

## From Schoolbook to Children's Literature. The Evolution of a Dutch Book Market for Youngsters in the Long Eighteenth Century

*Joke Spaans*

The most colourful and inviting section of any general bookshop is undoubtedly the corner with the children's books. Today those come in all shapes and sizes, in a variety of genres, and categorised for children of different ages. Subsidies keep prices low, to make children's books accessible to all, as reading skills are essential for successful participation in society. But while the educational value of these books is acknowledged, their primary aim is fun. They should first of all be entertaining, with pictures that please the eye and stories that spark the imagination. Tongue in cheek books for the youngest, and more overtly those for older children and young adults, usually also address 'life questions', from friendship to war trauma, presented at the level of understanding of the young readers.

Historians of literature generally place the birth of children's literature in the second half of the eighteenth century. There are good reasons for this. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period reading material specifically produced for children was primarily educational, and aimed at training basic skills: in reading, writing and elementary religious knowledge, and for more advanced pupils in arithmetic, national history, basic geography and the classics. For entertainment young readers resorted to material that was also meant for adult readers, sometimes in simplified form. Enlightened pedagogy prescribed a stricter separation of age groups, for the protection of the young against information that was considered beyond their intellectual and emotional horizons and potentially harmful for tender minds. It advocated playful teaching methods. It encouraged parents to give children books to read that were meant to entertain them as well as help them develop their character and tastes, and to let them experiment with arts and crafts, not only indoors but emphatically also in hands-on gardening, with the care of animals, and by means of excursions to farms and workplaces. Parents should explain the world to their children in walks in the countryside and around the family hearth. Young readers were presented with stories of children enjoying such

an upbringing and with whom they could identify.<sup>1</sup> An expansive print industry happily catered to this market, with books and journals aimed at children that bore the stamp of the new pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most significant feature of these books is a certain religious indifference. They are rarely 'secular' – the Supreme Being is never far away – but they emphatically prepare children for life in this world, not the next. Enlightened books assume that the child is inherently good. It needs moral guidance and occasional correction to remain good, but the churches, the Bible and religious doctrine are relegated to the margins of the narrative, and often beyond.

In the Dutch Republic, Hieronymus van Alphen's *Proeve van Kleine Gedigten voor Kinderen* (Selected Simple Poems for Children, 1778–1782) is considered a milestone in the development of modern children's literature. It contains short poems, in crisp and simple language. Pleasant pictures illustrate each poem. They show children in their own habitat, in a house or a garden with a toy or a pet, engaged in typically childish occupations. The children are often shown in the company of a loving parent, a teacher, or another child. The poems address concerns such as sibling rivalry, playing and learning, being praised or corrected, the birth of a new child or a death in the family. Morality and religion are omnipresent, but without confessional overtones. The poems are meant to please, as well as to inculcate virtues such as industry, fairness, compassion and gratitude. Van Alphen was a learned advocate who held prominent public offices, and he overtly imitated recent German literary and pedagogical trends.<sup>3</sup> Hardly less iconic is the four-volume *Katechismus der Natuur* (Catechism of Nature, 1777–1779) by the philosopher-minister Johannes Florentius Martinet, aimed at older children and adults. It offered informative dialogues between a teacher and his pupils and was nicely illustrated. A cheap excerpt for younger

1 Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, *Kind van de toekomst. De wonderse wereld van Otto van Eck (1780–1798)* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2005).

2 For the Dutch production, see P.J. Buijnsters, 'Nederlandse kinderboeken uit de achttiende eeuw', in Nettie Heimeriks and Willem van Toorn (eds.), *De hele Bibelebontse berg. De geschiedenis van het kinderboek in Nederland en Vlaanderen van de Middeleeuwen tot heden* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1990), pp. 169–228; Inger Leemans and Gert-Jan Johannes, *Worm en donder. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1700–1800: de Republiek* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013), pp. 501–518; Rita Ghesquière, Vanessa Joosten and Helma van Lierop-Debrauwer (eds.), *Een land van waan en wijs. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse jeugdliteratuur* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2014); Feike Dietz, *Lettering Young Readers in the Dutch Enlightenment. Literacy, Agency and Progress in Eighteenth-Century Children's Books* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

3 Hieronymus van Alphen, *Kleine gedigten voor kinderen*, ed. by P.J. Buijnsters (Amsterdam: Athenaeum/Polak and Van Genneep, 1998).

children appeared in 1779. In both forms it is an introduction to the natural sciences as well as a 'catechism' of natural theology, in the spirit of the new pedagogy.<sup>4</sup>

Historians of literature base their claims about the birth of *the children's book* in the later eighteenth century on the observation that this period produced a number of books overtly based on the ideas of prominent authors on pedagogy, such as Locke, Rousseau and 'the German philanthropists', adepts of the German educational reformer Johann Bernhard Basedow. Yet from the viewpoint of book history or cultural history the caesura is less obvious, and recent studies on children's books emphasise the continued influence of older genres in a continuous process of innovation whereby children's literature adapted itself over time to changing ideals about childhood, upbringing and education. For the Netherlands, P.J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smet have demonstrated this in their hefty bibliography of eighteenth-century Dutch children's books. They cover a wide spectrum of genres, from ABC-books and catechisms to fiction and poetry, while acknowledging that they often overlap. Van Alphen's *Kleine Gedigten* and Martinet's *Katechismus* are mentioned with distinction, but at the same time it is clear that the period before their appearance was by no means a no-man's land with regard to reading material for children, and that these works did not appear out of the blue.<sup>5</sup> From the Middle Ages to the end of the *ancien régime*, books aimed at children followed the classical adage *utile dulci*: offering useful and edifying instruction wrapped in simple and entertaining formats. The latter included the use of dialogue, of rhymed couplets set to popular tunes, and of pictures. Many of these books, moreover, went through several reprints, suggesting continuity rather than incisive change.

