

TRANSCRIPT: HISTORICAL CLASSICS

08 JULIANA CORNELIA DE LANNYOY

We remain in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Netherlands is on edge. Anna of Hanover governs the country for a few years, and soon after, the spirit of the American Revolution crosses the ocean. In 1780, Britain declares war on the Netherlands, and at home, Patriots and Orangists clash. One fights for a republic, the other for the stadtholder—or even a monarchy. Protests flare up. Convictions are defended with violence—sometimes with fists, sometimes with murder. Yes, we are in the Age of Enlightenment. Emotions run high as society transforms rapidly. Wilhelmina of Prussia leaves her mark on politics and believes her daughter deserves the same education as her son—a small revolution for the time. Women, in any case, are not idle.



During the conflicts, they donate money for weapons, join protests, and are visible on the streets. In times of crisis, the distinction between men and women seems momentarily unimportant. Meanwhile, not only men but also women write prolifically. Lucretia van Merken remains the Netherlands' most popular author. Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken are on their way to becoming literary superstars. And among these giants, we find Juliana Cornelia de Lannoy. De Lannoy is an Orangist with a turbulent life, born in Breda in 1738 into a military family. Her father serves in the garrison army. Soon, she loses several family members. She moves to Zutphen, Deventer, Nijmegen, and Geertruidenberg. At 25, instead of marrying, she chooses the life of a writer. With the poetic letter "To My Spirit" in 1766, she gains recognition. She writes, among other things:

"I find my dearest feast, my sweetest delights again,

when I return to myself and to my books."

Yes, she also excels in literary societies, wins literary medals, and writes tragedies like *Leo the Great* and *The Siege of Haarlem*, confirming her fame as a tragic poet. Let yourself be carried away to the eighteenth century, to the work of Juliana Cornelia de Lannoy, who, with a sharp pen and humor, challenged the conventions of her time.

Next to me is Jannah Loontjens, a novelist, poet, and essayist who has specially retranslated De Lannoy's texts into modern Dutch for us. Welcome, Jannah.

Jannah Loontjens

Thank you.

Fleur Speet

And on the other side, Marleen de Vries, a writer, scholar, and expert in eighteenth-century Dutch literature, who will provide the background and context for De Lannoy. Glad you're here, Marleen.

Marleen de Vries

Thank you.

Fleur

In the episode about Lucretia van Merken, I rather boldly announced Juliana de Lannoy as the Dutch Mary Wollstonecraft—a force of nature. The author of the iconic *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1790. Of course, it's terribly anachronistic to compare De Lannoy to her, since De Lannoy died about ten years before that book was published. Marleen, how far-fetched is this comparison?

Marleen

It's a bit far-fetched, but I completely understand what you mean. Like Wollstonecraft, De Lannoy is constantly fighting for women's emancipation. We would call her a feminist today—a word that didn't exist then, but she was deeply committed to it. She is very ambitious. She wants to become the best tragic poet in the Netherlands. But she also always has in mind the importance that other women can derive from what she does. So when she is invited to join one of those literary societies you mentioned—that was in 1772, *Kunstliefde spaart geen vlijt*—she is, like anyone receiving such an invitation, very surprised. But she immediately understands that this is a golden opportunity. Not only for herself, as a woman becoming a member, but also for future women. She hopes that by joining, she will set an example and spark change. In that sense, you can indeed compare her to Mary Wollstonecraft.

Fleur

Jannah, did you know the name or work of Juliana de Lannoy before you started retranslating?

Jannah

Well, I knew her name, but I must admit I had never read anything by her before you asked me to do these retranslations. It was a huge surprise. I was really happy you asked me, because I was so struck by the liveliness. I found it incredibly accessible, funny, playful, and witty. So I was very surprised. I had expected something much more hermetic and stiff—eighteenth century, you know.

Marleen

Yes, this clings to the eighteenth century. This is also exactly the problem with the eighteenth century: no one knows what that century meant, who was important, who wrote poetry. And because of those portraits with all those strange wigs, it comes across as very stiff. Everyone looks the same. And in history, it's a kind of collective black hole, I always say. No one knows anything about the eighteenth century—well, about the seventeenth, the Golden Age, and then the nineteenth. But there's a whole century in between. It's systematically skipped. In the Dutch canon, it gets three measly little windows. The TV series *The Story of the Netherlands* started that century in 1780, just skipping eighty years. And in *The Story of Amsterdam*, that century wasn't even on TV—only in the book. But this is characteristic. You can't really blame anyone for either having no image of that century or having an image that's completely wrong.

