Transcript: Historical Classics
Episode 11: Petronella Moens

"The freedom of the press—that terror of tyrants, that nurse of philosophy, the lovely dawn of the Enlightenment—must remain eternally inviolable." With these words in defence of freedom of expression, penned in 1795 amid the turbulent Batavian era, as the Patriots seemed poised to seize power, Petronella Moens revealed herself as a woman unafraid to take a firm stand. She believed that even unpalatable opinions must be heard, for only then could reconciliation be achieved.

Petronella Moens was born in 1762 in Koudum, Friesland. As a young girl, she lost most of her eyesight, yet this did not prevent her from becoming one of the most prolific and influential authors of her age. While knitting, she dictated poems, novels, plays, pamphlets, and political treatises. Her oeuvre comprises some 150 titles, ranging from children's literature to fiery political texts—such as her condemnations of slavery. She was also the first woman in the Netherlands to edit her own journal. Moreover, Moens was a central figure in the 18th-century poetic societies, from Rotterdam to Gouda, Amsterdam to Utrecht. She was a member of seven such societies and, at the age of 23, received a gold medal alongside her friend Adriana van Overstraeten. Furthermore, she was part of a literary circle in which women, for the first time, visibly led the public debate.
She was celebrated as "the friend of the fatherland," though later critics dismissed her as overly pious, florid, or moralistic. She died in 1843, at the age of 80, in the midst of the 19th century. Contemporaries admired her sharp intellect, humour, and independence.
Let yourself be carried away into the life and work of a woman who refused to be cowed, and who reminds us today of a forgotten tradition: women who stood at the very heart of the political and literary arena—Petronella Moens.

Fleur Speet
Poet and writer Simone Atangana Bekono has re-translated ten pages of Moens' work. Welcome, Simone!

Simone Atangana Bekono
Hello.

Fleur
We're so glad you're here. Also joining us is Feike Dietz, Professor of Global Dynamics in Dutch Literature at the University of Amsterdam—and, might we say, a specialist in 18th-century Dutch letters. Welcome, Feike!

Feike Dietz
Thank you.

Fleur
Let me start with you, Simone. Had you ever heard of Petronella Moens before?

Simone
No, not at all. Laughs To be perfectly honest.

Fleur
Please, do be honest. I suspect most of our listeners haven't either.

Simone
No, I hadn't.

Fleur
And what did you think of the introduction?

Simone
Well, I immediately Googled her, of course—who is this woman? I traced her footsteps through the era in which she wrote, and I was struck by how, like so many writers of her time, she was the daughter of a minister. And yet, she was so active, even from a young age. When I began translating her work, I had to adjust to her language, which, by today's standards, is rather archaic. But once you grow accustomed to it, you see how she brings the reader close, placing them in a landscape or an emotion. That, to me, is characteristic of her writing.
And yes, as you've already said, she is incredibly sharp—daring to engage with political subjects that were, to put it mildly, rather contentious. I found that fascinating.

Fleur
Feike, turning to you—what was her life actually like?

Feike
Petronella Moens' life has been meticulously researched by Ans Veltman van den Bosch, who wrote a substantial biography covering both her work and her personal history. What was remarkable about Moens' life was that she faced significant challenges from a very young age. She lost her mother in childbirth when her younger sister was born. In that same year, while staying with relatives, she contracted smallpox and nearly lost her sight. These two events had a profound impact on the course of her life and her work.
As a blind woman, she was dependent on others, so she always lived with people who could care for her—first with her own family, later with her sisters, and eventually, when she moved to Utrecht, with a companion who acted as her secretary. She never married and had no children, so she did not follow the traditional path of family life.

Fleur
Which, incidentally, applies to many of the authors in this series.

Feike
Indeed. The conventional assumption has long been that if you had a family to care for, it would be difficult to dedicate yourself to literature. Fortunately, we've revised that notion somewhat. But for someone as prolific as Moens, it's clear that she was able to devote her entire life to her craft. In a way, the very challenges she faced also created opportunities for her to reflect deeply on what she wanted to contribute to the world.