This revisionism is noticeable also in recent studies on children's literature in other European countries. The enlightened eighteenth century did produce new genres of children's literature, especially in the form of secular moral tales and guides to the natural sciences adapted for young readers. These were first of all geared to shifts in social stratification, to innovations in the printing industry and the book trade, and to new notions of citizenship, and moreover often mirrored fashions in adult reading. The ideas of enlightened pedagogues were grafted upon these changes. The innovations of enlightened pedagogy built upon pre-existing models. Locke's *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693) may well reflect the educational culture he encountered in

4 Leemans en Johannes, *Worm en donder*, pp. 454–455.

5 P.J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smet, *Bibliografie van Nederlandse school- en kinderboeken 1700–1800* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).

the heavily urbanised Dutch Republic with its dense network of public schools and child-friendly culture of childrearing, while the German philanthropic movement of the 1770s repeats many of the insights developed by August Hermann Francke in his great Orphanage in Halle (1698).<sup>6</sup> Enlightened theorists designed methods to prepare a new generation for a changing world. Elite authors with more general reformist agendas pounced upon these methods, which they set out to apply first of all to the offspring of their own social milieu: the books based on the ideas of the enlightened pedagogues were often expensive and reflected the lifestyles and ideals of the well to do.<sup>7</sup> The 'secular' children's books of the 1770s and 1780s – so appealing to a modern audience – lost much of their popularity in the restorations after the revolutionary upheavals of the final decades of the century.<sup>8</sup>

How, then, should we evaluate the emergence of the new children's literature based on enlightenment pedagogy in the Dutch Republic? How far did its influence reach? Rather than to look for a sharp break, between 'before' and 'after Van Alphen', in this article I will try to trace incremental changes, by presenting a comparative analysis of two cases. The first is a schoolbook, written in Leiden in 1740, and reprinted several times, still valued, albeit in a substantially reworked form, as a children's book in the early nineteenth century. The second case involves an almanac that appeared in Amsterdam from 1765 to 1794, and that, over the years, developed from a biblical calendar into a moral guide for children and youngsters. The choice for these two cases is serendipitous. I happened to stumble upon them, the first when perusing the minutes of the classis of Leiden with totally different questions in mind,

6 Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, 1650, *Bevochten eendracht: Nederlandse cultuur in Europese context* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1999), pp. 237–247; Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), pp. 481–486; Juliane Jacobi, 'Pädagogische Avantgarde um 1700. Franckes Schulgrundungen im Kontext ihrer Zeit', in Holger Zaunstock, Thomas Müller-Bahlke and Claus Veltmann (eds.), *Die Welt verändern. August Hermann Francke. Ein Lebenswerk um 1700* (Halle: Verlag der Franckesche Stiftungen, 2013), pp. 215–223; Joke Spaans, 'Early Modern Orphanages between Civic Pride and Social Discipline: Francke's Use of Dutch Models', in Udo Sträter and Josef N. Neumann (eds.), *Waisenhäuser in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2003), pp. 183–196.

7 W.W. Mijnhardt, 'De Nederlandse Verlichting nagerekend. De verkoopcijfers van het oeuvre van Willem Emmerij de Perponcher', in E. Jonker and M. van Rossem (eds.), *Geschiedenis en Cultuur. Achttien opstellen* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1990), pp. 171–185.

8 Reiner Wild (ed.), *Geschichte der deutschen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (2nd ed., Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002), pp. 45–98; Andrew O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child. Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003); Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature* (2 vols., New York: Routledge, 2008–2009), vol. 1, 1600–1800.

the second when browsing through the books on the always inspiring stall of the antiquarian bookshop Klikspaan on the Saturday market in Leiden. They are the kind of cheaply produced books that were used until they fell apart, and whose value for cultural history has been so eloquently argued by Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen.<sup>9</sup> And because these specific texts were used and adapted over a long period of time, bridging the alleged break wrought by enlightened pedagogy in the 1770s, they offer interesting possibilities for studying incremental change. Both can be considered as serial sources for the development of children's literature. Moreover, as these publications were both aimed at a wide, popular market, following their approach to their readers over time might offer clues for solving the question how deeply the new pedagogy impacted the market for children's books.

### *Christelijk Kinderschool, 1740–1825*

In 1740, Philippus Vaa (1707–after 1751), schoolmaster and teacher of the catechism in Leiden, published the *Christelijk Kinderschool* (Christian School for Children). It was approved and warmly commended by the classis of Leiden. It allegedly saw five editions in the eighteenth century, and appears to have met with acclaim nationwide. Only one copy has been preserved, in the library of the Free University of Amsterdam.<sup>10</sup> Vaa was one of several Leiden schoolmasters and catechists who published books. They were either self-taught men or had learned their trade by assisting established schoolmasters – Leiden boasted a schoolmasters' guild that may have offered training for aspiring candidates. They often came from the milieu of skilled artisans. Their teaching did not make them rich, but to all appearances it did offer them a comfortable income as well as social standing within the community. At the time of his first marriage Philippus Vaa was registered as a *greinwerker*, a specialised producer of soft woollen cloth, either made of camels' hair or of sheep's wool mixed with silk. When he remarried five years later, he is described as a schoolmaster. In his two marriages he had twelve children, many of whom died in infancy. His son Paulus Vaa (1738–?) established himself as a public catechist and singing

9 Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 15 and passim.

10 Philippus Vaa, *Christelyk Kinder-School en Huys-Oeffeninge* (3rd ed., Leiden: Henderik van der Deyster, s.d.).

master in 1758, and married into the family of a fellow schoolmaster-catechist.<sup>11</sup> Such career paths were not unusual in the teaching profession.

Vaa's *Christelijk Kinderschool* is a typical cheap little schoolbook, 135 pages in octavo in a simple paper binding. It is a book of manners, and apparently a rather modern one for its time. It teaches civic and Christian virtues, in a way that still appealed to reformers of education over eighty years later. It is also modern in that each of its short lessons addresses the pupils directly, in varying terms such as 'dear pupils', 'attentive children', 'studious youngsters', etc. It even looks modern, using a Roman typeface rather than the black letter or the *civilitéé*, the latter outmoded given that handwriting had changed from a Gothic to a more cursive script. The lessons aim at demonstrating how children should behave decently and honestly in school, towards their parents, other pupils, their master, and to those less fortunate than themselves, such as the indigent and the handicapped, and how that will serve their own interests both in this life and in the hereafter. His examples are obviously taken from lived experience, both his own and that of his pupils and readers. He devoted a distinct group of lessons to correct behaviour on special days: the Christian liturgical feast days as well as the annual fair and the third of October, the annual commemoration of the relief of the siege of Leiden by the Spanish in 1574. Vaa used Bible texts as a starting point or reinforcement for his teaching, yet his book is not a catechism. The focus is on the manners of the young – Vaa taught the catechism on Saturdays and manners on Fridays.