Jannah

Fortunately.

Marleen

No, this is really a shortcoming of scholars, too, who don't popularize enough, I think. But also of Dutch culture, where interest in history has completely disappeared. Unless it's for those fun TV series, but then they should include the eighteenth century.

Fleur

Yes. We'll get to the poem in a moment, because I actually wanted to ask Jannah to recite a bit, but how is she rooted in French? Everything was French in the eighteenth century, right?

Marleen

Yes, some people wonder if we should say De Lanoje or De Lannoy. Well, the aristocracy spoke French at home, wrote in French, so it's obvious that she was called De Lannoy and that's how she referred to herself, not De Lanoje. That said, I'm surprised that, as far as I know, she published exclusively in Dutch. That Enlightenment idea is probably behind it: we're going to put Dutch culture on the map, and I'm going to contribute to that. I want to promote patriotism and the importance of culture, piety, and patriotism—that's what I want to do.

Fleur

Yes. Jannah, would you like to recite the opening of "To My Spirit"? This time, we'll skip the original because the original text has largely remained intact.

Jannah

And maybe I can explain a bit. I understand this was her debut. She was 27 when she wrote it. And I read it as a conversation, actually with herself, with the conventional voice of the time that she had also internalized, and her spirit, which was freer and wanted to break free. But it's the conventional voice that starts, and I've made it a bit more contemporary, mainly by replacing "Gij" with "you." Because it's written in "gij," and also, for example, "zotternij" with "foolishness" or "misnoegen" with "stress." But otherwise, I've stayed very close to the text.

"My Spirit, I must finally speak to you seriously,

I've been patient with your flaws until now,

Though your foolishness stressed me,

I stayed silent, or gently advised you to stop:

But now, since indulgence seems to win so little,

I must, reluctantly, begin in a stricter tone.

What kind of madness has clouded your mind

That you lead such a senseless, extraordinary life?

How can it be! Someone of your talent, in the prime of life,

Does nothing but read books.

And what books! A woman should rather

Open Clarissa or Pamela once in a while.

But no, you won't spend time on that,

Devoting yourself instead to supposedly more interesting pursuits—

To investigate, as if anyone cares,

Whether it's the earth or the sun that stands still or moves,

Who Plato was, and what Epicurus actually taught,

Which heroes Rome and Greece admired,

And as if this foolishness weren't enough,

There's also that urge to write poetry, which leads to this.

You manage not only to waste entire days on it,

But also to spend whole nights,

Your devotion, your lust and care, seem reserved for this alone.

A young lady, a poetess! So bizarre, so boldly uninhibited!

But tell me, what's the point of all these whims?

What advantage do you see, besides wasting your time?"

Fleur

You really feel addressed.

Jannah

Yes. I also thought, wow, how incredibly brave to push back against the conventions of what a woman should do. And she's very outspoken about it in this poem, because it's also a very long poem. I've shortened it considerably.

Fleur

It's 246 lines...

Jannah

Yes.

Marleen

The wonderful thing is that you see the Enlightenment in action. Because the eighteenth century is synonymous with the Enlightenment. But that's a very abstract concept, and most people, when I explain it, can't imagine it. It was an emancipation movement for both men and women, focusing on individual freedom and autonomy. And that's what this poem is about. The Enlightenment was carried by thousands of citizens, intellectuals, writers, merchants—it was about creating awareness. And you see that De Lannoy is one of those citizens adding a small brick to that masonry, which would eventually be called the Enlightenment. With this poem, she contributes to greater awareness and advocates for more freedom and autonomy for women. That's what this dialogue is about. And that's what we could typically call enlightened. So this is a very concrete example in this case.

Jannah

Yes.

Fleur

Yes, Jannah, would you like to recite another part of "To My Spirit"?

Jannah

Here, she responds to her more conservative voice addressing her.

"What? you ask, what words! Is pure intellect

Not equally granted to us as to the male sex?

Is it possible, with a soul, noble and elevated,

Divine by nature, to grovel so low in the dust?

Or is the soul in us women of lesser worth?

I doubt if this has ever been proven or clearly explained.

No, that we must yield to men in rationality,

And that wisdom and ingenuity so rarely reach us,

Comes only from education, which bears the blame,

Misled from youth by the example it sets,

Led astray by the trivialities of women's lives.

Is it surprising that we rarely strive to expand our knowledge?"

Jannah

Great passage.

