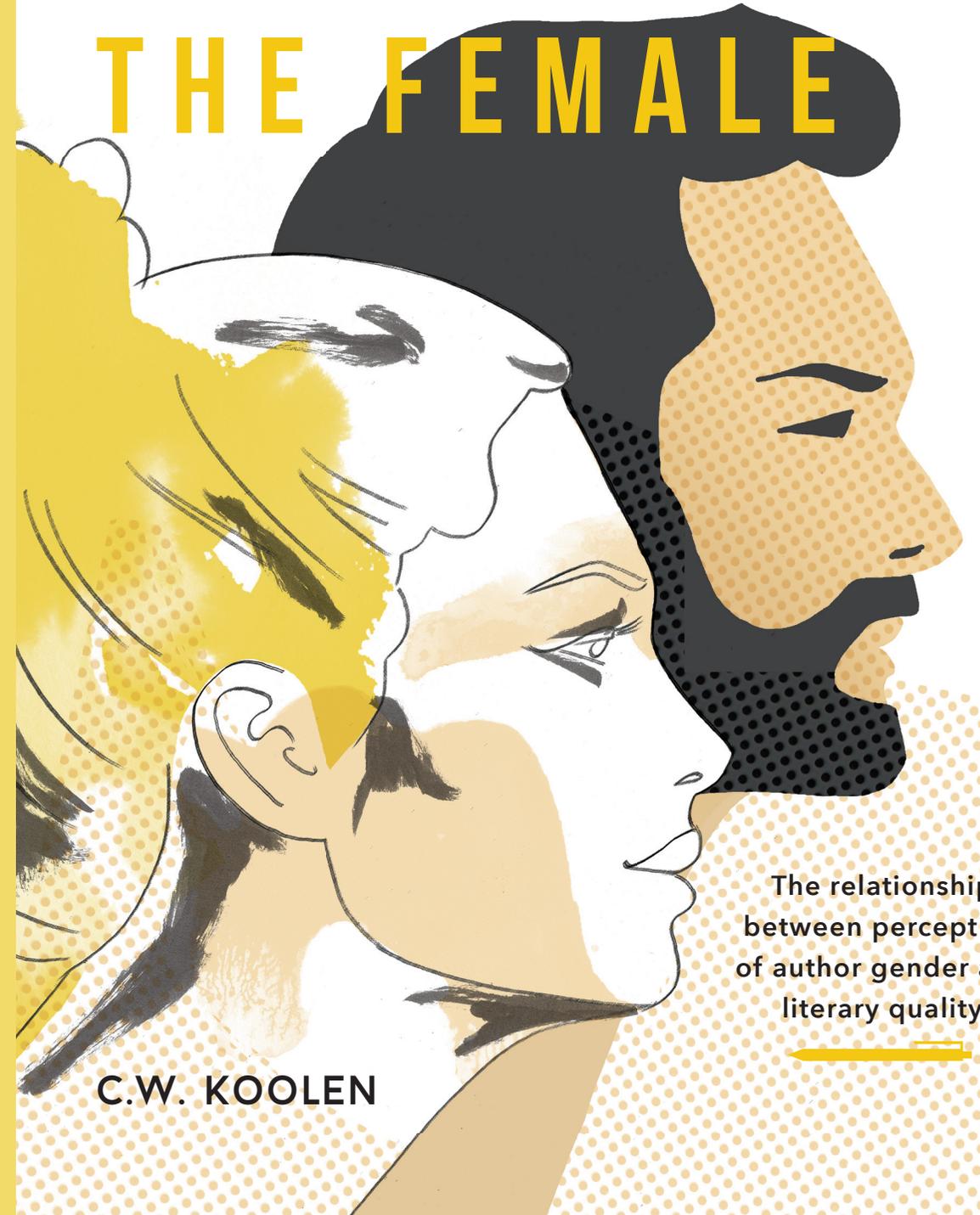


# READING — — BEYOND THE FEMALE



The relationship  
between perception  
of author gender and  
literary quality

C.W. KOOLEN

READING BEYOND THE FEMALE



C.W. KOOLEN

# PUBLICATION STATEMENT

Part of the results presented in this thesis have been published before.

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THE FEMALE

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# READING — — BEYOND THE FEMALE

The relationship between  
perception of author  
gender and literary quality

CORNELIA WILHELMINA KOOLEN



# READING — — BEYOND THE FEMALE

The relationship between perception  
of author gender and literary quality

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT  
ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus  
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit  
op vrijdag 18 mei 2018, te 11.00 uur

door Cornelia Wilhelmina Koolen  
geboren te Roosendaal en Nispen

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# 1.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Women do not think with their boobs, and normally they don't write with them either. The whole gender discussion wearies me sometimes, because fiction is the best place to drop the categories of man/woman. When I write, and when I read, I do not think about my gender at all. That my femaleness also determines what and how I write, I do not deny, but no more than all the other components do - nationality, social background, education - which determine my identity.*

(Weijers, 2014, my translation)

*Women must write,  
but they can not write  
if they are not allowed  
to forget their sex.*

(Moi, 2008: p. 267)

What does gender have to do with perceptions of the literary quality of an author's work? Ideally, the answer would be 'very little'. In practice, female authors find it hard to escape their gender, as Dutch author Niña Weijers laments in the quote above. To explain what I mean by 'escaping gender', I present the following example. Author Catherine Nichols experienced problems in getting her manuscript published and devised an experiment (Nichols, 2015). She sent her manuscript to a number of agents; fifty times under her own name, and fifty times under a male pen name. The 'male' author was asked for the manuscript seventeen times, whereas under her own

name, this only happened twice. Nichols speculates that, among other reasons, agents might find a male-authored book about a woman more interesting than a female-authored book about a woman. However, in their reflections the agents claimed that the male author's work was of very good quality ("well-constructed" and "clever") whereas the female author's work was deemed to be not good enough, although it contained "beautiful writing" (ibidem). The text was identical in both cases. The agents did not realize that their initial opinions were subconsciously based on the relationship between author gender and protagonist gender (or even just on the author's gender), which resulted in very different appreciations of the exact same words on the page.

Consider a second example. In 2010, Belgian author Bernhard Dewulf won a prestigious and well-known Dutch literary award, the Libris Literatuur Prijs, for a semi-autobiographical account of day-to-day life with his kids. Three years earlier, a jury of the same prize lamented the fact that women so often write about "personal trifles" (Habbema et al., 2007), which presumably includes childcare. When an author writes about a topic such as 'domestic life', it *does* matter whether the author is a woman or a man, simply because it is more unexpected in the second case. The jury report praises Dewulf's "guts" for choosing this topic (Wijers et al., 2010). In both cases described here, the gender of the author affected how the overall quality of the text was judged, either consciously or subconsciously. The professional critics probably believed they applied neutral standards. In other words, perception of gender influences perception of literary quality. I call this 'the gendered lens', a term which I will explain further in the next paragraph.