In the preface he positions his text within the range of books available for elementary schools. He provides a short list, which suggests that in the eighteenth century such schools still taught their pupils an overwhelmingly biblical orientation on the world. He mentions eight titles. The *School-boek behelsende de Namen der Geslagten, van Adam af op Christum toe* (Schoolbook containing the biblical genealogies from Adam to Christ, 1684) by Pieter Bakker, organist and schoolmaster in Medemblik (Noord-Holland), contains extensive lists of biblical names, of persons and places, both from the Old and the New Testament, and from the history of the church. They could be used in spelling and reading exercises, but also as the starting point for lessons in worldly and sacred history. The *Gemeene Zend-Brieven* was a book of models for composing several types of letters, published in 1696 by Berend Hakvoord, precentor and bookseller in Zwolle. *De Proverbia, ofte Spreuken des alderwijsten koninks Salomons* (The proverbs or sayings of the most wise king Solomon, 1722) taught the children reading skills, along with the wisdom of the biblical

11 Genealogical data has been gathered from the site of Erfgoed Leiden <https://www.erfgoedleiden.nl> > collecties > personen.

proverbs. The *Klein Woordenboek* (Little Dictionary, ca. 1714) was an attempt to set a new standard for the spelling of Dutch, enlivened with edifying verse, by the Leiden schoolmaster Martinus Heugelenburg. The list is completed by two seventeenth-century chapbooks with the histories of biblical figures, the Gospels, and the *Heidelbergse Catechismus*. All of these were small, cheap books, endlessly reprinted as schoolbooks.<sup>12</sup>

For his method, Vaa acknowledges the example of one of his own former schoolteachers, who used to dictate model letters as an exercise in developing good handwriting as well as in the art of letter writing. Vaa copied dictation as a didactic form, now for his lessons in manners, implying a form of class instruction that would become the norm after 1800, rather than the traditional individual coaching of pupils who came to the master's desk each in their turn, to be tested, corrected and given their next task. Experience had taught him that, although his school was successful, disciplining his pupils was the hardest part of being a schoolmaster. None of the available schoolbooks proved very useful. Although at one point he quotes Erasmus, where he discusses a sea creature that changes its colours as an example in his discussion of insincerity, Vaa ignored his *De civilitate morum puerilium*. This book was much used in the Latin schools and was still in print in Dutch translation. He probably considered it unfit for his own pupils, who were artisan's children rather than the genteel boys addressed by the great humanist. Instead he designed his own method, aimed at older schoolchildren who already knew their prayers, their catechism, and the biblical and national histories. His book offers a selection of his most effective lessons.

In the nineteenth century, the *Christelijk Kinderschool* was noted with distinction in a history of elementary education in the Netherlands, as a book that, despite its age, still fit the format of the new national education system. Upon this recommendation, it was substantially reworked and modernised by Anna Barbara van Meerten-Schilperoort (1778–1853). She was the daughter of a well-to do family who married a minister, also from a good family and steeped in the social engagement of the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (Society for the Common Good, founded 1784) and of the new national regime. She embraced and emulated her husband's fervour and acquired national fame as a reformer of female education and as the principal of a well-reputed boarding school for girls. Apart from that she engaged in a variety of philanthropic activities and was also a very prolific author, especially of books and journals for

12 Vaa's book predates by a decade the first books of manners mentioned in Buijnsters and Buijnsters-Smet, *Bibliografie*. The *Christelijk Kinderschool* is absent from this survey, but it does describe the other schoolbooks mentioned here.

children and young adults, which combine the educational with the moralistic and the entertaining. Her work is deeply stamped by the liberal Protestantism of the enlightenment as well as by the new ideals of citizenship.<sup>13</sup> Her adaptation of Vaa's book, now renamed *Christelijke Zedekunde* (Christian Ethics) reappeared in 1825.<sup>14</sup> In the preface she unabashedly presents it as a worthy addition to a child's bookshelf, to be placed besides other enlightened children's books such as 'the pretty verses of the child-loving Van Alphen', the *Robinson Crusoe* and *Keetje en Frits*, a story for young children that she had translated from an English original shortly before. She thus presents it first of all as children's literature, but suggests that it could also be used as a schoolbook. She closely follows Vaa's format. So how do the original and the adapted version differ?

The introduction contains an important clue. In veiled language Van Meerten laments the fact that recently people have become reluctant to talk to children about religion. She probably refers both to the school regulations proclaimed by the authorities of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands in the first years of the nineteenth century that limited religious education at the public schools to a general moral instruction, and to the late eighteenth-century enlightened children's books. She announces that her book is 'a little different'. And the difference is exactly in the religious sphere: she adopts the biblical basis of Vaa's book, and yet she transforms it. Whereas Vaa assumes his young readers are familiar with the tenets of the Reformed faith and participate in the public religion, Van Meerten criticises how in the past children were confronted with religious knowledge and rituals they could not yet understand. She therefore starts from scratch, and also addresses a younger audience. Instead of grafting her lessons onto a Reformed knowledge base gained from catechesis, she presents the Bible as a storybook, rich in examples, and moreover written by God himself, and therefore of the utmost usefulness as a moral guide towards happiness in the here and the hereafter. Van Meerten is part of a wider nineteenth-century trend, aimed at the improvement of the masses

13 A.J. Berkhout, *Proeve eener beknopte geschiedenis van het lager onderwijs in ons vaderland* (2nd ed., Amsterdam: Schalekamp, Van de Grampel and Bakker, s.d.), p. 110; Jean-Philippe van der Zwaluw, *De kroon van Gouda. Veelzijdig voorloopster van de vrouwenbeweging: Anna Barbara van Meeerten-Schilperoort* (Gouda: Elixir, 2016); P.J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smet, *Lust en Leering. Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse kinderboek in de negentiende eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001), pp. 40–43.

14 A.B. van Meerten-Schilperoort, *Christelijke Zedekunde, of Godsdienstig Handboekje voor Kinderen, afgeleid uit den Bijbel, zijnde een vernieuwde uitgave van Ph. Vaa, Christelijk Kinderschool en Huisoefeningen* (2nd ed., Leiden: D. du Mortier en zoon, 1833).



and of popular culture through evangelisation that also affected the market for children's books.<sup>15</sup>

Like Vaa, she starts by comparing children to a garden, lovingly tended, but also open to bad seeds of corruption, sown by naughty classmates and the frivolities and lewdness of uncultivated adults. But whereas Vaa takes the metaphor from a series of biblical proof texts, Van Meerten retells the parable of the sower, following the new Bible translation for children by the Leiden professor of theology J.H. van der Palm (1763–1840).<sup>16</sup> Where the body of Vaa's book consists of moral lessons on a variety of subjects such as virtues, vices and the shortness of life, and discusses the required behaviour on special days in an appendix at the end, Van Meerten focuses first on the Christian feast days, on the meaning of church services and prayer. She acknowledges that much in religion may seem incomprehensible. Therefore religious life should be explained also to the very young to contribute to their socialisation as decent Christian citizens.

Another innovation is Van Meerten's inclusion, at the end of each lesson, of a poem, often by enlightened authors of children's poetry, such as Van Alphen and the nowadays lesser known Pieter 't Hoen, Matheus van Heyningen Bosch and Francijntje de Boer.<sup>17</sup> She also uses multiple couplets of the equally enlightened *Evangelische Gezangen* (hymnbook for the Reformed churches), introduced in 1806 against the resistance of more orthodox ministers and their congregations.<sup>18</sup> Instead of enlightened poetry, Vaa offered prayers for the beginning and the end of the school day at the end of his book. Vaa spiked his moral lessons with references to the need for redemption, conversion and sanctification according to the then dominant federal theology. In this vein, his lesson on the celebration of Easter compared Christ's death and time in the grave with the spiritual death of the sinner, and the resurrection with his conversion and regeneration. Van Meerten puts far less emphasis on sin, and more on the happiness that God has in store for his children.