Marleen

Yes, applause.

Jannah

And you could still say today: it still applies.

Fleur

I immediately thought of the TikTok videos my daughters watch, with all those makeup tutorials. And yes, you sometimes hear feminists say: makeup and all that, making yourself pretty, prevents you from learning and opening books.

Jannah

Yes, exactly the trivialities of women's lives. Yes, exactly, that's what's held up as an example.

Yes, no, that's why. I found it so lively, accessible, and contemporary that I wanted to stay as close to the text as possible to show that people actually wrote very modernly back then. Which also surprised me. Should I read the last two lines as well? So it's that confessional voice in her speaking again, saying:

"All that may be, my spirit, and if I understand you correctly,

You compare your inspiration and talent to the muses.

Good luck then with your books and the language of poets,

The household will soon make you forget this whim."

Yes, that's the end of the poem. Because it's all so clever and often mocking and ironic, I read this as satire—that the conventional voice indeed says this to her, wants to keep her under its thumb and suppress her, but she still shows in this poem: I stand against it. I, I straighten myself up and I write, yes, this is what I have to fight against, these ideas.

Marleen

Men are allowed to study, and she, as a woman, is not supposed to—and she is judged for it. That's the conflict, and that's why she has this inner struggle: yes, but I want to study, I want to read books. I want to do that all day, while society expects her to invest time in a family and bearing children. And I think she clearly doesn't want any of that.

Fleur

Was it also in the air? All that attention to women's rights? I read something about the fear that the Dutch Parnassus, the poets' mountain, would fall under female rule.

Marleen

Yes, undoubtedly. This is a defining feature of the Enlightenment. So it was all about freedom, equality. And then, yes, you can forget about brotherhood. And it wasn't there in the Netherlands, still isn't. It was already very polarizing then, but freedom and equality between all classes—because there was still a class society—and with that equality comes the call for justice. And I think "To My Spirit" also strongly appeals to people's sense of justice: why is it that men have all these privileges and freedoms and can develop themselves? And if I, as a woman, do that, I'm called a savante—a bluestocking. That's unjust. Why don't I have that freedom? And those are indeed typical Enlightenment themes.

Jannah

I did read in Maaïke Meijer that savante was indeed an insult at the time, but also seen as a real danger to society. That the learned, educated women had to be opposed, and she even compares it to the modern-day terrorist. Should I read it?

"The savante, the specter of the woman who studies, is a mathematician, astronomer, or writer, and who discusses as an equal with men. The discourse about the savante is comparable to that about terrorism today. She is the radicalized Muslim of the eighteenth century. Every writing woman must be careful not to resemble a savante, because then she is not only unattractive to men but also a danger to society. Women exhaust themselves in displays of modesty and virtue. They were only allowed, wrapped in a cloud of excuses, to extend one finger into the territory of literature reserved for men. It's a miracle that women, despite so much opposition and disadvantage, have written so much that is interesting."

Thus Maaïke Meijer.

Marleen

I think that's a bit over the top.

Jannah

Oh, do you?

Marleen

I actually think it's nonsense. In Wolff and Deken's *Sara Burgerhart*, two savantes appear as characters, Cornelia Hartog and Van Kwastama, and they are constantly ridiculed because they sit with their noses in books all day. And well, that's not the point. Why not? Because then you're not useful to your country. That's the idea, because as a woman, you're supposed to bear children, raise them, and take care of your husband a bit. And that's what was understood as useful at the time. And everything revolves around being useful to the fatherland. That's a real dilemma for someone like De Lannoy, because she wants that very much. As a woman, she can't be a soldier like her father. As a woman, she can't study, so she can't become a lawyer. She can't become a preacher, she can't become a doctor—she can't do anything for the fatherland. The only thing she can do is put her pen at the service of the fatherland. And that's what she does. And if, as a result, she is rejected or excluded as a savante, well, that's extremely painful. But the fact that she became so famous, that she was recognized, that her tragedies were known, and that the most famous writer in the Netherlands at the time was a woman, Lucretia van Merken—it shows that in reality, it wasn't all that bad. So those women did receive that respect and recognition from men, and they didn't make a fuss about it. So I think it was also a bit of a literary, satirical joke that took on a life of its own.

Fleur

The more we talk in this podcast about how things were for women and what they wrote and did and said, the greater the contrast sometimes seems, and you really see that there are also waves—sometimes women get a lot of space, and then, of course, there's a counter-movement, and they have to be silenced again, but it's also a game.