In this thesis, I attempt to unravel the relationship between author gender and the appraisal of the literary quality of the author's work, specifically for the recent Dutch literary field. Can I get closer to the workings of author gender as a lens through which the quality of the work is seen? For now, I define the gendered lens as a way of reading a text that is – either subconsciously or consciously – affected by the gender of the author. Note that I am not stating that author gender does not or should not matter at all, or that there are no differences between female and male authors. My goal is to find out *how* and *to what extent* author gender matters – and to do this, I examine the authors' status as well as the texts themselves. First, I will show how the Dutch literary

field is gendered with respect to the positions female and male authors take, and how their works are appraised. This is not as simple as ‘women rarely get literary awards’. Then I will examine the texts of the novels themselves, partially through computational analysis, to discover to what extent author gender matters in the texts that this author writes.<sup>1</sup> For this I apply methods originating from separate disciplines, respectively literary sociology and Natural Language Processing (NLP), specifically, computational stylistic analysis (stylometry); though the overall perspective remains that of the digital literary humanist I am. This means that I do not solely apply computational methods to analyze fictional texts.<sup>2</sup> I choose to combine two perspectives for two reasons. First, because computational methods are no more neutral than any other method of analysis and therefore, they cannot supply ‘the ultimate answer’ to any question. I will return to this issue in Chapter 5. And second, because sociological research into reception excluded, until recently, the content of the objects themselves, whereas comparative literary analysis has attempted for a long time to analyze texts in a social vacuum. Neither method alone is sufficient to deal with the relationship between perceptions of gender and literary quality. My approach marries the perspectives and thereby aims to be a first step towards closing the gap.

---

1. This thesis is not written based on the ideas of intersectional feminism. My perspective is that of a white, heterosexual, cis gender and able-bodied woman, and this is reflected in how I have conducted my research. Moreover, my methods are rooted in existing digital humanities practices, which are not yet that aware of intersectionality or non-binary approaches. I do cherish the hope that digital humanists will take note of how I have bent these existing practices to be more accommodating, and because of this, will reflect more thoroughly on the automated classifications they undertake. Not only concerning gender, but also on other social groupings. I also believe that my roots being in a different field helps me overcome the issue that Moi (2008) notes, where she argues that the current theoretical paradigm paralyzes the discussion of female authorship. For good intersectional feminist reflections on the topic of digital humanities, I refer to McPherson (2012) and Risam (2015).

2. There have been many discussions on what digital humanities is and is not (see for instance Kirschenbaum, 2012). I prefer to draw as few boundaries as possible, hence, this definition of digital literary humanities is a strictly personal one.

## 1.1 CONTEXT

The research I undertake is liaised with a larger project, called The Riddle of Literary Quality (from now on: The Riddle; van Dalen-Oskam, 2014), funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1.1: The logo of KNAW-project The Riddle of Literary Quality, design Bas Doppen.

My goals are somewhat different from those of the project, however, as I will explain at the end of this section. The Riddle is a project in the field of digital humanities, and specifically digital literary studies. Digital literary studies, among other endeavors, applies computational methods to research questions which are traditionally approached through literary-theoretical means, most notably close reading (see Liu, 2012). It also poses new research questions, which can be answered by investigating larger corpora. Taking into consideration the characteristics of a large body of works leads to a bird's eye or 'distant' perspective; hence the term 'distant reading' was coined (Moretti, 2005); its benefit is that it allows us to sketch patterns (see Bod, 2013) and changes in such patterns in the field of cultural textual production at large.

Within this field, The Riddle aims to study the textual characteristics of such fictional prose which is perceived to be of a certain literary standing, as opposed to that which is seen as 'popular' or 'genre' fiction. The project aims to answer the question: are there specific textual qualities to a fictional prose text that can contribute to it being perceived as highly literary? More specifically, given a large body of texts comprised of novels seen as literary, barely literary,

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3. See also: <http://literaryquality.huygens.knaw.nl>. (Last visit: 17 August 2017).

and everything in between, can we apply computational methods to pinpoint (meaningful) textual differences between these groups (see also van Dalen-Oskam, in preparation; van Cranenburgh, 2016)? What is perceived to be barely versus highly literary, is based on a large, Dutch reader survey that was undertaken in 2013, where readers were asked to judge the literary quality of novels on a scale of 1-7 (1 being barely literary, 7 being highly literary), called *Het Nationale Lezersonderzoek* (NLO; ‘The National Reader Survey’). These ratings, and the motivation respondents were allowed to give alongside one of their ratings, are what I consider to be literary quality judgments in this thesis. I return to them in Section 1.3 and more fully in Chapter 3 and 4.

Note that the project does not assume that textual factors are more important than social factors in judgments of literary quality – we see the notion of literary quality as a social construction (see Section 1.2). Nor does it assume that the reader judgments, which we base ourselves on, are inherently unquestionable, or that such judgments are universal, timeless and impersonal. The project studies a specific time frame (2007-2012), a specific text type (fictional prose texts published in the Dutch language which either sold well or were loaned often from libraries) and a specific audience (readers of Dutch-language prose); it therefore limits its conclusions to this spatially and temporally restricted field.

I, as part of this project, did not start out with the topic of gender. Only after we had compiled a list of novels and asked the Dutch reading public to judge them, did it become obvious: perception of literary quality cannot be separated from author gender (see Chapter 3 and 4). I decided to investigate the ways gender interacts with judgments of literary quality. Gender of the author, the gender of protagonists, of readers, all might be part of an intricate play of subconscious processes that leave female authors underrepresented in, among other things, literary supplements of newspapers and literary award procedures. The corpus and survey of the Riddle of Literary Quality, supplemented with other materials, allow me to examine these processes.

However, I am not looking for a direct connection between the reader judgments and the texts of the novels, in the way that van Cranenburgh (2016) does. He trains computational models to see how well ratings can be predicted

based on the texts of the novels; and he therefore includes possible respondent biases in these connections. I, on the other hand, look at the relationship between gender and the ratings on the one hand, and gender and the text on the other. I choose to do so, because the relationship between gender and literary quality in my view should not be seen as a direct causal connection, as my examples above have indicated. Part of the issue, I believe, is that many readers prefer to think that the gender gap is only caused by people who believe that there is a direct connection between gender and literary quality, those who overtly discriminate against women. We do not like to think that we ourselves also take part in maintaining the gap. With this thesis I provide evidence that we are all part of it. But please note that I have not written this thesis with a view in mind of laying blame. I ultimately have a more optimistic goal: first to map, and second to show how we might aim to look differently (and perhaps do better).