15 Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden, 'Leentjebuurtje, leescultuur en protestantse kinderliteratuur. Opkomst en eerste ontwikkelingen van een nieuw genre in Nederland in internationale context', in Jacques Dane and George Harinck (eds.), *'Bouwsel voor 't leven'. De traditie van de protestantse kinderliteratuur* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003), pp. 13–30; Ghesquière, Joosten and Van Lierop-Debrauwer, *Een land van waan en wijs*, pp. 56–60.

16 Willem van der Meiden, *'Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig'. Geschiedenis van de kinderbijbel in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), pp. 95–100.

17 Buijnsters and Buijnsters-Smet, *Lust en Leering*, pp. 28–29, 43.

18 Roel Bosch, 'Evangelische gezangen', in George Harinck, Herman Paul and Bart Wallet (eds.), *Het gereformeerde geheugen. Protestantse herinneringsculturen in Nederland, 1850–2000* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009), pp. 550–560.

Besides religion, the societal changes wrought by the Batavian Revolution make themselves felt. Vaa localised his lessons in Leiden and its environment. Van Meerten propagates a modern, national patriotism, substituting Vaa's lesson on proper behaviour on the general days of prayer held under the Republic with one discussing the annual commemoration of 18 June, the Battle of Waterloo against Napoleon, that safeguarded the independence of the young Kingdom of the Netherlands. Vaa's lesson on the third of October she replaced with one on how to celebrate properly the king's birthday, and which contains a paean to the virtues of the royal family. Unlike Vaa, in her treatment of children's virtues and vices Van Meerten emphatically addresses her lessons to boys and girls. She included a remarkable lesson on the virtue of purity. After discussing purity in the sense of cleanliness, she makes covert allusions to another meaning of the word, which she hopes her younger readers will not know. Those who do she admonishes never to discuss these matters with other children, but only with the parent or guardian of their own sex. They should feel free to ask them whatever they felt they needed to know. Van Meerten was a lifelong advocate of all-round education for women, including sexuality.

Both books were modern for their time. The rapid changes in the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century spurred continuous innovation, while the aim of this type of book remained the same. Both aspired to prepare schoolchildren, neither from the social elite nor from the mass of day labourers, for a decent, Christian civic life. While Vaa's pupils could expect to live under the cultural regimes of the Dutch Republic, Van Meerten localised her readers in the new Kingdom of the Netherlands. The changed relations between church and state and the replacement of the old Republic, with its local cultures, by a unified nation have left unmistakable traces in the transformation of Vaa's schoolbook into Van Meerten's children's book. Yet in her rearrangement of Vaa's subject matter the original can still be easily recognised. The influence of the enlightened pedagogies of the 1770s is, however, much harder to trace. Van Meerten adopts both the traditional work of Vaa and the innovative poetry of Van Alphen and other enlightened poets, but adapts both to the new realities of the early nineteenth century.

### *Bybelsche Almanach, 1765–1794*

In 1765, a newly established publisher-bookseller presented a new type of almanac, in a highly competitive market. The almanac was an item that many people bought as a matter of course each year. Such publications offered publishers a big market. All almanacs contained a number of fixed rubrics

connected to the calendar, such as basic information on the timing of sunrise and sunset, the phases of the moon, eclipses and conjunctions, high and low tides, the best times for planting and sowing as well as the dates of the most important annual fairs, the time schedules of tow barges and stage coaches, the hours at which cities opened and closed their gates, vacations of important institutions, conversion tables for the values of various coinages and the tariffs on stamps. Publishers competed with additional material with which they distinguished their products from those of others, such as prognostications, historical chronicles, entertaining stories and jokes. Interleaved with blank pages, the almanac served also as a diary. Booksellers in the main towns offered almanacs from various publishers, while pedlars carried a selection of almanacs into rural areas.<sup>19</sup> Publishers could thus aim at a wide market, and consumers had something to choose. Some almanacs were notorious for the ribaldry of their fun-section, or for prognostications and cosmological theories that undermined biblical authority and attracted the opprobrium of classes and synods.<sup>20</sup>

Not so the new *Nuttige Huis- en Bybelsche Almanach* (Useful house- and Bible almanac), published by Pieter Jan Entrop, which was aimed directly at Bible-lovers, and more specifically at their children.<sup>21</sup> Entrop (1720–1772) came to Amsterdam from Emmerich, just across the border with the German Empire. In Amsterdam he became a member of the Dutch Reformed church, married Agatha van Berchem, a local woman, and fathered three daughters. He built a successful publishing house, with a bookshop on the corner of the prestigious Herengracht and the Koningsplein. He is known as a minor poet.<sup>22</sup> Over time he published pieces of occasional poetry for family and friends and on the bicentennial of the Heidelberg Catechism. In 1761 he published, and

19 Jeroen Salman, *Populair drukwerk in de Gouden Eeuw. De Almanak als lectuur en handelswaar* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1999).

20 Besides lewdness and immorality, Reformed ministers complained especially about Catholic elements (the inclusion of saints' days in the calendar), and about the claims of the mathematician Luchtenburg for the influence of the celestial bodies on human affairs, contrary to Scripture. See Salman, *Populair drukwerk*, pp. 135–164; G. van Klaveren Pz., 'Over almanakken en perscensuur in de 17e eeuw', *De Tampon*, 20 (1939), pp. 67–79; Minutes of the consistory, Stadsarchief Rotterdam, Archief Nederlandse Hervormde kerk, inv. nr. 8, 19 July, 2 and 16 August and 1 November 1702; 25 July 1703; 18 and 25 November 1705; 25 January 1708. For an example: A. van Lugtenburg, *Den alleen oprechten werelds almanach op't wonder iaer 1703* (S.l.: for the author, [1703]).

21 Jeroen Salman, "Die ze niet hebben wil mag het laaten". Kinderalmanakken in de achttiende eeuw', *Literatuur*, 17 (2000), pp. 76–83.