Marleen

It's also like now: you have progressive men, you have conservative men, so it depends on who says what at what moment, I think. It's all very recognizable. I find that very appealing about the eighteenth century: everything is recognizable. That anger, those vicious jokes, fighting for whatever. But that's what makes that century so interesting to me.

Fleur

Yes.

Marleen

It's a very difficult century. You can't easily summarize it: everything is possible, and everyone has their own opinion. That's it. Everyone is very opinionated, just like today, so you can actually encounter anything, and you can defend almost any statement at some point.

Jannah

But wasn't it the case that, for example, artists and writers were progressive, but the general spirit of the time was still quite conservative toward women? That she is actually fighting against a kind of zeitgeist or an image that is still very much imposed on her?

Marleen

Yes, I agree with you. I think the zeitgeist was more conservative than the circles she moved in. But we can't be sure. Because we know almost nothing about the lower classes, and I think they were actually quite free, especially the youth, and they could go out and stay up late. And everything we know from diaries, you think, wow, that was already quite cozy, going to bed at 2, 3 a.m. So it's not that when the sun went down, all of the Netherlands went to sleep. There was just as much nightlife as today.

Jannah

I always wonder why it turned around again after that? That there was so much freedom in that time? Why did it become so much stricter, more pious, and narrow-minded afterward?

Fleur

I think we should make another podcast about that, the nineteenth century. Every podcast mentions the "nineteenth century." A lot changed there, let's just say. And also in the perception of this time, and that's something we still carry with us today. And what I also read is that women actually had a lot of economic independence and freedom, and that there were also many rich women. Although I also come across names like—what was her name again?—Petronella van Woesthoven, women who practiced science and were also developing all that.

Marleen

The culture was, of course, predominantly Christian, and what you see in the eighteenth century is that more secular impulses are added. That's a process that actually continues throughout that hundred years. So I think it was much harder to go against the tide at the beginning of the century, and as the century progresses—that's why all those societies only emerge in the last quarter of the eighteenth century—by then, the culture has become so secular that there's less resistance in larger groups and also less resistance from the church. And then it suddenly goes very fast.

Fleur

Yes. Does that also explain why there's such a boom in female authors at the end of the eighteenth century?

Marleen

Yes, and in societies. They are really invited. And that's very special. It wasn't obvious that this would happen. And it wasn't the result of a struggle or anything. It was actually handed to them, and it gained momentum when the war broke out in 1780-81. And then the men in all those societies realized, oh dear, now every voice counts. We actually have a lot of talented poets, women, who can now all become members of our society, just to write propaganda. That's what it comes down to. And I always say the war was probably the best thing for women in the eighteenth century; they really benefited from it. And the number of female memberships doubled in ten years, and some women owed their fame to those societies and the poems they produced. It was all about patriotism, love of country, with a lot of drama and monologues. Actually, you'll see that in De Lannoy's work, which you'll read later.

Jannah

Certainly.

Marleen

It's very dramatic. She makes a great appeal to emotions, which doesn't fit the image we have of the cool, rational, detached Enlightenment. I fell for that century because everything I encountered was so dramatic. Letters, too—you think, wow, they seem like real people; you recognize every emotion. It comes very close. And that happens again and again. But that patriotic period caused a huge acceleration. I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't ended up in revolutionary waters. But I think it would have been quieter. Because that's what ultimately happens in the nineteenth century—it all gets reversed, and then it just plods along again.

Fleur

And what strikes me is that parts of, for example, "To My Spirit" are almost still relevant today. I mean, Dolle Mina could have written such a poem, right?

Jannah

Well, I think such a conversation with yourself about the expectations placed on you as a woman and how you actually want to live—that, yes, I can imagine that you could still write that today. And there would certainly be similarities. She didn't have children, but I think, for example, that even now, you still have to deal with judgments as a mother if you work or write and therefore

have less time for your children—those kinds of things, you could easily write a dialogue about that. So in that sense, there's a lot to recognize. And I think 27 is young to write such a poem, but maybe in that time, it wasn't so young. And she didn't get very old, did she? 46 or so? Or how old?

Fleur

In '82? She was 44. That's very young. Because ultimately, the body of work she left behind isn't very large, is it, Marleen?

Marleen

No. And fortunately, she didn't have to experience the patriotic period. That might have been an advantage. She would have been terribly annoyed by it, because she was an Orangist. So she was spared that.

Fleur

Yes, exactly.

