



Femke Deen, David Onnekink and Michel Reinders (eds.), ***Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*** (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011, 261 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 19178 5); Roeland Harms, ***Pamfletten en publieke opinie. Massamedia in de zeventiende eeuw*** (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011, 416 pp., ISBN 978 90 8964 368 1); Michel Reinders, ***Gedrukte Chaos. Populisme en moord in het Rampjaar 1672*** (Amsterdam: Balans, 2010, 333 pp., ISBN 978 94 600 3284 4).

Pamphlets are a favourite historical source, but even so the definition of ‘pamphlet’ is not beyond dispute, and there is much speculation about the degree of influence they exercised. A great step forward was taken in 1987 when the American historian Craig Harline published *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic*. Taking a broad approach, he discussed content and genres, writers and readers, distribution and sales, political context and the influence of the early seventeenth century pamphlet. As an expression of public opinion he took them very seriously: ‘The pamphlet audience became, as it were, the final court of appeal’. Thereby the author was a forerunner of the debate about the rise of the public sphere. The hypothesis of the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas of the transition, first in England in the eighteenth century, from a ‘representative culture’ dominated by ruler and state to a ‘public sphere’ characterised by political and cultural debate, initiated a great deal of research internationally. Although the seventeenth century Republic seems to be the ideal ‘laboratory’ to test Habermas’ theory, for a long time this field remained dormant. In 2006 *Het lange leven van het pamflet [The long life of the pamphlet]* appeared, edited, among others, by Marijke Meijer Drees, in which writers’ strategies and the symbolic meaning of text and image were the new features. While it is true that in two collections of articles that appeared in 2011 this approach is taken, the interest is primarily in the influence of the pamphlet. In *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650*, edited by Jan Bloemendal, Arjan van Dixhoorn and Elsa Strietman, beginning with a valuable theoretical exposition, the emphasis lies on the public functioning of literary texts in the broad sense. The collection of Deen, Onnekink and Reinders reviewed here, has a more specific approach, namely the functioning of pamphlets as a political medium.

The opening sentence of the ‘Introduction’ summarises the main point: ‘In the Dutch Republic, an intimate relationship existed between politics and pamphlets’. This

statement, accompanied by an extensive bibliography, is then clearly elaborated. Harline's work, now 25 years old, does not make it clear how the pamphlet can function as a 'political actor' in either political discourse or political action. Therefore the writers of the introduction test hypotheses, discard theories, sketch frameworks and search for a new research strategy. An approach based exclusively on content offers little insight into the pamphlet as a medium of action, that is to say, in interaction with other media and public reception. Pamphlets are part of an interactive communication cycle. As a result Habermas' hypothesis is found to be unusable for the Republic since it assumes the control of information and communication by the state, while in the early Republic pamphlets would have been the means to influence ideology and identity. An (anonymous) public formed public opinion and in turn, was the target of authors and publishers who, using market strategies, attempted to increase their sales and to shape opinions. The method that the writers of the introduction propose to determine the political functioning of the pamphlet is analysis in a double context – studying the sources on technical grounds, the origin, content and reception of a pamphlet, together with other sources, printed and written, such as resolutions, petitions, handwritten news reports, correspondence and diaries. The infrastructural context, government, public, printing industry and distribution determined the boundaries within which the pamphlet could function. The writers of the introduction have little hope of getting a grip on the public as long as this remains largely unknown and it is not clear how readers interpreted a text. They assume that their method can avoid this problem.

Eight articles follow this stimulating introduction. Harms, De Bruin and Reinders examine the functioning of a pamphlet in its political and commercial context. Stern, Onnekink and Stapelbroek focus on the influence of content of one or more pamphlets by comparison with other content-related pamphlets. Deen and Stensland demonstrate that pamphlets functioned in interaction with other media. The authors do not have the space to follow fully the research method advocated in the introduction, but do manage to go a long way in that direction. Mostly one or more links are missing in establishing the pamphlet as 'political actor'. A few examples will suffice. In his contribution on pamphlets, public opinion and government influence De Bruin comes to the conclusion, remarkable for this collection, that in the time of 'True Freedom' between 1653 and 1672, the political influence of the pamphlet was scant. Regents acknowledged the influence of public opinion and applied informal pressure to keep undesirable printed matter out of circulation. But whether public opinion could be expressed by other media is left out of the discussion. At that time support for the House of Orange was also expressed in visual material and public acclamation of the members of the House of Orange. Onnekink discusses a pamphlet regarded as one of the most influential in the late seventeenth century – the *Declaration of Reasons* brought out by William III in 1688 in order to sway international and English opinion. Comparison with several drafts, until now unknown, makes it possible to examine the ideological message more closely. In this contribution the public is not considered, but the similarity between the private expressions of the

writer and the message of the *Declaration* suggests that propaganda – of which this pamphlet is so often accused – is not the most accurate term: the pamphlet had a broad basis. Deen delivers a convincing argument in which she demonstrates that in 1574 William of Orange tried to win the city of Amsterdam to his side by a combination of printed pamphlets and handwritten letters signed by the prince. The printed matter was suitable for wide distribution, the handwritten letter for the personal approach. Although Deen has done such a good job of charting how the various strategies reinforced each other, the reason that the desired result was not achieved is not mentioned. In his elegantly written commentary on the articles in this collection Harline points to the remaining ‘mysteries’ in regard to the pamphlet genre, ‘especially, how great their impact was’. The methodological recommendations of this collection take research a great step forward, but it remains difficult to get a grip on the heart of the matter.