## 1.2 CONCEPTS

As this thesis operates on the crossroads of several disciplines, I have decided to spend some pages to define the concepts I use.

### **Literary field**

I use the concept of 'field' broadly in the sense of Bourdieu (1983), but apply it to the contemporary production and consumption of prose fiction in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> The field consists of a number of 'actors': authors, readers, publishers, editors, reviewers, award juries, educational institutions and literary scholars – although I do not focus on those last two groups in this thesis, because of the recent publication dates of the works under discussion. Bourdieu describes two poles, one where publishers aim for large-scale

---

4. The survey also contains Flemish authors and Flemish respondents, but I choose to focus on the Netherlands for my general analyses in the next chapter, because the literary fields in Belgium and the Netherlands function differently – although not completely separately (see Dorleijn and van Rees 2006: p. 23).

production with the goal of gaining economic capital, versus the pole where publishers strive for limited production of high quality, thus with the goal of gaining social capital rather than economic capital. Social capital in the Dutch literary field would take the form of one's works being perceived as highly literary by the literary establishment, the gatekeepers in the field, such as critics. Although the actors have not changed much since Bourdieu's conception of the cultural field, this picture has to be nuanced somewhat when we consider the production of contemporary Dutch prose fiction. As van Boven (2015) describes, the 'literary bestseller' has arisen. The literary bestseller is a subgenre of novels that receive critical acclaim in the form of awards granted by the literary establishment but also sell relatively large numbers of copies. Franssen (2015) has shown through analysis of publishers' lists that this is indeed the case, and that poetry publishers might be the only real small-scale publishers left in the Netherlands. This tendency is also reflected in the list of bestsellers the Riddle uses as its corpus, some of which have been awarded prestigious literary prizes. Examples are A. F. Th. van der Heijden's *Tonio*, Marente de Moor's *De Nederlandse Maagd* ('The Dutch Virgin') and the translation of Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*. In other words, even though the concepts of economic and social capital are still useful, a form of 'literary novel' has arisen that might be placed somewhere between the two poles of large scale production aimed at economic gain and small scale production aimed at social gain. In my use of the term 'literary field', the actors, the products – in the form of the texts of the novels – and the actors' judgment on the products play a central role. While the focus is on the social production of value (i.e. perceived literariness), for the selected corpus this cannot be cleanly separated from the economic production of value (i.e. revenue from sales etc.). To clarify this further, I have adapted a visual overview of the Dutch literary field as modeled by Dorleijn and van Rees (2006). However, as I do not adhere to the separation of economic and social production of value, as also argued against in English (2009), I slightly altered the original model to the one in Figure 1.2.

The model shows the intricate play of actors in the field, where for instance authors and publishers work closely together, the readership is influenced by education and literary criticism as well as the bookstore, informal book clubs and libraries. This model is changing because of the influence of digital

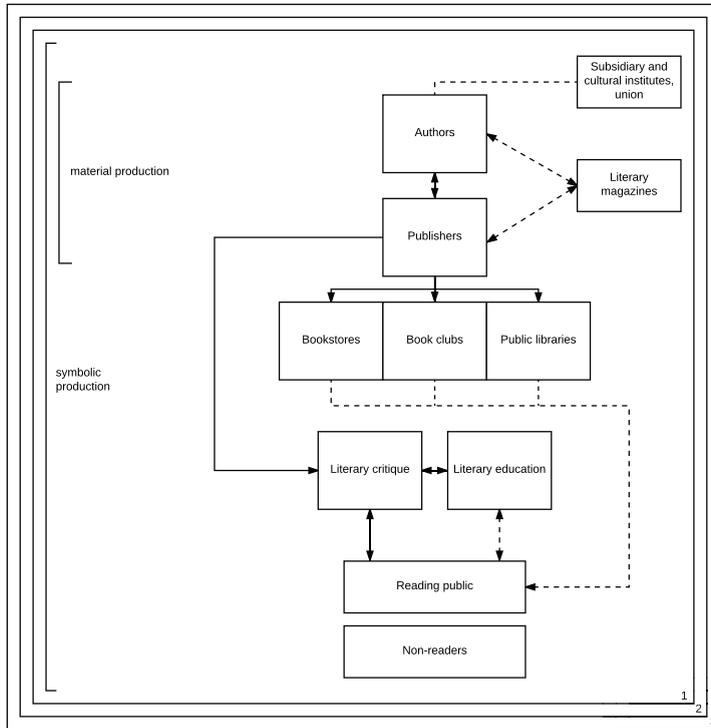


Figure 1.2: The Dutch literary field (1), a modification of the diagram in Dorleijn and van Rees (2006). The literary field is embedded in the cultural field (2), which is embedded in the field of larger society (3). Whereas Dorleijn and van Rees limit symbolic production to criticism and education, I believe that all players influence the symbolic production and hence, I have altered it to include all. Digital processes can be thought of as part of this model, online reviews for instance are part of literary critique. Moreover, because of the internet, in fact all actors have direct access to one another, but I have left this implicit for sake of clarity.

media. Direct connections are now much more easily made between authors and the public and publishers and the public; I do not focus on them in this thesis, however, and therefore, have not included them in the model. Other digital processes can be seen as part of existing structures. Online reviews by lay readers for instance can be construed as part of literary critique in general. I do not include such reviews in this thesis, because I base my analyses of lay judgment on the results of the National Reader Survey (see Chapters 3 and 4).<sup>5</sup> My focus lies with the author, the publisher, literary criticism and the reader; though I include other actors when necessary. I choose not to focus on education and academia, because the corpus I use is too recent to have been solidified through these practices. The implications of relating this thesis to Bourdieu's theory of field is explained with the next concept, that of 'literary quality'.