22 A.J. van der Aa, 'Entrop (Pieter Jan)', *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden*, 5 (1859), p. 172.

probably also authored, *De School der Deugd* (The School of Virtue) a book of manners for the young. It appeared with ecclesiastical approbation. It was a more substantial book than Vaa's, with which it has otherwise much in common. It was probably not intended for use in schools, although Entrop proudly mentions in his stocklists that it was often given to schoolchildren as a prize. It may have ended up on children's shelves of prized possessions, as Van Meerten hoped for her reworking of Vaa's book. It contains prose lessons on a series of virtues, contrasted with the opposite vices, larded with frequent references to Bible texts and interspersed with pious poetry.<sup>23</sup> In 1762 he published, under his own name, a brief universal history of the Church and the Jewish People, staunchly anti-Catholic and richly illustrated, followed in 1763 by a geographical description of Gelderland, based on an existing work, but allegedly expanded and brought up to date by himself.<sup>24</sup> In his birth town Entrop apparently had been a member of the literary society *Jucunda et Idonea*. In Amsterdam, he published a volume of poetry, assembled by the members of this society, to celebrate the end of the Seven Years war in 1763, for which he himself also contributed several verses, and in which he included a detailed description of the decorations displayed on the main buildings and many burgher houses for the festivities in Emmerich.<sup>25</sup>

He was an ambitious publisher who ran a well-stocked, but not particularly specialised bookshop. Entrop sold his own publications not only in his own shop, but also 'in commission' with booksellers throughout the Republic, just as he sold theirs, ensuring an attractive stock-in-trade as well as a wider sales market. His stocklist contained mainly works in Dutch that reflected his interests in history, geography and Christian virtue, and quite a few vernacular works of theology, but he also published some of the then popular 'spectatorial' periodicals and advertised for a wide assortment of almanacs. He advertised his publications in 'national' newspapers, and the theological works also in the *Boekzaal der Geleerde Wereld* (Library of the Erudite World), a bimonthly journal with book reviews and news items of interest for ministers and a theologically interested audience.<sup>26</sup> In company with other publishers he undertook

23 Anonymous, *De School der Deugd* (Amsterdam: Pieter Jan Entrop, 1761, repr. 1773).

24 Pieter Jan Entrop, *De Kerkelyke en Joodsche geschiedenissen verkort niet alleen ten gebuik van de Jeugd in de aanzienlyke Schoolen, maar ook voor alle Minnaars die zig in de Kerkelyke Oudheeden tragten te oeffenen* (Amsterdam: Pieter Jan Entrop, 1762); *Geographische Beschryving van de Provintie van Gelderland* (Amsterdam: Pieter Jan Entrop, 1772).

25 *Het Juichende Emmerik, over den herstelden Vrede, gesloten te Hubertsburg in Saxen, den XV. van Sprokkelmaand MDCCLXIII* (Amsterdam: Pieter Jan Entrop, [1763]).

26 Hannie Goinga, *Alom te bekomen. Veranderingen in de boekdistributie in de Republiek, 1720-1800* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 1999), pp. 57, 108, 113.

to produce, in instalments from 1768, a Dutch translation of Christian Gottlieb Jöcher's *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (1750–1751). He also produced and sold printed portraits of famous men, paper table decorations and forms.

Entrop's *Nuttige Huis- en Bybelsche Almanach* contained the usual material for which people bought such booklets in the first place, but as a distinctive appendix he chose materials related to the Bible 'to educate young readers in biblical history and geography, and to edify them with many other useful, moral and also entertaining subjects'. This suggests adult buyers who purchased it for themselves with regard to the calendar section, and acquired with it useful and entertaining reading material for their children. Apparently this format met with enthusiastic response, as the almanac continued after Entrop's death, first under the direction of his widow, and from 1780 under that of Harmanus Keyzer (†1799). The last instalment appeared in 1794. The individual booklets in duodecimo format were neatly printed and illustrated and relatively expensive for an almanac. Depending on the binding – ordinary, French, 'tortoise-shell' mottled paper, or red Moroccan leather with gold stampings and gilt-edged pages – they cost between 12 and 30 *stuivers*. Only the University Library in Leiden has an almost complete set, most of them in the nice red leather bindings that probably ensured their survival.

The additional material in the appendix soon came to overshadow the regular almanac-section. In the years 1765 and 1766 it consisted of a calendar that offered the Bible-loving reader a method to read the entire Bible in the course of one year, six days a week – not only the Old and New Testaments, but also the Apocrypha. The calendar was accompanied with extensive explanations about the composition of the Bible, and the rationale behind the method. Moreover Entrop offered a list of the texts ordinarily read in the churches on Sundays and feast days. After two years, however, the texts for each weekday were simply registered in the general calendar, without further explanations, assuming that regular buyers would have kept the extended version for reference. Franciscus Ridderus (†1684), a Reformed minister in Rotterdam, had published a similar reading method in the previous century, combined with a thorough textbook on the catechism and Christian morality, in a hefty quarto book.<sup>27</sup> Entrop offered his version in the cheap format of the almanac.

Besides a Bible calendar, the almanac contained a print Bible: in each yearly instalment twelve pretty, consecutive, and anonymous copper engravings accompanied by a rhymed text. This print Bible would prove the backbone of the almanac throughout the 29 years of its existence. Whoever persevered

27 Franciscus Ridderus, *Dagelijcksche Huys-catechisatie* (Rotterdam: Pieter van Waesberge, 1657).

to collect all the issues – and Entrop explicitly encouraged his readers to do so – would eventually find himself the proud owner of a print Bible with 348 images.<sup>28</sup> Such print Bibles were very popular. Despite the apprehension of the Dutch Reformed about religious imagery, Bible prints, inspired by Southern Netherlandish and German examples, had practically swamped the market in the seventeenth century. In the early years of the eighteenth century no fewer than four prestigious folio print Bibles had been published, their images and accompanying rhymed Bible histories created by the most famous artists and by prominent writers. Since then several similar works had appeared in smaller formats.<sup>29</sup> Again Entrop popularised an existing but rather pricey genre in a cheap format.

Entrop keenly experimented with items and rubrics that he expected would be appreciated by the buyers of his almanac. Initially he varied the contents of both the general almanac and the special biblical sections. In the first he included in 1768 a table of distances between the main Dutch cities and 155 towns and cities in the Republic and beyond its borders. In the following years he expanded it with a general description, first of the Republic, then of Europe, and eventually of the world (1769–1773). Buyers may have considered this material suitable for their children as well, as a cheap and simple alternative to the then popular massive chorographies and as a companion to the still popular travel literature. But the experimentation with new rubrics affected most of all the appendix, whereas the almanac part would become more and more limited to the essential calendar, timetables and schedules, especially under his successor Keyzer.

Besides the print Bible, Entrop planned the inclusion of a rhymed version of the Bible (1765–1777). Keyzer stopped this project once Genesis had been completed, as it would take far too long to work through the entire Bible, and was moreover considered dull by his readers. Throughout its existence the *Bybelsche Almanach* contained several biblical reference works, stretched out over several years in annual instalments. The longest-running one was a 'sacred geography'. In its last instalment, in 1792, the publisher declared that he had always considered such a rubric fitting for a biblical almanac, as it supported an historical reading of the Bible. This sounds a bit apologetic, and perhaps by that time it was. Over time it also came to feature lists of Dutch

28 The rights were later bought by the Groningen printer Jan Oomkens. Most of the prints would be reused in Hendrik Wester, *Bybelgeschiedenissen voor de Nederlandsche Jeugd* (1818–1821, repr. 1830–1831), now with prose explanations, Van der Meiden, 'Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig', p. 100.