Fleur
She also had a library of, I believe, around 500 titles?

Feike
Yes, she was clearly widely read. Yet, of course, her blindness limited her access to books, so she relied heavily on others to read to her. Still, she had an extraordinary ability to discern what she wanted to know and to surround herself with people who could help her achieve that. That, in itself, is deeply impressive.

Fleur
Shall we begin with one of Moens' poems? Here's an excerpt from "On the Abolition of the Slave Trade by the French Nation," published in 1798.

Simone
Certainly.

> The clanking of chains
> No longer torments nature,
> Free brothers need not curse
> Cruel Christians any longer.
> No desperate wringing of hands,
> No avarice, no damnation,
> Consuming the innocent.
> No parents dying of grief,
> While children suffer.
> No sons, filled with rage,
> Hanging themselves in chains
> Before their fathers' broken hearts.
> No cruelty separates the young man
> From the maiden of his dreams.
> No pregnant woman in tears,
> Torn from the child of her love.
> No young girls fleeing
> For their honour, from slave traders,

No terrified daughters
Wrested from their mothers.
Here ends the desperate weeping
Of mothers who, rather than
Let their children endure a hellish life,
Would smother them in their sleep.

Fleur
That does sound rather forceful.

Simone
Oh, absolutely.

Fleur
At the very least, she clearly grasps the tragedy of slavery.

Simone
Yes. And in this poem, she writes from the perspective of the enslaved, making it clear to the Dutch reader just how cruel the practice is. She does it very effectively, and with rich metaphor. She appeals directly to emotion—motherly love, the love between young people torn apart. She pulls no punches. That final stanza, about mothers smothering their children—it reminds me of Beloved by Toni Morrison, which also tells the story of a mother who kills her own daughter to spare her from slavery. So, you see, there's a profound empathy at work here.

Fleur
Feike, do you recognise this in her work as well?

Feike
Absolutely. This poem is a fascinating example of Moens' strategies. She critiques the system of slavery, but she does so by framing it positively. She presents France's abolition as an example for the Dutch Republic to follow, something to celebrate. The implication, of course, is that the Dutch should ask themselves: Why are we lagging behind? It's a clever way to influence public opinion.
Additionally, as Simone noted, she appeals to the emotions of mothers, children, and vulnerable people. She taps into empathy, compassion for those who are marginalised—whether by gender, age, race, or ethnicity. She brings all these threads together, and it remains urgently relevant today.

Fleur
And which of her works would you say everyone should know?

Feike
That's a difficult question. I've known Moens' work for a long time, and the more I read, the more I appreciate her ability to address grand themes in so many different genres.

But if I had to name two favourites, I'd choose The Young Sophia, a girls' novel written late in her career, because she does some truly innovative things with girls' literature that were important for the development of the genre—and, indeed, for the recognition of girls as readers.
From her early period, I find it fascinating that she wrote an epic poem about Esther, a strong biblical woman who rises to defend her people. Publishing an epic as a young woman was a bold statement, especially at a time when women were not expected to engage so publicly with literature. It was a way of asserting herself and her ideas about how literature should be practised. You had to take gradual steps to be taken seriously as a poet, so for a young person—let alone a young woman—to publish an epic was a real declaration. And indeed, a number of women did just that. I think it was a deliberate statement, one that invites us to rethink how women's literary careers developed. You needed that kind of boldness to be noticed, and then you could move on to genres that were perhaps less prestigious. And that's exactly what Moens did: first the epic, then later books for children and young girls.

Simone
Would you call a girls' novel something like young adult fiction today, aimed at young women?

Feike
Yes, exactly. It's a precursor to girls' literature.

Simone
Right.

Feike
And what's interesting is that this was a genre that was becoming increasingly important, even commercially. I think Moens saw that potential. In her work, you see this tension: she's searching for ways to give new groups a voice, while also operating within a system that required her to adapt to existing expectations. On the one hand, girls are often portrayed in rather stereotypical ways, but on the other, you also see her addressing the position of enslaved Black people, or deaf children. As a blind poet, she advocated for these marginalised groups in a way that was virtually unheard of at the time. It's not something you see in the literature of that period.