Marleen

But we also know nothing about De Lannoy's love life.

Fleur

No.

Marleen

Not married, no children. That seems like a conscious choice. But maybe it wasn't at all?

Fleur

Yes. Especially because the image was that a woman should get married. And that's why she had to be beautiful, because then it was attractive to men, and otherwise, you couldn't get a man, which was dangerous.

Marleen

Well, she had smallpox and apparently had a very scarred face, covered in smallpox scars. But I mean, Van Merken: no child. Wolff and Deken: none either. Belle van Zuylen: none either. So sometimes I think: now, is that a coincidence, or are we falling into the trap of thinking that everything was more prudish back then? Maybe it wasn't like that at all, and those women were already quite independent. It seems like: well, I'll just let all that pass me by. I'll focus on my books.

Jannah

And she literally mocks that. Just like in the poem "The Perfect Man." I mean, pure mockery of married life.

Fleur

Yes, for her, it was really a kind of prelude, I think, to then definitely choose only to write. Or not?

Marleen

Yes, I think so, because that's also why she says to the Haagse Kunstliefde spaart geen vlijt—all members have to submit four thick pieces a year. So the only thing she has to do is not much. But in practice, it turns out to be too much for everyone. No one feels like it. And she knows that by saying, well, I'll just do one or so, because I want to spend my time on those tragedies—that's the most, most important thing for her. That's her greatest ambition. And she succeeds in that. She's very successful with those tragedies and certainly with what we're going to talk about next, The Siege of Haarlem. So she has very clear priorities.

Fleur

Humor is often missed in female authors; it's often thought that women can't write with humor. And in this series, we see that's not the case. Anna Bijns had humor, Anna Roemers had humor. They all had it. Yes, I also wonder if it's a rhetorical trick to say with a smile, I'm not so dangerous.

Marleen

Well, it's very eighteenth century. Satire, that's also synonymous with the eighteenth century. And uh. So that's very nice. Self-deprecation, self-awareness, that's a, that's really. That's why that century is so fun. Everyone does it. Except for the heavily devout Christians. They, in my opinion, have zero self-deprecation, but people who are a bit lighter in life, yes, they make jokes all the time. There are also volumes full of lame pun poems, and that continues throughout the century. So you think, boys, underwear humor, but it really belongs. It's also called the century of satire. I really like that self-relativizing ability that everyone seems to have, and Wolff and Deken have it too, especially in their letters. You laugh yourself silly; they constantly mock themselves, yes, almost everyone has it.

Fleur

So "The Perfect Man" is also a satire on men. Was that normal?

Marleen

Well, satire is a way to survive, of course. It can be a survival strategy. You just laugh away your pain and misery. We all do that sometimes, and I think that plays a role too. But you can see that in orthodox Christian circles, you weren't supposed to laugh or go to the theater or write, or see a comedy, or read fun novels. So the fact that this kept happening also shows that the culture was indeed becoming more earthy and secular, and people made grateful use of that. I think you really need that, because life was incredibly hard. You can't imagine it. There were floods every winter, people drowned, there were epidemics every spring. Uh, there was war. Child mortality was still very normal, so you had almost no social safety net. So it's impossible for us to imagine, sitting here, how difficult it must have been to survive back then. So you arm yourself in all possible ways, and the fact that there's still so much humor, I actually find that astonishing sometimes. I think if we were to go back in a time machine now, if we were to really experience that for a week, we'd be screaming to get back to the 21st century.

Fleur

Yes, well, Jannah, now that we're talking about it, let's do that poem, "The Perfect Man."

Jannah

Yes, yes, the nice thing is, of course, that first poem, "To My Spirit," is full of self-deprecation or satire about women. But here, she also mocks men.

The Perfect Man

Always at work for the sake of the family;

Diligent in his profession, with pride and honor;

Never angry, never inclined to wild frivolities;

Concerned for his neighbors, averse to vain gain:

Never gambles, never touches alcohol;

Attentive even in his free time to spend it usefully;

No lazy consumer of temptations or nonsense;

In love, and tender too, but only with his true wife!

Faithful to the death to the bonds of true friendship:

Ready to fight for the state in distant lands;

Full of compassion, honest, wise, friendly, and gentle in spirit:

The man, with so much virtue, with so much fame,

That man, who so ardently ignites my poetic flame,

Has, to my knowledge, never existed on this earth.

Fleur

Yes, it would indeed be nice if such men existed on earth. Does such a poem inspire you, Jannah?