29 Wilco C. Poortman, *Bijbel en prent* (2 vols., Den Haag: Boekencentrum, 1983–1986).

equivalents for Hebrew and Greek names in the Bible (1766, and again 1783–1794), an alphabetical list of famous men and women in the Bible (1767–1785), a chronicle of ‘world history’ (1765–1788), a Dutch church history (1781–1794), and a list of all the names considered to refer to Jesus throughout the Old and New Testaments (1786–1794). All this reflected scholarly interests in biblical antiquities and philology, which seeped into sermons and catechisms. Such material found its way into the hands of children in such dual-use books as the *School-boek* by Pieter Bakker (1684) that Philippus Vaa still used in his school in the 1740s. Although Entrop and his successors never indicated their sources, it is clear that they recycled existing material for the almanac, sampling, abbreviating, translating and adapting as they saw fit.

The *Bybelsche Almanach* is a very far cry from what we consider a typical children’s book. Yet the similarity with Bakker’s *School-boek* should probably warn us not to dismiss too quickly Entrop’s claim that it was aimed at youthful readers. The Republic had a lively culture of catechisation that went beyond the basics of the short versions of the Heidelberg Catechism and the simple question and answer books.<sup>30</sup> Remember how Philippus Vaa was quite confident that his pupils and readers were not only familiar with the teachings of the Bible, but even with the gist of Reformed doctrine. Entrop’s *Almanach* avoided doctrine, probably for the sake of custom within a wider Protestant spectrum, and made the Bible ‘fun’ by using illustration and rhyme. In this he prefigures Van Meerten. The poetry accompanying Entrop’s Bible prints first retells the events shown, and in the last lines contains a moral lesson, essentially the same format as we find in Van Alphen, who ended all his homely sketches on a moralistic note. In the early days of the almanac, Entrop included fold-out prints a few times, some of them hand-coloured as proudly announced on the title-page – making the almanac volumes a diminutive version of the coffee-table print Bibles and books on biblical antiquities for grown-ups, and he did everything in his power to present the almanac as a have-to-have collectible. The geographical and lexicographical material in the reference sections may have enlivened the catechism lessons and the spelling exercises using the complicated names from the Bible, with which children were confronted at school.

Over time, the *Bybelsche Almanach* gradually moved into the direction of the modern children’s book. In 1779, the last year the almanac appeared under

30 Jetze Touber, ‘The Culture of Catechesis and Lay Theology. Lay Engagement with the Bible in the Dutch Reformed Church, 1640–1710’, *Church History and Religious Culture*, 98 (2018), pp. 31–55; Joke Spaans, ‘Between the Catechism and the Microscope: the world of Johannes Duijkerius’, in Joke Spaans and Jetze Touber (eds.), *Enlightened Religion. From Confessional Churches to Polite Piety in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 316–345.

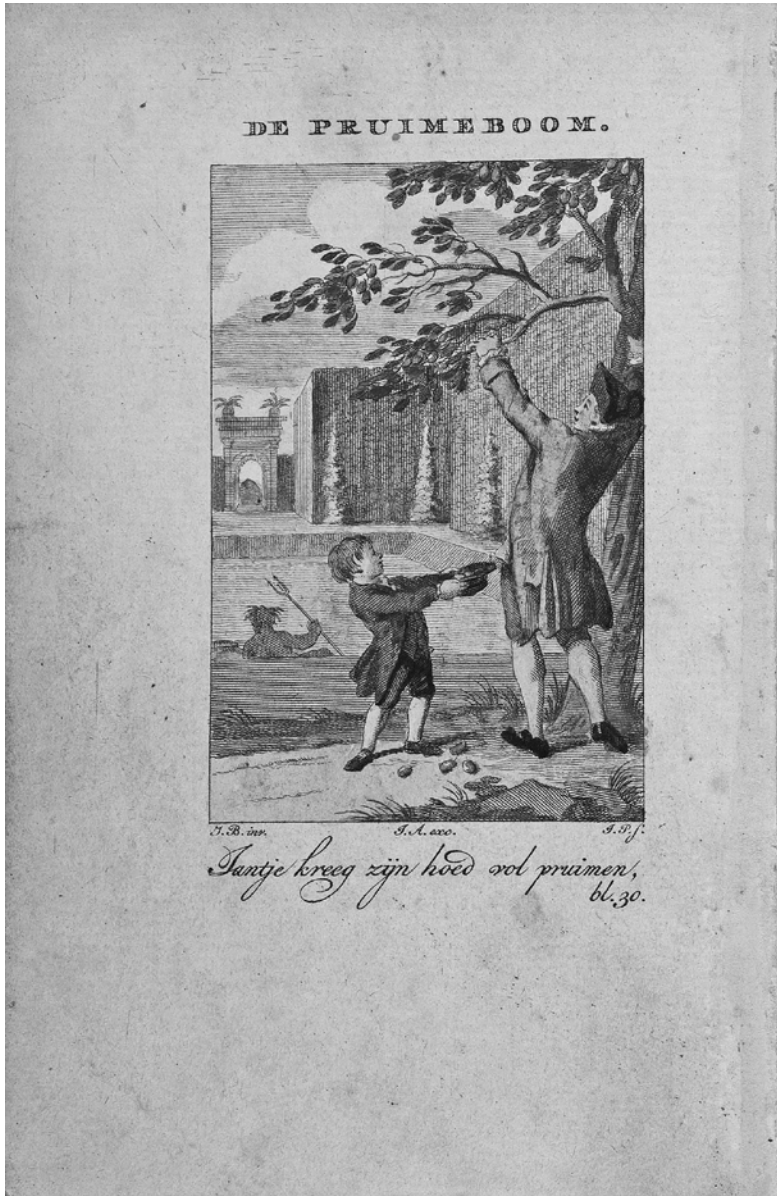


FIGURE 17.1 'De Pruimeboom' (The Plum Tree) in Van Alphen's *Kleine Gedigten*. The poem tells about the young boy Jantje who is lusting for the plums 'as big as eggs' from a tree in the family garden, but obeys his father's command to leave the tree alone. For this he is rewarded with a hatful of plums. The line 'Aan een boom zo vol geladen, mist men een twee pruimpjes niet' (From a tree so richly laden nobody will miss one or two little plums) has become a byword in Dutch.