Fleur
What strikes me about this poem on the abolition of slavery in France is its free verse. Simone, what was it like for you to translate? Was it easy, or did you find yourself thinking, "What a shame I'm not working within a strict form, like rhyming verse?"

Simone
In my experience with translations—especially of fixed forms like sonnets or rhyming poetry—you often run into rhythmic or structural challenges. If you want to preserve the rhyme scheme, you sometimes have to get quite creative with the language. But this poem is rhythmically consistent, so it was relatively straightforward. I also translated "Katootje and the Apple," where I had to think carefully about how to maintain the rhyme scheme. Sometimes, I'd have to break the pattern or use slant rhyme. But here, there's

still a fair amount of assonance, which I could work with. So, it was manageable. And since I don't typically write in rhyme myself, it felt quite liberating. I could focus on interpretation.

Fleur
Did that bring you closer to the text?

Simone
In a way, yes. I do see the empathy in Moens' work, as I mentioned. But as a translator and a woman of colour, I also sense that she's writing with a white audience in mind, about Black enslaved people. Sometimes, that creates a certain… melancholy, I suppose. On the one hand, it's entirely justified; on the other, there's always that tension, as a Black person, of feeling fully seen in all your complexity.
But I think her language brings you close to her subjects and the points she wants to make, regardless of—or perhaps because of—her position. As Feike said, she's not afraid to appeal to emotion, but she also presents a logical argument. The passage I read earlier is essentially a rational exposition: these are the things that happen when people are forced to live in inhuman conditions. You might call it sentimental, but it's also simply the truth. That's a powerful approach.

Fleur
Let's move on to another excerpt, this time from The Young Sophia (1837). We're making quite a leap forward in time. You've translated the eighth chapter, which is entirely about slavery.

Simone
Yes.

Fleur
Could you read the passage where you added a footnote?

Simone
Certainly. It's the part where she says:
"If Black people from Africa come to Europe and have children here, those children will undoubtedly grow up less Black. And after five generations, they will barely resemble their ancestors at all."

> 'Now, Lotjelief,' said Mrs. Van Dijk, 'all people on earth share the same origin. They are all descendants of the first man created by God. So it is written in the Bible, and this theory is confirmed by scholars from around the world who have studied the human body. They say there is only one human race, and that all differences in colour and form are merely caused by differences in climate, which greatly influence the blood and the humours. If Black people from Africa come to Europe and have children here, those children will undoubtedly grow up less Black, and after five generations, they will barely resemble their ancestors at all. So, Lotje, can you believe that descendants of the same ancestors have the right to buy and sell one another?'

Fleur
Why did you feel the need for a footnote there?

Simone
I struggled with this passage because I was raised with some knowledge of the Bible through my Catholic father. I remember learning, even in primary school or early secondary school, about Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The story goes that the world was divided among these three sons. When Noah, drunk, returns home one night and lies naked in his tent, Ham and Japheth mock him, while Shem covers him. This was said to reveal their characters, with Shem being the virtuous son. Noah, of course, is a major biblical figure, and this story was used to explain the division of the world's peoples. Africans were said to be descendants of Ham, while Europeans were descendants of Shem, which was supposed to explain why Europeans were superior to Africans.
This was combined with the theory of humours—black bile, yellow bile, etc.—which were thought to influence temperament. So, a European constitution was considered more temperate, while a Mediterranean temperament was seen as more fiery, and an African temperament as both more sluggish and more passionate, even violent.
What's fascinating is that Moens is trying to use these two flawed theories to argue that Africans and Europeans are equal. She cites scholarly research—albeit research we now know to be scientifically incorrect—to argue that if an African moves to a temperate climate, they will gradually lose their African features. So, their skin might lighten, their nose might narrow, they might even develop blue eyes or straight, blonde hair. Her point is: look, we may all look different, but we all come from the same source, and that source was created by God.
There's a paradox here: on the one hand, she's trying to explain why Africans and Europeans are equal, but on the other, she's using theories that are, at their core, racist—and biologically inaccurate.