Jannah

Not specifically to write poetry myself, because I write very differently. But I do think it's just fantastic to read. And also, apparently, men were talked about like that, I think, oh, that they were constantly praised in the family and that they got so much honor and that they were actually, even if they were jerks, still very good and had a good heart. And you should know how tender they can be. I hear that immediately, that those kinds of things are said, and she mocks that, and yes, I enjoyed that very much. I also changed the most in this poem, because at the time, she had references, for example, to Spel and Bachus, which I simply changed to gambling or alcohol. Let me see what else was there: "geen laf bewonderaar van vreemde aanvalligheden," which I turned into: "geen luie consument van verleidingen of onzinnigheden." There's enormous persuasive power in it. And uh, yes, that really spoke to me. Yes, I think that's very nice. That inspires me, perhaps, in the persuasive power of poetry, yes.

Fleur

Yes. Well, we'll leave "To My Spirit" and the poems behind us for now, because we're moving on to a tragedy, because that's actually where she wanted to be great, Marleen. That was really the highest genre, right?

Marleen

The highest genre, along with the epic and tragedy. And the three were also really considered male genres. And the strange thing is that in the second half of the eighteenth century, two women managed to become the most important tragic poets in the country: Van Merken and De Lannoy. How is that possible? And that they received recognition for it. Because it wasn't really the intention that you should speak out. The nice thing about De Lannoy is that she says she's ambitious and doesn't present herself modestly at all. And when she wins a prize competition at one of those societies for the first time, she also says, Hurray, I will be immortal—"Triumph," she says, "triumph. I will be immortal." That's also a bit mocking...

Jannah

Yes, I also took it as a joke, actually.

Marleen

But it's also really what she wanted. And someone like Van Merken, who was very modest, you'd never hear her say such a thing. Yet those two women, they were both accepted and they were really recognized. And for example, Willem Bilderdijk, he adored De Lannoy, he was really at her feet. The Siege of Haarlem, when he read that, he confessed to her in a letter that he had shed tears of envy over that immense talent of hers. So tears of jealousy he had shed over that immense talent of hers. So you could say, and that's the great unenjoyable, Bilderdijk. That was his nickname. The great unenjoyable.

Fleur

Why?

Marleen

He was a very difficult man, who quarreled with everyone and was not easily satisfied with anyone or didn't easily think anyone else's work was as good as his own. But he thought hers was wonderful, and he eventually took care of her posthumous poetic work, but the fact that he also just writes down, "I shed tears of envy." Yes, wonderful, that does show how generous men were at the time. Van Merken received the same praise, but it remains amazing that they had no competition from those men in the field of tragedy. They both stood alone at the top. Very special, I think that fact hasn't received enough attention yet.

Fleur

Well, it did strike me, starting with Katherina Lescailje, that women were very present in the theater world anyway.

Marleen

Yes, that's true.

Fleur

And that they often bring female protagonists from national history to the fore. So yes, at some point, I get the idea: oh, it's actually a kind of women's territory, because they're so important in it.

Marleen

They've made it that way. Yes, yes, I think that's true. And that was also really recognized, that that was the case.

Fleur

Yes, what is a tragedy, actually? Because yes, a tragedy, is that the same thing?

Marleen

Yes, it's the same thing. And that's a classic genre, so you already encounter it in the classical poets, just like an epic. And a tragedy is also always about heroes. And somehow, it remained the highest of the high for a long time. It was also written in rhyme and meter, so you really had to master the craft of poetry and be able to create a plot. And I think a tragedy also always has five acts, and then there's a catharsis, a turning point. There's always a conflict, and the annoying thing about the eighteenth century is that then, on top of that, all kinds of French classical rules were added that an author also had to comply with. So it was actually a notoriously difficult genre. If you could prove yourself in it, you had really made it. The sad thing is that you can already see in the eighteenth century that the novel will eventually become much more important than poetry and dramatic poetry. That shift, which is already somewhere in the middle of the century, you can see that the hierarchy of genres is going to be completely overturned at some point. And that only really happens definitively in the nineteenth century. And so Van Merken and De Lannoy, but also Wolff—she actually started with the idea of mastering those classical genres because that was the standard. Anyway, plenty of drama.

Fleur

Yes, yes, it's all drama in the eighteenth century.

Marleen

No! There are also a lot of farces.

Fleur

Oh!

Marleen

Yes, no, there's also a farce culture, of course. But well, who's going to research that? You can't do everything at once.