Two of the authors have now brought out commercial editions of their PhD theses and it is better to discuss their books than their contributions to the collection. Harms examined how pamphlets were influenced by the interaction between politicians, authors and booksellers during four periods of crisis in the Republic (1615-1619; 1650; 1672; 1690) and how this influence changed during the course of the seventeenth century. Each of these crises is analysed with the help of the same questions in each case – the output of pamphlets and booksellers involved, the influence of politics (such as that of stadtholder or city council) and the interaction between the pamphlets, each time preceded by a sketch of the political crisis itself. It is a study of the form and content of pamphlets with the emphasis on the analysis of their rhetorical dimension. The reader who is familiar with what happened in these times of crisis will learn a great deal. The author shows that each crisis had its own dynamics of pamphlet production. Authorities, authors and booksellers adapted to the political situation of the moment and manipulated the pamphlet to fit, according to Harms, in order to increase sales and to influence public opinion. They employed such techniques as slander campaigns, false information and a high degree of amusement content. According to Harms, during each crisis the pamphlets became more and more targeted on the public and in the course of the century the manipulation of the media increased. He states that in this way the pamphlet also reached the ‘general public’ who thereby took part in the political discussion. That is questionable. It is clear that those in authority sought publicity. It is equally clear that publishers saw the pamphlet as a commercial product. Authors wielded creative pens (one or two wrote for different parties at the same time). But how did the public react to this media strategy? Did they read a pamphlet as a media event and soap, or were they stimulated to develop political opinions? The concept ‘public opinion’ in the title of the book is only partially justified. Harms demonstrates that politicians, authors and publishers, each with their own motivation, wanted to reach the general public, but whether they shaped public opinion is not yet clear. The research question is answered in exemplary fashion and the book is extremely well written.

In Reinders' research, however, the *impact* of the pamphlet is central. He is the first person who has dared to study the entire flood of pamphlets brought out in 1672 (1600 titles). This daring is also seen in his style, the book is written with passion. The author is not shy of exaggerating, but does go to work systematically. The insurgencies of 1672 have been previously interpreted as a battle between the parties of the republicans and the supporters of the House of Orange (Fruin) and as fights between factions of the city regents (Roorda). In this last view the governing aristocracy retained a dominant position despite the dismissal of various regents and William III becoming stadtholder. Roorda stated (rather than showed) that to a great extent the civil disturbances were orchestrated by regents wanting their own career improvement. Later historians (Knevel, Prak, Van Nierop et al.) have further investigated the republican and the civil disturbances during the Republic and have given the citizen a more prominent role. Reinders builds on this: for him key words are citizens, pamphlets, debate and public opinion. Citizens chiefly wanted city and state to be 'well-governed' and their opinions respected. Pamphlets were their means of communication amongst themselves and with the government. In 1672 they debated the criteria of 'good government' (this year of disaster demonstrated the opposite), the function requirements of regents, the question of what to do with incompetent regents and how to bring about a new situation of trust between government and citizens. The writers of pamphlets reacted to each other's opinions, including those outside their town, and this was facilitated by the 1672 innovation of the printed petition. This left its mark on politics, the murder of Johan and Cornelis de Witt being an important, but not the only example.

The value of this book is that it charts the circulation of news and the shaping of public opinion. Naturally the question arises as to whether the writers and readers of the hundreds of pamphlets issued in 1672 were concerned about politics and the general debate, or – so as emerges in Harms' book – they were more interested in sensation and malicious enjoyment. Even so, aside from this, and that is what Reinders added to the debate, public opinion can make things happen and can break people. Both citizens and regents were aware of this and valued public opinion. After Fruin and Roorda, Reinders presents here a new vision of the civil actions of 1672. However, as Fruin and Roorda forced the civil protest into a particular framework, Reinders' book also suffers from reductionism, which seems difficult to avoid when dealing with 1672. He sees the citizenry as a homogeneous and autonomous power. Citizens had no new political ideas, but embodied a new political culture. They had their own interests and mouthpieces. The citizen is the model for what Reinders calls 'the ordinary Dutchman'. Reinders is not at ease dealing with pamphlet writers who did not oppose those in authority. He calls them 'town hall' or Orange propagandists; but why should citizens not have an interest in loyalty to the local government body (many were dependent on its offices) or supporting the House of Orange as a necessary correction to government seen as arbitrary? The author rightly distances himself from the image of citizens as the puppets of regents or Orange supporters, but pays little attention to the connection between social groups in

the urban community and the attraction of the House of Orange, particularly in times of crisis. In the final instance the strength of this book is in demonstrating the functioning of the pamphlet culture rather than in social-political history. It is to be hoped that in future studies the author will further investigate his claim that with the civil actions of 1672 the political culture of the Republic changed fundamentally.

These three publications give considerably more insight into the public discussion in the time of the Republic. Therefore, borrowing from the introduction to the collection edited by Deen, Onnekink and Reinders, I would like to formulate two research requests. First, I would like to see a broader idea of the concept of media than is given in these books – images and objects, for example, also functioned as ‘political actors’ as much as pamphlets did, and there is every reason to include them in research. Second, it is to be hoped that researchers will find creative solutions for research into public in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about which, as all the authors admit with regret, so little is known. A final comment: in all these publications a reasoned distance is taken from Habermas’ analytical framework. The authors certainly showed the space given to the pamphlet culture, but they exposed the boundaries as well: pressure from government, media manipulation and market strategy were so great that the shaping of political opinion could just as well have been restrained as encouraged.

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