Fleur
Yes, exactly. Because in that final line, she also says:

> "Blood confers no nobility. No, the same human blood, without distinction, flows in the veins of the slave and the king, of the hero and the highwayman, of the benevolent philanthropist and the murderous tyrant."

So, she was also a fierce opponent of the class system. But there's a kind of moral superiority at work here, isn't there? I see you nodding, Feike.

Feike
Yes, I recognise that tension. In her context, what she's doing here is important and even innovative—or at least part of an innovative tradition of critiquing the system and advocating for the equality of different groups of people. But from our modern perspective, it's deeply problematic.

Simone
Yes.

Fleur
I sometimes think that the Bible is, at its core, a racist and misogynistic text. So, if you're against slavery and the oppression of women, you're essentially attacking the Bible itself. That must have been incredibly complicated for someone in her time.

Feike
That tension is very much present in this discussion. The words Simone just read are spoken by Mrs. Van Dijk, who is giving a kind of enlightened education to a group of girls. One of the girls asks: "But the Bible condones slavery, and the Bible is good—so what's the problem?"
And Mrs. Van Dijk responds: "Yes, people have been doing it for a long time. But people have also been stealing from each other for a long time—that doesn't make it right." So, in this way, she invites a critical reading of the text. We shouldn't accept everything as truth.

Simone
Absolutely.

Fleur
This was also a time—the early 19th century—when people were beginning to turn away from religion, to embrace atheism.

Feike
I wouldn't say Moens herself became atheistic, though.

Fleur
No, her work is deeply Christian.

Feike
Exactly. But what you see in her writing is a combination that was quite common from the late 18th century onward: Enlightenment thought and Christian belief, which sometimes sat uneasily together.
Enlightenment thought emphasised critical thinking, personal experience, and logical reasoning. So, you see these two strands coming together in her work.

Fleur
Bert Paasman, Emeritus Professor of Dutch Literature, has argued that female authors at the end of the 18th century were actually the first and loudest to denounce slavery. Were you aware of that, Simone? That women were at the forefront of this movement?

Simone
It doesn't surprise me, given what I know about the development of abolitionist thought in America, for example. The movement to abolish slavery was rooted in a genuine belief in the equality of all people. And yes, I think you see that women were often very active in this cause, partly because they understood what it was like to be treated as second-class citizens. There's the famous speech by Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?"—though, ironically, it was later edited by a white woman who wanted to make it sound more

"authentic," which actually made it less authentic. That's a rather striking footnote to that speech. But it's also a speech that bears a strong resemblance to what Moens does in her poem on the French abolition of slavery: posing the question, "Am I not a woman? I am also a mother. I exist within a patriarchal context." That line of thinking, that solidarity—I recognise it in Moens' work. So, no, it wouldn't surprise me if women were at the forefront of that struggle.

Fleur
Would you read another passage from The Young Sophia?

Simone
Certainly. I believe we were just discussing this, weren't we? Sophia asks whether it's right to enslave people—whether by the Dutch, the Spanish, or the English. And Mrs. Van Dijk explains that it happens, but that it stems from greed and misguided religious zeal. It's a rather critical Christian perspective on slavery. The Spanish don't come off well in this passage.

Fleur
No, they don't.

Simone
And she explains:

> "But when greed triumphs over integrity and humanity, no crime is too monstrous. Yes, children, not only the Spanish, but all Europeans who had conquered lands in other parts of the world bought and sold Black people. Many an African mother wept for a lost daughter or son, stolen during a hunt or at play by European merchants or other scoundrels. I myself once knew a Black woman whom a friend of mine had brought from Demerara..."

Fleur
Here, she really puts her finger on the sore spot, doesn't she?

Simone
Absolutely.

Fleur
Greed.

Simone
Greed, indeed. And again, that emphasis on motherhood—the African mother weeping for a lost son or daughter. It's a deliberate appeal to the reader's emotions, because the worst thing that can happen to a parent is losing a child.