Fleur

No, no, that's true. Well, then I also heard that there was—I don't remember the order—whether it was first a tragedy and then a farce was performed one after the other?

Marleen

Yes. Always. So that you still went home happy. That was the fixed recipe.

Fleur

Yes, nice, Jannah! Would you like to recite a bit from *The Siege of Haarlem*?

Jannah

Yes.

Fleur

It was published in 1770, and maybe it's nice if Marleen does the daughter Amelia and you do Kenau. Kenau, not "de." That's also something. We think of Kenau, that's a word with many meanings. What's it about?

Jannah

Kenau is Kenau Simonsdochter Hasselaer. She lived in the sixteenth century. And in the war with Spain, Haarlem was also occupied. And she wanted to liberate herself. Actually, this play is a long conversation between—yes, various people, the old mayor, the mayor: should we surrender now? Because there's also famine. And then Kenau is called in, and the old mayor hopes that she will be on his side, that we have to surrender now, we have to make sure our children get food, etc., but she is very steadfast and says: I think we should keep fighting, and the women can also participate. Children, the elderly can participate. But it's true that her daughter and her daughter's husband were already on the Spanish side, or had been taken prisoner there—I don't remember exactly, and the daughter managed to escape. Her son-in-law, so the husband of that daughter, he continued to fight, he agreed very much with Kenau, but he doesn't survive. And at the moment they find out that he's dead. And then Kenau says, and then it says behind it, I also read what's behind it—restraining herself.

"Beware, it's your husband... (Amelia faints)

Oh, heaven, help me! Could life be fleeing her?

Amelia, dear daughter, my offspring, do you hear your mother sigh,

please, at least you survive in this distress,

my daughter, were you not raised in my womb?

Survive, this is the hand that always dried your tears,

it embraces you, recognize the breast that nursed you.

But alas, she doesn't hear me—what a terrible moment:

she dies, it's over, this is her last breath."*

"You live, my daughter, dare I hope?

You know this tender heart: it is open to all your complaints,

I feel, if possible, even deeper the pain that now tears you apart,

no, never was a husband mourned with such right."

"Where is my other half? Where do you hide him?

Mother, you torment your soul with unnecessary worries:

Toledo betrays his friend if he sheds his blood.

Where is he?"

"Does your eye not see this wrenching spectacle?"

"Ah... so it's true!"

(She throws herself into her mother's arms)

"Your grief is just,

but show by your courage you are worthy of your husband:

he died for the fatherland, my daughter, what a death!

In the name of your other half, your tender husband,

in the name of all his virtue: bear your loss patiently,

you owe it to his love, to his memory,

my daughter, it is he himself who makes this request of you,

that was his last will."

Marleen

What drama.

Fleur

Well, I see you both looking very moved.

Marleen

You have to put yourself in it. Yes, terrible.

Fleur

Yes, yes. We would now, of course, find this very exaggerated, but...

Jannah

I loved it.

Fleur

Yes, because Jannah, you've retranslated a small part of this here to give readers an impression of this tragedy. Would you like to take on the whole thing so that it could be performed, for example?

Jannah

Well, I've retranslated about three times as much as what we've just read. But I have to say, there are also considerable parts where there's a bit of dithering, I think, about whether or not they should continue to defend the city, and yes, between the old mayor and the mayor, and this is the most dramatic part, and I did enjoy the drama here. I think I've taken on the best part.

Fleur

Yes. Can you confirm that, Marleen? Is this the most dramatic part of it?

Marleen

Yes, this was the end, and it gets even worse, because then, her husband is lying there dead on the stage, but she hasn't realized it yet. But the audience has. The audience is waiting for the moment when she's going to discover that, and then it becomes really dramatic. But the special thing about this piece is that she wants to show that Kenau is a very good example. And the

conflict is actually: which emotion—because it's about emotions—is more important? Is it motherly love or civic duty?

Jannah

Yes.

Marleen

And Kenau really chooses civic duty.

Jannah

Yes, definitely.

Marleen

That ideal, that's actually the ideal that De Lannoy herself also has. And I think she consciously didn't get married and didn't have children to consciously serve the fatherland in this way. Just as her father did as a soldier, she can do it this way. But that's the special thing about this piece. It's about the same theme again. How do you, as a woman, relate to social problems?

Jannah

Yes. It's actually almost shocking how she chooses virtue, in the name of the greater ideal. Yes, so not for personal relationships, but really. So indeed for the fatherland, and yes, it's her. She argues it incredibly well in the piece. But it's also that you think: wow, yes, how can you actually think like that. But it's also: she's even willing to sacrifice her daughter for it, and she says that literally.