## **Literary quality**

For centuries there have been debates on what makes a 'great book'. Famously, in the seventeenth century, the so-called *Querelle des Anciens et Modernes* revolved around the question whether only old, classic works could be considered to be of good quality, or if more recent works could also be included (Fishelov 2010: p. 30). Novels were initially not considered to be an art form, but with the professionalization of the trade of novel writing, this changed (Tuchman and Fortin, 1984). A more recent debate is whether the quality of art stems from the art work itself or if it is socially constructed. On one side there are critics who see aesthetic qualities as inherent to the text (van Peer, 2008). The American New Critics – who revived close reading – are the most vehement defenders of this point of view (see for instance Wellek and Warren, 1956). On the other side there are theorists who believe that literary quality is solely socially constructed, by stakeholders in the cultural field, and therefore that any text could function as a highly literary one (Bourdieu, 1983; Verdaasdonk, 1983). Fishelov (2010) asserts that both sides, which he calls

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5. The National Reader Survey was publicly available to fill out for six months in 2013. It includes mostly lay judgments, but professional critics also took part in it. We know this because critics expressed having taking part through national media, but also because some disclosed their profession through open fields of the survey.

the 'beauty party' and the 'power party', have valid arguments, but also pitfalls, and:

*So if the two parties have strong points but also weaknesses, perhaps all we can do is choose one of them (...), and try to ignore its weak points, reiterating arguments against the other party in a typical dialogue-of-the-deaf. Or perhaps, there is another way out of this conceptual circle (pp. 44-45).*

But perhaps the contrast is not necessarily this stark. Note that the idea of the social construction of literary quality does not exclude the literary establishment from forming a generic consensus on which elements constitute this quality, and that such elements can be quite consistent for a longer period of time. There is a rough consensus – albeit a temporally and spatially dynamic one – on which aesthetic qualities a text needs to contain in order to be considered literary.

In the field of literary sociology there have been attempts to pry away from Bourdieu's grip, in the so-called 'new sociology of art'. Most notable is the work of Schwartz (2013), which combines the renewed interest in individuals' aesthetic consumption (as found in Hennion, 2007) with a broader sociological perspective. He introduces the concept of 'tasting techniques', which aligns with my notion of the literary quality consensus. Schwarz argues that even though judgments of art – in my case of literary quality – are individualized, a "repertoire of tasting techniques" is acquired through socialization, or in other words, taught (p. 427). This repertoire is similar to the notion of 'consensus' that I argued for in the previous paragraph.

When we look at such 'tasting techniques' in literary theory, literary works need to adhere to Shklovski's idea of *literaturnost* (literariness) which means that literary art does not prescribe. Rather, it leaves readers to form new ideas and creates room for reflection (Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney, 2006: p. 57). Foregrounding and textual complexity are two examples of text characteristics that create such space for reflection. Foregrounding means that an author uses unfamiliarity to make a reader aware of otherwise subconscious processes; the existence of which has been empirically tested in Miall and Kuiken (1994). Textual complexity means that a text has layers that a reader cannot simply

gloss over (Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney, 2006: p.49). These layers are a result of the inventive use of several language dimensions simultaneously, such as meaning and sentence structure (ibidem). Quality is thus seen foremost from an aesthetic point of view (see for instance van Peer, 2008). Ideological qualities, such as ethics, morality, etc., have been pushed to the background (ibidem), even though an influential academic discipline such as postcolonial studies argues for taking such qualities into consideration (Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney, 2006: 369). Literary quality could then be seen as the combination of textual characteristics that professional readers, as a consensus, believe to constitute literary quality at the time of literary judgment. The snake biting its tail, perhaps. Professional judgments do leave a mark with the general public. The National Reader Survey, discussed in the Chapter 3 and 4, shows that the general Dutch reader is highly aware of the conventions of literary quality, and helps its reproduction.

Van Cranenburgh (2016) shows that for the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus there is indeed a correlation between textual factors and judgments of literary quality. Judgments of literary quality are equated with the average rating of literary quality per novel, as per the results of the National Reader Survey; to this I will return later. The correlation between text and average rating becomes stronger when it is supplemented with extra-textual factors, such as author gender, genre, etc.. Examples of textual factors that correlate with the average ratings are the number of cliché's, sentence length and basic syntactic sentence structure. Computational analysis based on judgments of literary quality presents some issues, as the characteristics are not pre-defined (except for the fact that the project selected the corpus), but built from the bottom up. Moreover, they are based on the judgments of laypersons as well as professional readers. More problematically, the judgments are indirect – the readers were not asked to judge text excerpts, but books, based on title and author name. Respondents might have chosen characteristics that they were taught in school as being literary, or assign those characteristics to novels by authors that have a reputation of being literary. It is even quite likely that the respondents judge author reputation as well as, or even instead of, textual characteristics, and hence judge literary prestige more than they do textual aspects (see also Verboord, 2003). Not surprisingly then, the respondents' overall ideas of literary quality turn out to be quite consistent with those of the

literary establishment, who – at least in their reviews and jury reports – act as if an objective sense of literary quality exists (see Chapter 4).

This, if anything, supports the social nature of the concept of literary quality: it is created within a group and non-professional (but well-educated) readers are aware of the concept and its ideas. In other words, literary quality is a consensus, influenced by the literary establishment, which consists of a combination of extra-textual and textual qualities. The most careful interpretation of the Riddle method is that it allows us to distill common textual characteristics from novels that are valued as highly literary, versus those that are seen as not very literary. In the end, the Riddle's approach does not result in an enumeration of true, value- or bias-free, eternally valid or globally applicable characteristics, but paints a picture of a local and temporal consensus of literary quality. The textual characteristics that were extracted are not necessarily a description of the consensus of literary quality at the time of judgment, but rather describe the common elements in novels that are believed to uphold the standard of literary quality. A number of the characteristics align with the 'conscious' literary quality consensus, but some are more tacit. To give an example: complexity, as shown before, is seen as part of literary quality. In novels that are seen as highly literary, the basic sentence structure could be interpreted as being more complex, because, on average, the sentences in such novels contain more sub-clauses and are longer than in novels that are seen as not very literary (Jautze et al., 2013). Thus, the method helps in comparing literary standards, including possibly subconscious elements of it. What it looks like in practice will vary from period to period, from text type to text type, reader group to reader group, approach to approach, etc. etc.. And it will come as no surprise that this thesis shows that this notion of literary quality contains certain biases.

## **Gender**

Biological sex and gender are two different concepts. Biological sex is based on chromosomes, but it is not always equal to the gender a person feels s/he has (see Butler, 1990). Gender then is the identity which is performed to the outside world, which is not necessarily in line with biological sex. Just as biological sex is not limited to female and male, there are many other types of gender than just these two. However, to operationalize gender, I do use

a dichotomy of female/male. This does not do justice to the complexities of gender, but with my data and methods it was ultimately the most workable model. Moreover, in practice, the authors in my research are taken to be either female or male by their readers, which is the perspective I investigate, that of the reader's judgment.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, with this thesis I hope to remedy some of the problems concerning computational analysis of gender and these computational approaches generally involve a binary model. I will show how this model can be bent to include a less narrow view of gender, even though I also firmly hope I will be part of the development of more subtle computational methods in the future. I chose to assign one of two genders according to how the author presents her- or himself to the general public at the time I conducted my research, because this is the best knowledge I have.