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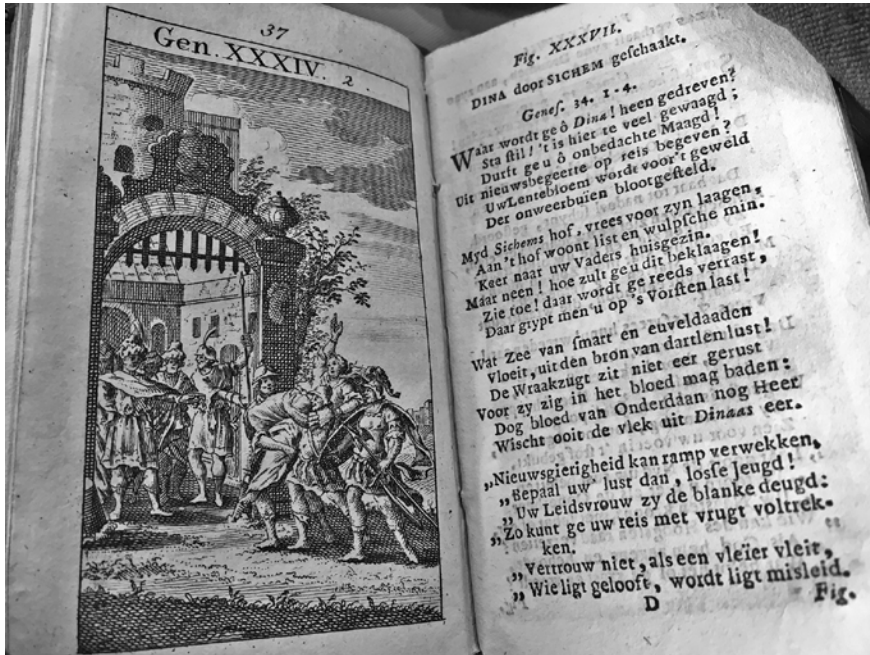


FIGURE 17.2 Compare figure 17.1 to the format of Entrop's Print Bible, also with lively images and rhymed text on opposing pages, and a clear moral message. The story of the rape of Jacob's daughter Dina (1769) is softened into an elopement, a topic that eighteenth-century children may have been familiar with, and the bloody revenge of her brothers is only hinted at. The moral warns girls not to be too easily taken in by sweet-tongued men.

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the name of Entrop's widow, a new rubric was started, in which biblical histories, from the creation of the world to the corruption of the human race after the Flood, were retold in paraphrase, as the later children's Bibles would do. Keyzer, however, cut this project short. Perhaps a prose retelling of the Bible replacing the authorised translation met with resistance. Early 'children's Bibles' as a rule do not paraphrase or simplify the text of the Bible, but rather illustrate its highlights with pictures and poetry, or test children's understanding with questions and riddles. The modern children's Bible would emerge only in the new century.<sup>31</sup> Van Meerten would use the child-friendly translation by the established authority professor Van der Palm, rather than adapt the Bible text by herself. Interesting is the shift from 'world history' to national history: the brief chronicle of world history, a rather abstruse but therefore

31 Van der Meiden, 'Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig', pp. 38–121.

perhaps fascinating succession of factoids from antiquity and the early Middle Ages, abruptly ended in 1788 when, after 491 pages, it reached the middle of the seventh century. It was tacitly supplanted by a rubric that had started out a few years before as a general history of the Reformation and then shifted towards the history of Dutch Protestantism. It ends with the *Nijkerker Beroerten* (Nijkerk Commotion, a noisy and contested revival movement in 1749–1751).<sup>32</sup> It is striking that Van Meerten also introduced this shift to national history when reviving the work of Vaa.

Over the years, we can identify a further shift towards material that approximates our notions of the children's book, away from strictly educational towards more entertaining material and from an exclusive focus on the Bible towards more playful, albeit always proper and moralistic entertainment. This started circumspectly with a collection of biblical riddles, eventually numbering 222, offered over the years 1771–1774. Germany had a tradition of such riddlebooks, and several were translated into Dutch.<sup>33</sup> Entrop's riddles were taken from an existing collection and superficially reworked.<sup>34</sup> In 1775, the first non-biblical rubric was started: *Zedelyke Gedagten en Vermaaning en de Jeugd* (Moral considerations and admonitions for youngsters, 1775–1776). This collection of short moral lessons somewhat resembles Vaa's work in content and tone. According to the publisher, at that moment Entrop's widow, it was an unqualified success and had noticeably boosted sales.

This was the starting signal for a collection of 240 *Zedelyke Fabels en Vertelselen* (Moral Fables and Stories, 1777–1793) that would continue almost to the end of the *Almanach's* existence. In the announcement at the beginning of this rubric the widow defended the fable as a useful format for moral instruction for the young. Unlike the works of famous poets Jean de La Fontaine, David van Hoogstraten and Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, her fables were in prose, not in poetry, as this brought out their message more clearly. The *Fabels en Vertelsels* started with a series of Aesopian animal fables, but in its later instalments developed into a mixed bag. The histories of Abraham and Hagar (1787) and the sacrifice of Isaac (1788) are mixed in, presented in romanticised form, featuring dramatic dialogues. Exemplary fictional tales about human characters eventually entirely supplanted the fables. The riddles, the seven

32 The material in these historical chronicles was an adaptation of Entrop's *De Kerkeleyke en Joodsche geschiedenissen verkort*.

33 Buijnsters and Buijnsters-Smet, *Bibliografie*, pp. 201–203.

34 Gerrit Hesman, *Schriftuyrljcke onderwyser* (Amsterdam: widow Gysbert de Groot, [c.1700]), also reprinted several times. Entrop left out Hesman's secular riddles.



FIGURE 17.3 Belying the 'cheap' character of the almanac, Entrop enhanced its appeal with professional illustrations. For the *Bybelsche Almanach* he had the frontispieces engraved by Nicolaas Frankendaal (1720–1791), who may also have made the fold-out prints.

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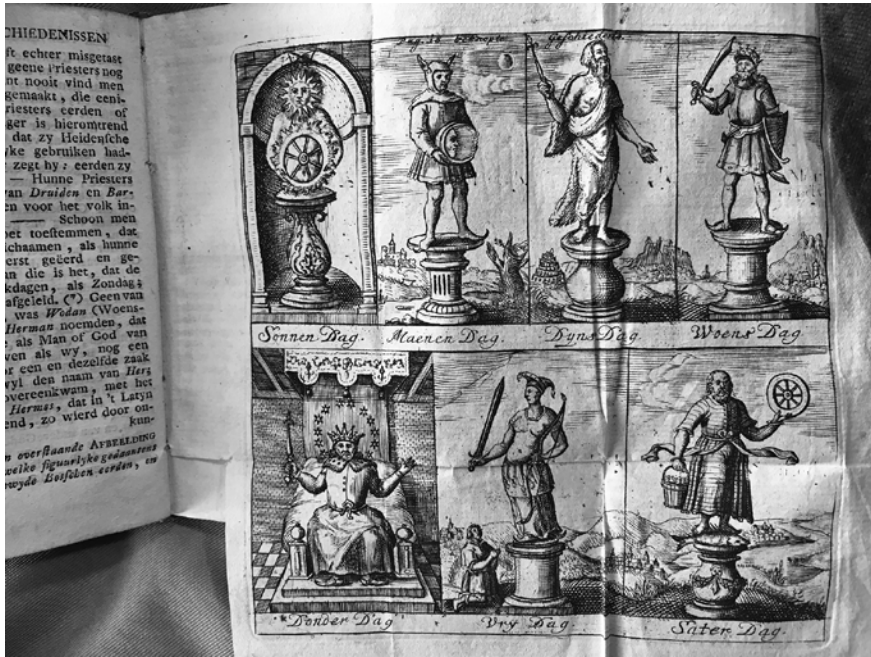


FIGURE 17.4 Most of the fold-out prints show Jewish antiquities and aspects of the Holy Land. At the beginning of the history of the Dutch Reformed Church Entrop inserted the images of the heathen Saxon gods, after Richard Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence: in antiquities. Concerning the most noble and renowned English Nation* (London: John Bill, 1628).