Feike
And in the passage you just read, Simone, what follows is an extended story about that mother and what she went through with her child. It's a very detailed account, designed to make the reader feel what it does to a mother.

Fleur
Simone, I'd like to ask you about a choice you made in this translation. Did you decide to use the N-word? I've shown some of your translations to students, and they've said they would have handled it differently.

Simone
I did, and I wrestled with it. As a translator, you're reinterpreting to some extent, but not entirely. And as I've said, there are things Moens writes and methods she uses to make her point about abolition—or to persuade people to support it—that I don't entirely agree with.
At the same time, as a woman of colour, I didn't want to erase that by sanitising my translation. I think I did explain at the beginning why I kept the original language. She was certainly someone with a strong sense of justice, but that was embedded in a particular context—her Christian worldview, for example—which is itself problematic.
And yet, these were words that were perfectly normal at the time. That's not necessarily a reason to leave them in, of course—it can still be problematic. But I thought: Why should I correct her? Or rather, Why should I pretend she was already fully aware of the harm in that language?
I understand why students might take offence. I'm perhaps less sensitive to it because, as a writer, I see it through the lens of the language of the time. But I do understand the objection. That's why I included a note: these words are used, but I wouldn't want to give the impression that she was consciously aware of their harmfulness.

Fleur
Speaking of the Spanish—you mentioned they don't come off well. Feike, I'll turn to you, because by the end of the 18th century, as the Netherlands was on the verge of becoming a democracy, there was a great deal of interest in revisiting the old history of the Republic. We see many tragedies from that period, about figures like Kenau or Magdalena Moons. The Spanish had to be painted as the villains, didn't they?

Feike
Absolutely. You're right. Around the time of the late 18th-century struggle for freedom, there was this idea: We must stand up for those who oppress us. And that was directly mirrored in the Eighty Years' War, in which the Dutch had to rise up against the Spanish oppressors. So, that history was revived.
And in this passage, the Spanish are portrayed as the ones who set the trend for sailing the world's seas and initiating the transatlantic slave trade, making people part of that system.

Fleur
Which was true.

Feike
Yes, it was. And it suited the narrative. At the same time, the text also says: "Not only the Spanish, but all Europeans."

Simone
I was wondering if this had something to do with Catholic Spain versus Protestant Holland.

Feike
It certainly does. That dynamic played a major role in the Eighty Years' War: Catholic Spain as the oppressor, a faith that allowed little room for dissent. In contrast, the new Dutch Republic was associated with a more critical, personal approach to faith—the new Protestant ethos. In reality, the Republic was multi-confessional, with many Catholics. But the story that was constructed—and revived in the late 18th century—was that of the Protestant free nation against the Catholic oppressor.

Fleur
Moens was, in a sense, the "friend of the fatherland." But she wasn't the poet of the fatherland. Wait—she was called "the friend of the fatherland," wasn't she?

Feike
Yes.

Fleur
That was, of course, a nod to her own journal.

Feike
Exactly. The Friend of the Fatherland.

Fleur
Would you say that everything Moens wrote was in service of that ideal of patriotism?

Feike
In the broadest sense, yes. What she did was varied, but in her journalistic work—The Friend of the Fatherland—she explicitly reflects on the political state of the nation. How can everyone take responsibility? What kind of behaviour and action contribute to a better future? That's very clear in her journalism.
But you could argue that all her other work was also aimed at teaching people to be critical, thoughtful, morally upright citizens who could contribute to society. That's why she paid so much attention to children, young girls, women—everyone was told: You have a full and valuable place in this fatherland. Together, we can make it better and stronger. So, that programme is always there in the background.

Fleur
I also find it fascinating that she defended freedom of expression—even for opinions she found objectionable, which might argue the exact opposite. And yet, she also wrote:

"Division is the plague of our national happiness. As long as it exists among you, your youthful freedom will never reach its full strength. A hidden worm will gnaw at its heart, and you will grow disheartened by the most disastrous disappointment of your expectations."