The gendered author image, obviously, is not always clear. There are duo's of one female and one male author in our corpus, such as Nicci French and Lars Kepler. There is also one anonymous author in the corpus, Ravelli. For these authors, I have opted to leave them out of computational analysis; it would be interesting to compare them to the overall results in future work. The corpus also contains works by an author who published under a female pseudonym, Suzanne Vermeer. After the author died, his wife revealed her husband Paul Goeken to be the actual author, and readers were made aware of this fact. These novels are analyzed as written by a male author.

As a final example, at the time of publishing his first novel, author Maxim Februari still published as a female. In my research I have chosen to consider him male, as at the time of my research, he presented as male. Still, this does

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6. Moi (2008) gives a compelling argument as to why we should sometimes take the label 'woman' or 'man' and put them into practical use: "No theory about the origins of gender will change the fact that in a sexist society people who are taken to be women will be perceived as Other in relation to a male norm. When I claim that Nathalie Sarraute or Virginia Woolf are women writers, then, all you need to acknowledge is that they have been perceived as women who write, and that they also took themselves to be women" (pp. 266-267).

not do justice to the fact that he is, in fact, a transgender male, who was socialized as a woman for a long time.<sup>7</sup>

## Genre

‘Genre’ is a term that is used in several academic disciplines in different senses. I borrow from literary sociology, which means I roughly follow publishers’ categorizations. As Franssen (2015) notes: “Genres are, both as cognitive categories and organisational principles (...), omnipresent within contemporary literary production” (p. 385). This is also motivated by practical concerns, as I try to stay as close as possible to the categorization of the Riddle corpus, see Section 1.3. By ‘genre’ I mean the subsets of literary fiction that are marketed by publishers as distinct, through choice of cover layout for instance, and which often have thematic and/or stylistic commonalities. This means that the corpus has some variation, but the novels in it also have much in common: the texts are all written (and not transcribed oral texts), published in the 21st century in the Netherlands, professionally edited and consist of prose fiction. My definition of genre is thus more stylistically contained than what is common in computational stylistics studies. In computational stylistics, text categories such as ‘fiction’ and ‘non-fiction’, or ‘email’ and ‘blogposts’ are considered to be genres. Gender differences are investigated based on such categorizations, while possible within-genre differences are glossed over (i.e. Koppel et al., 2002; Sabin et al., 2008). I will address this topic further in Chapter 5.

Within the category of prose fiction, which I study, I distinguish between three genres, literary, romantic and suspense. I explain these further in Section 1.3, but I want to make a note on the use of ‘literary’ as a genre. It might be confusing to the reader of this thesis that I study the abstract notion of literary quality, for which I rely on reader judgments, while I also use the label of ‘literary’ for novels as a genre. I have not chosen this label myself. The

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7. His work is not part of the Riddle corpus, but of a second corpus compiled for this thesis (see Chapter 5 and Appendix A.2).

label of 'literary fiction' is applied by publishers at the time of publication of a novel in the Netherlands. To do justice to the Dutch literary field, I have decided to keep these original labels, because many readers of the novels in the Netherlands are also familiar with the term 'literary' as a genre – rather than solely as a judgment. Changing it to the more proper 'general fiction' would erase that background. Moreover, there is computational evidence that such a literary genre exists (see for instance Piper and Portelance, 2016). Therefore, whenever I use the word 'literary', I will make clear whether I am discussing the abstract notion of 'literary' that I research, or whether I am applying the genre label.

## **Style**

In the second part of this thesis, I aim to answer the question to which extent the writing style of female and male Dutch prose fiction authors are distinct. To operationalize the concept of style, I use the definition in Herrmann et al. (2015), devised with computational analysis in mind: "Style is a property of texts constituted by an ensemble of formal features which can be observed quantitatively or qualitatively" (p. 44). Let me now specify the separate elements of this definition. The texts I research are Dutch-language fictional texts (see Section 1.3). Formal features are linguistic features, which can be discerned from the texts, think of lexicon for instance. They also include features that go beyond the sentence, such as narrative perspective (*ibidem*). I will specify the specific elements I will research in Chapter 4. That I take style to be an ensemble of features means that I do not expect an aesthetic or inherent coherence of the text, like Herrmann et al. (2015) also note. Finally, the fact that the authors discern quantitative and qualitative analysis as possible venues of exploration suits my research as well. I will perform both types of textual analysis in the second part of my thesis.

## 1.3 CORPUS

In order to collect as many judgments (i.e. ratings) as possible, the decision was made to ask readers to judge a set of recent novels that had gained a wide audience: the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus. The more ratings we would receive, the greater the chances would be to gain reliable results for our computational analyses (see also Chapter 3). The Riddle corpus contains 401 novels published between 2007-2012. To avoid favoring middle-class readers – in other words, to also include readers who do not want to or cannot afford to buy books regularly – we decided to use two criteria for selection: the novels must have been either most often bought from bookstores or borrowed from public libraries between 2009 and 2012 in the Netherlands. The selection was based on rough numbers provided by Collectieve Propaganda voor het Nederlandse boek (CPNB; Collective Propaganda for the Dutch Book) and Dutch libraries; these institutes are not allowed to publish exact numbers, because of privacy reasons concerning the authors. The aim was to include only fictional full-length novels, and no children’s novels. A few issues were discovered after the survey however, which are discussed in van Cranenburgh (2016: p. 93). A list of the books in the corpus can be found in Appendix A.1. 249 of the novels were translated into Dutch, 152 were originally written in Dutch. The choice to include both was again intended to maximize the chances of readers having read the books. In my analyses of the corpus throughout the thesis, I use all of the novels. In the final chapters however, I focus on a separate corpus of only originally Dutch novels.

The Riddle project team organized the novels into categories, a.k.a. ‘Riddle codes’, to be able to compare results across the multiple explorations of the data we would undertake.<sup>8</sup> These codes are a refinement of the standardized codes the Dutch publishers assign to their books. These codes are referred to as NUR, which is short for *Nederlandstalige Uniforme Rubrieksindeling*, roughly translatable as ‘Dutch-language Uniform Classification’. An important reason to not just follow the original NUR-code, is that the category ‘302

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8. I thank Allen Riddell for his aid in this task.