Marleen

Yes, that's right.

Jannah

Yes, so that goes very far.

Marleen

It's almost classic drama: what do you sacrifice, indeed.

Jannah

It's almost a Greek tragedy.

Fleur

Yes, exactly. Yes, yes.

Marleen

And that's of course the message she wants to give the audience: fight, fight for that country, fight for your rights. That's also very current in that sense. Because that's the big question: what would we do ourselves? How far and how? How far do you go?

Jannah

Yes, and the special thing is, of course, that it's a woman. Because if it had been a man, it would have surprised you much less if he had chosen the fatherland and wanted to sacrifice his children. But she is Kenau, that woman, and I also found that so strong, that she chose her as a historical figure, because she really existed and also really fought, I think, when that woman was made of very tough stuff. And she also helped to reinforce the ramparts by providing all that wood. And yes.

Fleur

I suddenly have to think—sorry to interrupt you—but I suddenly find myself thinking about the previous episode where we talked about Magdalena Moons. She wasn't fighting, but she seduced a man to ask if he could delay the attack on the city of Leiden by one day, and coincidentally, there was a huge flood, so an attack on the city of Leiden could no longer take place, and Leiden was saved. Because Leiden was also under siege by the Spanish, and you see that a lot. Magdalena Moons, Kenau, female warriors, all of whom are always brought out to show: okay, with these women, you win the war, because that's what it is.

Marleen

Yes, indeed. Then, by making a mother of her, it becomes very relatable for the audience. Like, what would I do? Because yes, most women were mothers, what would I have done myself? And that's of course the question she raises. Very clever. If she had just made a real Kenau of her, you know, the tough one.

Fleur

What we now understand by that.

Marleen

Then it would have been less dramatic, while now everyone empathizes: what? What will she decide, how will she deal with that daughter? Yes, that's quite clever indeed. I think that's also why Bilderdijk was jealous, because you come up with that.

Jannah

At first, I thought, okay, she wants to present a woman who feels equal to men and is also treated that way by men. She wants to present a very rational, sensible, strong woman. But at the same time, she's also a very sensitive mother who has all those emotions from the part we just read aloud but can still rise above them and think: no, I choose those ideals, for the fatherland. That's an enormous contrast, and that surprised me in the piece, how those emotions suddenly took center stage.

Fleur

Were you also moved by that as a mother?

Jannah

Yes, I was moved by it. Marleen also just said, there are enough wars, even now, in the world, so you can also put yourself in the place of mothers now who lose their children or who live in war zones. So in that sense, it does move me. But I was also just busy with that language, staying close to her language and yet writing it in a more accessible, somewhat more modern Dutch.

Marleen

Yes, I think it's very clever, because I feel it because of that. While if it had remained in the original eighteenth-century language, it quickly becomes ridiculous. We can hardly read anything written in that period, unfortunately I have to say, that's how it is, it's almost unreadable for us. Yes, that's a real shame. But as soon as you start retranslating, you think, oh yes, yes, now it's coming in. Indeed, and then you also understand the content much better. That's almost essential for the eighteenth century to keep doing that, I think. I do think the century gains popularity with that.

Fleur

Last question for Jannah: have you gotten closer to De Lannoy? Has she come to life for you as well?

Jannah

Yes, definitely. I mean, for me, she was a vague historical figure whose name I knew. And indeed, that portrait with a cake on her head and a pushed-up bosom. That gives a very stiff impression, and I found her the opposite of stiff. So incredibly playful, funny, witty, clever. I've said it all, but. But that, yes, I had a lot of fun with her. So yes, I'm very happy that I got to know her better.

Definitely.

Fleur

Well, wonderful! Thank you, Jannah, for the retranslations and for entertaining yourself. And hopefully, that also entertains the listener, who can find the retranslations on our website. And thank you, Marleen, for sharing all your knowledge.

If you want to know more about female authors who wrote poetry in the same period and were also invited to join poetry societies, such as Adriana van Rijndorp or Anna van der Aar or Petronella van Woestehoven, who didn't really come up, but they were there, listen to the bonus tracks specially made for this podcast, written and read by literary scholar Evi Dijks, and available on our website.

In the next episode, we'll dive into the work of Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken, probably well-known for Sara Burgerhart. But do you also know the sharp satires? Thank you for lending your ear. Until next time!