Feike
This reminds me of an episode from A Friend of Mankind, another publication she contributed to—and, for the last year and a half, ran herself. In one issue, she writes about opposing forces in nature: the tensions between them are necessary to maintain the natural order. But in society, too many opposing forces disrupt that order. What we need are not people who, out of self-interest, perform grand deeds to be put on a pedestal, but people who can subjugate their own interests to the greater good, the greater ideal—people who can set aside a part of themselves.
She's pushing back against the kind of behaviour often associated with men: the "strong men" who want to do something grand to be remembered. She says: No, the people who should be remembered are the mothers who do small, quiet things within their own circles, where they can have an influence.

Fleur
She also writes in A Friend of Mankind:
"We have often said that women in the Netherlands display more steadfastness of character than men."

Feike
Yes, she does. And she uses this as an argument to say: Women have a crucial role to play, because they can teach men this. They're better at it.

Simone
Yes…

Feike
And this is where I, like Simone, feel a certain discomfort. On the one hand, it's wonderful that she's advocating for women's strengths, but on the other, it's still framed in terms of difference: women are different from men, women are from Venus and men from Mars, and that's why women have something to offer. It's still a kind of essentialism, and that creates unease.

Simone
Absolutely.

Feike
This tension runs through her entire oeuvre. Even as she challenges stereotypes, she sometimes reinforces them in other ways.

Fleur
Though, like Charlotte de Huybert a century and a half earlier, she does call for women's suffrage—albeit for a specific kind of woman.

Feike
Yes.

Fleur
She writes:

> "For our part, we would gladly see such women admitted to the constitutional assemblies and granted the right to vote."

Feike
So, the new generations are in the hands of women, and thus, as no other group, they have the power to shape the future. She sees this as a crucial part of her vision for society. Today, we might dismiss some of her texts on education as not particularly progressive, but for her, it was part of a broader idea: that society depends on how we raise the next generation.

Fleur
Shall we move on to Katootje?

Simone
I think this ties into much of what we've just discussed.

Fleur
Exactly.

Simone
You told me—something I didn't know—that it's actually a reimagining of another poem.

Fleur
Yes, by Hiëronymus van Alphen:

> "Jantje saw some plums hanging, oh, as big as eggs..." and so on.

Simone
This one is called "The Good Child, or The Virtuous Child." But we know it as "Katootje and the Apple," don't we?

Fleur
Yes.

Simone

> Katootje saw a basket full of apples,
> Blushing fair before her eyes.
> 'No!' she cried, 'I mustn't take an apple.'
> Yet still she smiled at the tempting prize.

‘How fine they are, so large, so red,
What harm in one small bite?
Even if it makes Mama cross,
Yesterday she gave me four—
I ate them all at once, it’s true.
But oh, how I wish I knew
The taste of these fine, ruddy spheres!
Would one apple even be missed?
Look at this one—how juicy it appears!
It must be delicious. Oh, but no!
How my heart beats. Fie, you wicked thing!
I feel it—God is watching me.
He sees me, He is everywhere.
I know I must obey.
Your heart will pound in your throat,
Mama says, when you do wrong.
God scolds you if you steal—
Stay there, apple! Oh, how free,
And light I feel again now.
God watched with satisfaction as
I fought and overcame my sin
By not just giving in.
Now my little soul shines like the sun.’
She overcomes her sin by...

Feike
Yes.

Simone
She says, "I fought," and what she gets in return is a pure soul.

Feike
A radiant soul, even.

Feike
It’s fascinating to compare this with Van Alphen’s poem. His was about a father and a son. Here, we have the female counterpart: the mother and the daughter. And it’s about a basket of apples—the woman and the apple.

Simone
Exactly.

Feike
The apple as the symbol from the story of Eve, the Bible as temptation. And here, we see the internal struggle to resist that temptation. It's a much more interesting portrayal of inner conflict than in Van Alphen's poem, where Jantje thinks: Okay, I see plums, and no one's watching, so I can just take them. It's more about opportunity: Because I can.
Here, it's about struggle. She's already tasted the fruit, so to speak. But she wants more, and then she weighs the moral implications. Ultimately, she's strong enough to resist. In Van Alphen's poem, Jantje does get the plums in the end.