Translated literary novel' would have been too large. This category is used as a catchall by many publishers, even though the novels would have fitted into more specific categories easily. The publishers do not choose to be as specific as possible, because it is not in their own interest in terms of marketing. Most often for this corpus, these are novels that could be categorized as 'romantic'. These I specifically want to be able to distinguish, because of my interest in the relationship between female gender and appraisal of literary quality.<sup>9</sup> So for a select set of novels, we use the genre codes given on Literatuurplein.nl, a Dutch database maintained by libraries, to overrule the NUR-code. Novels in NUR-categories in this set that are too small for general comparison, are assembled under a 'Miscellaneous' category. The final categories are based on the following rule-set:

**1.**

use the NUR-code (the code that Dutch publishers give their novels),

except:

**2.**

when the first and second genre code for the novel on Literatuurplein.nl are 'humoristisch' ('humorous') and 'romantisch' (romantic), then overrule the NUR-code to Humoristisch-romantisch\*

**3.**

when the first genre code on Literatuurplein.nl is 'romantisch', then overrule the NUR-code to Romantisch\*

**4.**

when rule 2 and 3 are not applicable, or the NUR-code is not 301, 302, 305, 331, 332 or 343 (see Table 1), overrule the NUR-code to Miscellaneous\*

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9. I will return to the connection between gender and genre in Chapter 4.

<b>NUR-code</b>	<b>Label</b>
301	Literary novel, novella
302	Translated literary novel, novella
305	Literary thriller
331	Detective
332	Thriller
343	Romantic

Table 1.1: An index of the NUR-codes that were used for conversion in the Riddle corpus.

After the final division into Riddle codes, some categories turned out to contain very few novels. Examples are ‘331 Detective’ and ‘343 Romantic’. Therefore in this thesis, I have grouped the Riddle codes into three main genres, as explained in Section 1.2: literary, suspense and romantic. Miscellaneous is left as-is. Note that the makeup of the corpus is skewed in some respects – that is to say, the number of male and female authors is not equal in each genre; I return to this in Chapter 3. The division of genres and the percentage of male and female authors in those genres can also be found there.

There are limitations to this method, since I impose a categorization on novels beforehand, and then base my conclusions on them. There are two reasons I have decided to pursue this strategy. First of all, van Cranenburgh (2016) shows that there are indeed textual commonalities that separate the genres quite clearly, based on the average literary rating per novel.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the division is not fully arbitrary. Second, since the division is based on third party categorization of the genres, I have imposed few personal decisions onto the categorization.

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10. Genre and judgment of literary quality appear to be strongly connected, I will return to this later.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OUTLINE

Now, having established the background of the project, I can be more specific about the remainder of my thesis and its methods. As I have stated earlier, I apply two disciplinary perspectives, although they cannot be fully separated. In the first part, I supply a state-of-affairs, where I take a literary-sociological perspective. This means I examine the Dutch literary field and the actors it consists of. The question I want to answer is:

***What is the relationship between author gender and the perceived literary quality of the author's work in the recent Dutch literary field?***

I do not assume that there is a direct causal relation between one or the other, but I want to give an indication of the likelihood that an author is perceived as producing works of high literary quality, given their gender. In Chapter 2 I answer the question: to what extent are female and male authors equal in literary prestige? Is there a level playing field for climbing the literary ladder? Literary prestige, as Verboord (2003) shows, is closely tied to perceptions of literary quality.

In Chapter 3, I take a broader perspective. This means I include 'popular' genres and examine the more general reading public, to answer the question: in bestselling fiction, what is the relationship between author gender and perceived literary quality?<sup>11</sup> This, for the most part, is a reflection of the results of the National Reader Survey, the large Dutch reader survey conducted by the Riddle in 2013 I described earlier. To study the role of author gender in the ratings respondents provided, it does not suffice to relate average scores for

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11. The corpus of course does not only contain bestsellers, but also novels that were loaned to patrons by libraries often in that period. However, the overlap between the lists of buys and loans was large, and the novels that were often loaned, but not often sold, only comprise 22 novels of the corpus in total. I therefore, for sake of brevity, sometimes refer only to sales, where I actually mean both sales and loans.

books by authors of a certain gender, since there is also a strong association between gender and genre for instance. These two chapters give a clearer picture of the workings of the literary field, and hence show at which points author gender and perceptions of literary quality are connected.

In the second part, I turn to the texts of the novels themselves, and employ a digital humanities perspective – which includes both computational analysis and ‘manual’ literary interpretation. I examine the texts of hundreds of novels, to answer the question:

***To what extent can an author’s writing style be ascribed to the author’s gender?***

Basically, what I want to know is, to what extent is there merit in applying the gendered lens; the (sub)conscious tendency to consider the author’s gender in the appraisal of literary prose fiction? Chapter 4 supplies the theoretical framework for the second part. In Chapter 5 I apply computational analysis to the Riddle corpus and a reference corpus of novels nominated for a literary award to see to what extent author gender can be related to writing style. In the final part (Chapter 6-7) I zoom in on a specific ‘feminine’ topic, that of attention to physical appearance, and do a cross-genre analysis of a smaller selection of novels to determine the importance of author and protagonist gender in relation to such a topic.

In picking apart these two components, the perception of the author on the one hand, and the texts of the works of these authors on the other hand, I will show how the gendered lens is constructed, and, ultimately, how we can put on different glasses to make it more likely that female authors’ work is judged by its own merit.<sup>12</sup> In other words, I will attempt to show how we might actively try to get past the knowledge of the female gender of an author, to

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12. I am aware I am not the first with this optimistic goal for the Dutch literary field. Maaïke Meijer’s thesis *De Lust tot Lezen* (1988) already aims to provide critics a different type of reading, in her case of female Dutch poets. I believe that this additional attempt, because it is focused on prose fiction and makes use of computational methods, builds on her work and might have additional effect in the current literary landscape.

'read beyond the female'.

# PART 1

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## **The literary field: perceptions of literary quality**

In this first part, I map the Dutch literary field along gender lines, from a literary-sociological standpoint, through an investigation of female authors' prestige, as well as the outcome of the Riddle of Literary Quality's National Reader Survey.



# 2.

## CONTEMPORARY FEMALE AUTHORS AND PRESTIGE

*‘Men, be warned, female writers are on the rise!’*

(De Coster, 2014, my translation)<sup>1</sup>

In theory, female authors have the same opportunities as male authors in the Netherlands. Authors like Connie Palmen, who won the prestigious Libris Literatuur Prijs in 2016, Griet Op de Beeck, who will write the Dutch Book Week Novella to be published in 2018, and debut prize winner Niña Weijers are part of the higher echelons of literary production. These examples indicate that actors in the literary field do assign the label of ‘high literary quality’ to works by female authors. Does this also mean that women and men in general have an equal chance of climbing the literary ladder now?