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paraphrased Bible chapters, the fables and tales were reprinted from a book that had already been published by Pieter Entrop.<sup>35</sup>

The secular moral tales are an incongruous collection in themselves. Some are mildly anticlerical, poking fun at monks. Some recount love stories, often with a backdrop in the milieu of the (German or French) nobility. Yet they advocate civic virtues over the pride and cruelty of lordlings. They often breathe rather 'democratic' values. A dialogue between a farmer and a rabbit lambasts the suppression of virtuous citizens by 'two-legged asses'. It follows closely upon a fox's 'Systema politico-morale' (1785). Both are thinly veiled criticisms against the self-serving regent oligarchies, in the spirit of the then vigorous Patriot movement (1785). The *Almanach* for 1793 contains the story of two noblemen who flee the city because of its worldly vices, renounce their titles

35 *Leidsman ter Bybelkennisse of Onderrigter der Jeugd in de Gewyde Geschiedenissen* (Amsterdam: P.J. Entrop, s.d.).

and build a new, virtuous existence among idealised village dwellers. Another presents an indictment against the trade in enslaved black people (1791).<sup>36</sup> The genre of the moral tale was very popular throughout Europe at the time. Such 'realistic' stories were considered more appropriate for children than the metaphorical fable or the fanciful fairy tale. The latter would gain general acceptance as children's literature only in the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

### The Birth of the Children's Book?

These two examples certainly show important shifts in the content and tone of children's books in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. They do not, however, demonstrate a watershed caused by the 'canonical' enlightened pedagogues. The vicissitudes of Vaa's and Entrop's initiatives suggest a much more complicated development. The children's literature exemplified in Van Alphen's *Kleine Gedigten* and Martinet's *Katechismus der Natuur* mainly reached, and indeed was intended for, the children of the elite. They were taught genteel manners by parents and useful knowledge by private teachers, and were stimulated to start their own bookshelves, mirroring the libraries in their family homes and that of relatives and friends. For the children of the middling sort, who were educated in the public school system, the market produced cheap multi-purpose books. They were written not by members of the social and political elite, but by schoolmasters and hired pens paid by publishers, and could be used in schools as well as at home. They reflected the values of their rank in society, which initially were firmly anchored on the Bible, a source of moral truths as well as of entertaining stories, as can be seen both in Vaa's *Kinderschool* and in the *Bybelsche Almanach*. The latter gradually admitted newer literary genres without ever renouncing its original character.

If the criterion for children's literature is that it should be suitable as leisure reading, we should not dismiss the entire category 'schoolbooks' out of hand, as many histories of children's literature do. Schoolbooks, especially those for the youngest, were playful long before Van Alphen, and used a wide variety of techniques to capture the children's interests. Even the crude ABC-books reached out to beginning readers with the picture of the rooster, calling upon them to make a useful use of their time. In the eighteenth century small pictures were added of objects from daily life as illustrations for each letter of

36 Several of these tales in their turn appear in the *Almanak tot nut en vermaak van jonge lieden voor 1817*.

37 Buijnsters and Buijnsters-Smet, *Lust en Leering*, pp. 98–112.

the alphabet. Several catechism primers were rhymed, even set to music, and illustrated – to aid the memory no doubt, but also to make learning fun.<sup>38</sup> Part of the enormous production of prints in the Low Countries was specifically aimed at children, to entertain, educate and edify them. Although they contained text as well as pictures, as a rule they are not categorised as 'books', which may distort our views of children's reading experience at the time.<sup>39</sup>

Vaa formulated his lessons in civic virtues for use in schools, but older children may have read his lessons at home as well. His examples mirrored their own experiences, in school and church as well as on the Leiden fairs and in walks through the countryside, and showed them where they fit into society at large. Entrop's *Bybelsche Almanach* presented the Bible as both a moral guide and a history book, expanding upon typical school subjects, but in a format intended to please and fascinate as well as educate eager young readers. It built upon the older genres of schoolbook, catechism, chapbook, songbook, and almanac, while gradually absorbing the initially elitist fables and moral tales that mirrored the virtues expected of late eighteenth-century citizens. Like the enlightened children's books, Entrop's *Almanach* followed international fashions. We may not immediately grasp the element of fun or wonderment in these books. Yet their commercial success should make us think twice, and the constant process of innovation in the production of schoolbooks suggests close attention to the demands of teachers and parents, but also of children.

Van Meerten's oeuvre shows how even an older book such as Vaa's could be adapted to the nineteenth-century book market, aimed at children of distinct age groups, and with a strong drive for moral and even social advancement. Her books, and those of authors like her, are recognisably children's books, even more so than everything that went before. They are without exception edifying and moralistic, and entirely lack the penchant for silliness and naughtiness that we value in today's children's books. They combine the enlightened ideals of citizenship with the religiously inspired moral agendas of the multi-purpose schoolbooks that served schoolchildren of artisan background. Yet their storylines, adapted from evangelical conversion narratives, provided

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- 38 J. Stellingwerff, *Kleine geschiedenis van het Groot ABC-boek of Haneboek* (s.l.: Staatsdrukkerij, 1979); H. van 't Veld, *Wegwijzer naar Christus. De Heidelbergse Catechismus berijmd en gezongen, 1624–2006* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2007); *De Bybelsche Print-verbeeldingen volgens het geleiden van den Eerw. J. Borstius* (Amsterdam: Cornelis de Wit, [c.1750]).
- 39 P.J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smet, *Papertoys. Speelprenten en papieren speelgoed in Nederland (1640–1920)* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2005); Nico Boerma, Aernout Borms, Alfons Thijs and Jo Thijssen, *Kinderprenten, volksprenten, centsprenten, schoolprenten. Populaire grafiek in de Nederlanden 1650–1950* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2014).

these nineteenth-century children's books with the drama and excitement that is smothered in utilitarianism and moralism in the books based on the ideas of the enlightened pedagogues.<sup>40</sup> Acknowledging that children's books reflect their own societies makes looking for 'the birth of children's literature' a moot question, invites us to look beyond the literary canons, and opens up a very wide field of research in popular genres that have long been neglected.

40 Buijnsters, *Lust en leering*, pp. 347–355.