011).
  - 5 On the Dutch radical Enlightenment, Spinozism, and clandestine culture, see M.C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (2nd rev. ed., Lafayette and Los Angeles: Cornerstone, 2006); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2001); Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church 1660–1750* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004); W. van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2012). Koerbagh’s work has recently been translated: *Adriaan Koerbagh: A Light Shining in Dark Places, to Illuminate the Main Questions of Theology and Religion*, trans. M. Wielema (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2011).
  - 6 C. Rasterhoff, *The Fabric of Creativity in the Dutch Republic: Painting and Publishing as Cultural Industries, 1580–1800* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).
  - 7 *Pierre Marteau’s Publishing House, Cologne Virtual Publisher for over 340 Years* (<http://www.pierre-marteau.com>); Olaf Simons, *Marteaus Europa oder Der Roman, bevor er Literatur wurde: Eine Untersuchung des deutschen und englischen Buchangebots der Jahre 1710 bis 1720* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001). A short introduction to Pierre Marteau can be found in M.C. Jacob, *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin’s Press, 2001).
  - 8 Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993); Inger Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant. Radicale ideeën in Nederlandse pornografische romans 1670–1700* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2002).
  - 9 Inger Leemans, “De Sexshop van Europa. Nederlandse productie en verspreiding van pornografische romans in de zeventiende eeuw,” *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 7, 2000, 81–96.
  - 10 The example of the “found” pornographic texts is an anecdote from the manuscript diary of Constantijn Huygens Jr. Huygens notes that Adriaan

van Borssele showed him a pornographic work with engravings by Romeyn de Hooghe “in the manner of *L'École de la Filles*.” By his own accord, Van Borssele had found this curious book (probably a copy of the Dutch translation of *La Puttana Errante*) in the gardens of the Royal Palace in Dieren. Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, 108, 164. For Huygens’s diary see Rudolf Dekker, *Family, Culture, and Society in the Diary of Constantijn Huygens Jr, Secretary to Stadholder-King William of Orange*, Egodocuments and History Series vol. V (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

- 11 Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*.
- 12 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, ch. “The Clandestine Philosophical Manuscripts.”
- 13 I. Leemans and G-J. Johannes, *Worm en donder. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1700–1800. De Republiek*. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker/Prometheus, 2013).
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- 15 F. Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).
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- 19 Steenbakkens et al., “A Clandestine Notebook,” 18–19.
- 20 Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*.
- 21 Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*; I. Leemans, “Arousing Discontent: Dutch Pornographic Plays, 1670–1800,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12 (2012): 117–32.



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- 23 A. Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); F. Büttner, M. Friedrich, and H. Zedelmaier, eds, *Sammeln, Ordnen, Veranschaulichen: Zur Wissenskompilatorik in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003).
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- 34 E.g., letter by Jan Bruynestein (1642–1686) to C. Huygens in 1668 about hermaphrodites and extended clitorises; or Henry Oldenburg (1619–1677) in 1672 from London to Jan Swammerdam on the same topic.
- 35 Constantijn Huygens (from Whitehall, 30 December 1692) to Christiaan Huygens. This letter can be found in the excellent collection of Dutch digitized learned letters at Huygens ING: Epistolarium (<http://ckcc.huygens.knaw.nl/epistolarium/>).
- 36 Anon. [Arnold Houbraken], *Philalétes Brieven [...]* (Amsterdam: P. Boeteman, 1712); Anon. [Arnold Houbraken], *De gemeene leidingen tot den Godsdienst afgebroken en weder opgebouwt op vasten grond door een Redenvoeringe over de Hertstogten [...]* *Dienende tot vervolg van Philaléthes Brieven* (Printed for the Author; Amsterdam: G. onder den Linden, 1712); Anon. [Arnold Houbraken], *Verzameling van uitgeleezene keurstoffen, handelende over den Godsdienst, Natuur- Schilder- Teken- Oudheid- Redeneer- en Dichtkunde* (Amsterdam: J. Oosterwijk & H. van de Gaete, 1713). I. Leemans, “‘Zie ons vry voor uwe wetsteen aan’. Frans-classicisme en de Radicale Verlichting,” in *Een groot verleden voor de boeg. Opstellen voor Joost Kloek*, ed. J. de Kruiif, G.-J. Johannes, and J. Salman (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2004), 213–36. For an extensive treatment of Houbraken, his work, his theories, and the censorship of his works, see H.J. Horn, *The Golden Age Revisited. Arnold Houbraken’s Great Theatre of Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses* (Doornspijk: Abebooks, 2000).
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- 43 [Houbraken], *Verzameling*, 178.