Research in gender studies has shown that in the past, from the 1970s and looking back, this was not the case. The notion of objective quality was used to create a hierarchy between female and male authors – see for instance Showalter (1977) and Russ (1983) for the Anglo-Saxon world, van Boven

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1. Original text: ‘Mannen, wees gewaarschuwd, vrouwelijke schrijvers rukken op!’ <https://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/-mannen-wees-gewaarschuwd-vrouwelijke-schrijvers-rukken-op~a3577912/>

(1992) and Vogel (2001) for the Netherlands. Van Boven (1992) shows that at the beginning of the twentieth century Dutch female authors – as a group – were judged to write materials of lesser literary quality, which led to them being seen as authors of lesser literary standing. This idea prevented them from being awarded prestige and, eventually, of becoming canonized. Because of such feminist research of the past decades, we are well aware that the simple, self-contained, objective notion of literary quality is deficient. Gender, social class, race, age, all are (subconscious) parts of its construction. Nonetheless, appraisal of literary quality still forms the basis of literary reviews and prizes nowadays. What I want to find out then, is: since the practice of ‘objective’ literary quality judgments is still in place, to what extent are we past gender-related mechanisms of exclusion? If we are indeed past such exclusion, then in theory female authors should have equal access to the highest echelons of the literary field. In other words, in this chapter, I want to answer the question:

***Are female authors in the current Dutch literary field as likely to gain prestige as male authors?***

To establish the meaning of ‘prestige’, I turn to Verboord (2003). Verboord attempts to construct a hierarchy of literary authors. He critiques the notion of classification based on an unexplained notion of quality:

*In the field of literary studies, the notion of classification by quality is not only one of the most frequently applied notions, it is generally also one of the least explicated. Some authors are considered more important than others, but it is left unexplained on what grounds this hierarchy is based. (p. 259)*

Verboord finds that, because critics operate in a social context and the grounds of quality are left unexplained, it is better to perform classification of authors by looking at literary prestige rather than at the (perceived) literary quality of the texts authors write (pp. 261-262). In this thesis, I do both, which allows me to relate the concepts. Verboord defines prestige as “the esteem authors have in the literary field and based on the value that is attributed to their literary work” (ibidem: p. 263), which I use as a starting point for my quantification of the Dutch literary field in the next section. In the second section, I present

related work on several countries to place my results in a larger context. However, solely presenting the recent and current state of the literary field would be insufficient. Critics inevitably point to the future: “But are we not on the verge of change?”, exemplified by the headline with which I opened this chapter. Thus, by way of conclusion, I address this retort.

## 2.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DUTCH LITERARY FIELD (2007-2012)

Have female authors gained equal prestige to male authors in the Dutch literary field? To measure prestige, I examine the numerical presence of women on several steps of the ladder of the literary field, see Figure 2.1. To be awarded literary prestige means that an author’s work is attributed high value. How does this happen? In order for an author to be taken seriously as a literary author, she first needs to be considered a professional author, not an amateur. Then, she needs to be published as a *literary* author, rather than as an author of genre fiction; after that, she needs to be read and reviewed by critics. The ultimate step for assigned value is to receive a national literary award, see also Verboord (2003). I do not measure inclusion in academic articles or encyclopedia’s, pillars of prestige Verboord does include, because solidification of prestige – and hence inclusion in academic publications – generally takes time, and I focus on the very recent past in my research. However, I will get back to this in the final section of this chapter. Also, there are other in-between steps, such as inclusion in literary magazines, but for the general picture I like to paint here (the next chapter delves deeper), these steps should suffice. I have gathered data from several sources. I roughly cover the period 2007-2016, which is the period of the last ten years, but with a focus on 2007-2012, depending on the availability of data.<sup>2</sup>

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2. All works of the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus were published between 2007-2012, hence this selection.

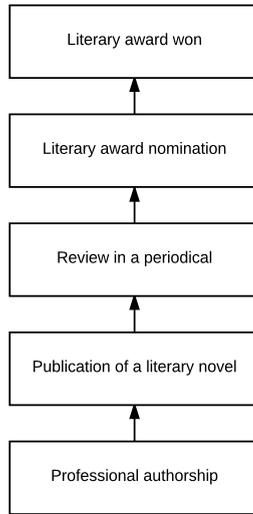


Figure 2.1: Literary ladder of prestige – I have excluded canonization, for instance through academic reflection or acceptance in educational curricula, because I research the recent past.

## Professional authorship

There are few hard numbers on the gender division among authors in the Netherlands. The Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (Central Bureau of Statistics, CBS) has collected data on artists in the Netherlands for the periods 2004-2006 and 2007-2009 (CBS, 2011). In almost all artistic fields, men represent 60% and women about 40%, but for the group ‘authors, translators and other creative professions’, it is the other way around: 63% women in 2004-2006; 59% women in 2007-2009. Although the category does not just contain authors, it is telling that this is the only category that contains mainly text-related artistic professions (others include visual arts, performance art, etc.), and that this is the only group which contains more women than men. The fact that ‘authors’ are the first profession to be mentioned in the group, suggests that it is the largest of the three. But I do not want to overestimate, so I will be careful and say that the number of female and male authors is equally divided at 50%. In the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus, mainly consisting of bestsellers, the percentage of female authors is 49 (men’s is lower, I have counted duo’s of authors separately), which supports this careful estimate that female authors roughly have an equal part in the overall field of fiction.

## Publishing literary fiction

A second step in gaining prestige is getting published, and more specifically, as a literary author. In the Netherlands, there is a categorization system for novels, which is applied when they are published, as I discussed in Chapter 1. This is called the Nederlandstalige Uniforme Rubrieksindeling (NUR; Dutch-language Uniform Classification). The publisher decides to which category a novel is assigned. As novels in the category '301 Literary novel, novella' (only originally Dutch works) and '302 Translated literary novel, novella' are generally placed in the most prominent places in bookstores, the codes cannot absolutely serve as a stamp of quality. Publishers use the classification to push their novels to the front of bookstores. The translation of *Fifty Shades of Grey* was for instance published as '302 Translated literary novel, novella'. On the other hand, bookstores will need to be able to trust the publishers in their categorization, the books cannot be assigned fully randomly.<sup>3</sup> The 301 and 302 labels basically function as a category for general fiction. What is important however, is that AKO and Libris prize-winning novels in the Netherlands have generally been published in the category of '301, Literary novel, novella'. Moreover, other NUR-codes pertain to what could be called 'genre fiction', such as thrillers, horror and other popular fiction (see also Chapter 3). Thus, I use the category of '301' as a proxy for being published as a literary author (for an author who writes in the Dutch language), even though not all of the books in this category are considered to be highly literary by professional critics.