Fleur
So, in this way, it's a subtle critique of masculinity in a poem like Van Alphen's. When it comes to women's emancipation, it can take many forms.

Feike
Exactly. And yet, of course, it's also reinforcing stereotypes about women being the ones who must restrain themselves.

Fleur
Yes, who must hold back.

Feike
Yes.

Simone
In Moens' brand of feminism, is there much room for women who do bad things?

Feike
No.

Simone
No.

Feike
No, not really.

Fleur
I was just thinking of Aardenburg—I've read it recently—but there are female characters who do things that aren't necessarily wicked, but do go against the grain.

Feike
There's certainly room for women who step out of line. Though I think it's always from the perspective of the good woman…

Fleur
But sometimes I wonder: as soon as a woman is judged on her femininity, we consider it less valuable. Or even shameful. Or we feel boxed in. But isn't the problem that we need to value femininity and what women do more—and value it better?

Feike
That's exactly what Moens advocates for.

Fleur
I agree. Hella Haasse was already making this point in 1954, in her essay "Emensipation," where she argues, much like Moens, that if women continue to concern themselves only with frivolous things and their appearance, when they could be educating themselves and doing meaningful work—educational work, in this case—then that's not good for women. And I'm not saying—and I don't think Moens is—that women should only do that. It's about humanity. Men, too, should be able to value the feminine within themselves.

Feike
Yes. And what you quoted from A Friend of Mankind—that women are particularly capable of fostering solidarity and smoothing rough edges—that's a kind of femininity that she says everyone should embrace. So, in that sense, yes, it's about valuing those traits more broadly.

Fleur
Moens also wanted men to see what women could do and did. Simone, would you read that passage from her open letter?

Simone
It's about Anna and Maria Tesselschade, who were honoured in a lecture, and a critic in the journal The Dutch Literary Exercises—a Mr. J. Scheltema—thought it was nonsense. Moens was furious about his dismissal, and at the end of her letter, she writes:

> "I hope and trust that lovers of Dutch literature will take offence at the critic's sexism. We are not lacking in men who are willing to champion women in literature—men who believe women capable of more than reading kitchen-maid novels. No, we are certainly not lacking in enlightened men who welcome the growing reforms in women's education. It is to these men that I appeal, and to them that I address this letter."

Fleur
It's almost a closing argument for this entire series.

Feike
Absolutely. And it brings the circle back to Anna and Maria Tesselschade Roemer Visscher. Here, Moens is angry that they've been dismissed as insignificant authors with nothing to say.

Fleur
Yes, but not all men have woken up to this. How can we better involve men in the canonisation of female authors, both historical and contemporary? Simone, do you have any ideas?

Simone
I've never actually given it much thought. For every man who's done something heroic, there's a woman who's done the same—who's just as badass. So, for me, that's always been a kind of anchor: that this can always be emphasised, and that it doesn't have to be an either/or situation.

Fleur
Exactly.

Feike
I find this passage fascinating—the call to resist sexism and the idea that men, too, have a role to play. It's still incredibly relevant. You see this in the work of organisations like Fixdit, which was founded on the observation that sexism in the literary world is still very much alive. And while we've made enormous strides in bringing attention to historical women like Moens, that work has largely been driven by women. When you look at research on women in history, it's still very much a women's issue. And that's a sign that there's still work to be done.

Fleur
So, let this series be a call to all the men who want to do research: get involved!

Feike
Yes!

Fleur
For those interested in Petronella Moens' contemporaries—Clara Fioena van Sietzema, De Cambon van der Werken, and Adriana van Overstraeten—we've prepared bonus tracks for this podcast, written and narrated by literary scholar Evi Dijcks. You can find them on our website.
With that, we come to the end of this full podcast series, with a call to everyone to name these women and keep naming them. We hope you've enjoyed all the episodes on early modern Dutch female authors.
For the enthusiasts, I'll be wrapping up the series with a short podcast epilogue, connecting all the threads and showing how these female authors were sidelined or even erased from literary history.
Thank you for your attention.