The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB; National Library) has supplied me with a list of titles published in the Dutch language in the period of 2007-2012, the period of the Riddle corpus.<sup>4</sup> The list consist of 28,378 titles. In the category of '301 Literary novel, novella', 5,842 titles were published (20.6%). As gender information was not provided, first names were used as a proxy. An algorithm categorized them according to manually supplied rules.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Interview with editor Lisanne Mathijssen (HarperCollins Holland), Utrecht, 22 April 2016.

4. The National Library keeps a collection of all materials published in the Dutch language, and their aim is to be complete. Their estimate is that the list contains 95% of all titles published in that period. I thank Steven Claeysens for supplying me with the list.

5. I would like to thank Carlos Martinez Ortiz for implementing the program.

For instance by applying the rule ‘if the name ends with the diminutive ‘-je’, assume the author is a woman’. When the algorithm could not make a decision because there was no rule, I manually supplied the gender of the author. If the algorithm identified an author as both female and male, it returned an ‘undecided’. I could also manually alter results if they were found incorrect. This resulted in percentages of 55% men, 36% women, 9% unknown or unidentified. If we split the unknowns into half and add them to the men and women, around 40% of the ‘301’ novels would have been written by female authors. This amounts to about 2,300 titles in the NUR-code 301 by female authors, over a period of 6 years. Thus, it is highly likely that more male than female authors are published in the 301 NUR-code.

## **Reviews and awards**

Ultimately, recognition by the gatekeepers in the literary field is what builds cultural as well as economic capital (see for instance English, 2009). Gatekeepers are the people and institutions who decide which works are of high enough quality to deserve the larger audience’s attention. Literary critique is an important element of gatekeeping practices, and this is still often performed through reviews in periodicals (Verboord, 2010). The Dutch blog *Lezeres des Vaderlands* provides an overview of the skewness of gender in such reviews in the Netherlands and Flanders.<sup>6</sup> The blog, written by an anonymous author, performs a gender count over the year 2016, for the book pages of eight large Dutch and Flemish newspapers and periodicals. An overall presence of works by female authors of approximately 30% is counted for that year, not considering review length; reviews, columns and interviews were included in the count.<sup>7</sup> We cannot assume this number to hold for more years, but as 2016 is very recent, it supports the argument that female authors have not yet reached full equality in the Dutch literary field.

For the reference corpus that I use in Chapter 5, which contains 50 novels nominated for either the AKO Literatuurprijs and/or the Libris Literatuur

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6. The title of the blog is hard to translate. Literally it says ‘The Reader (fem.) of the Fatherland’. ‘Fatherland’ has a different connotation in Dutch than in English. <https://lezeresdesvaderlands.wordpress.com/>. (Last visit: 31 October 2016).

Prijs in the period 2007-2012, I have also counted reviews, interviews and columns in periodicals and newspapers. For this select group of works, which gained in attention because of their nomination, the gender division was equal.<sup>8</sup> 330 of the 652 reviews collected were of books written by female authors (51%). This is not surprising. As Janssen (1997) shows, reviewers are generally quite conservative, and look to peers to choose which books to review and which not. A nomination thus might be important in pushing the number of reviews for female authors. Overall, female authors are nominated much less often for a literary award than male authors. I have counted nominations in the period 2007-2012 for the AKO Literatuurprijs and the Libris Literatuur Prijs: 37 out of 141 were by a female author (26%).<sup>9</sup> This skewness does not lie with the juries alone: in the 2007 Libris jury report the jury states that “over 50 of 160” submissions were written by women (over 30%), which they consider to be a “decent number” (Habbema et al., 2007). Publishing houses send in less novels by female authors. However, this does not mean that juries could not pick more novels by female authors than they do (Pafunda, 2012).

The ultimate recognition, after reviews and nominations, is the awarding of a literary prize, selected by a professional jury (English, 2009). English is quite skeptical about the intrinsic value of literary prizes, but as Piper and Portelance (2016) note in response:

*Few genres have come to stand as icons of literary taste more than prizewinning novels. However ambivalent we may feel about literary prizes (...) the literary prize is designed above all else to distinguish.*

The AKO (now ECI) and Libris Literatuur Prijs receive much attention in

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7. <https://lezeresdesvaderlands.wordpress.com/2017/02/16/mogen-wij-de-rekening-een-jaar-lekkertellen/>. (Last visit 21 July 2017).

8. Part of the reviews were written before the nomination, but often the nomination itself is mentioned in the review. This indicates that the nomination indeed resulted in more attention for the novel. I thank Janouk de Groot for collecting the reviews.

9. For the Libris Literatuur Prijs, I used the longlists, for the AKO I used the shortlist, as the longlists were no longer all available.

the Dutch media, and are highly anticipated. They also have high monetary rewards (both 50,000 euro each in 2017). At the same time, they have literary credibility (see van Dijk, 1999). I counted award winnings for these two prizes. This time over the full decade, but split in two to see if there has been an improvement of late, from 2007-2011 and 2012-2016. Female authors won 30% of these two prizes in the period 2007-2011, and 20% in the period 2012-2016, a decline of 10%. It has an average of 25% overall. I also singled out the period 2007-2012, that of the Riddle corpus and the counts in the previous paragraphs, to be able to compare these, and this results in a 25% female share as well.<sup>10</sup>

A salient detail pertaining to the skewed selections can be found in van der Deijl et al. (2016). The authors coded 170 novels of the 2013 bulk list of the Libris Literatuur Prijs. The bulk list is the list that is considered for the prize after a first sifting. They find that even when a female author is considered for this prestigious prize, the protagonist of her novel is most likely a highly educated white male. Female protagonists are scarce in the pre-selection.

To sum up my results: female authors of prose fiction are not equal in prestige to male authors of prose fiction in the Netherlands. The higher the author can climb the literary ladder, the less likely it is a female, even for a recent period such as 2007-2012. Although some of the numbers are not 100% certain, it is clear that at the top – nominations for literary awards and the awards themselves – female authors have lost ground, see Figure 2.2.

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10. I did consider other literary awards, such as De Gouden Uil ('The Golden Owl', since 2015 called Fintro Literatuurprijs), and the P.C. Hooftprijs (a career prize), which are mentioned as influential in Van Dijk (1999), but these do not appear to have the same impact in the Netherlands as the former two; moreover, the Fintro has been canceled as of 2018. The outcome would not have been much different had I done so, either. De Gouden Uil professional jury prize has had a percentage of 10% female winners in the period 2007-2016 (1 out of 10), and the P.C. Hooftprijs 33% (3 out of 10).

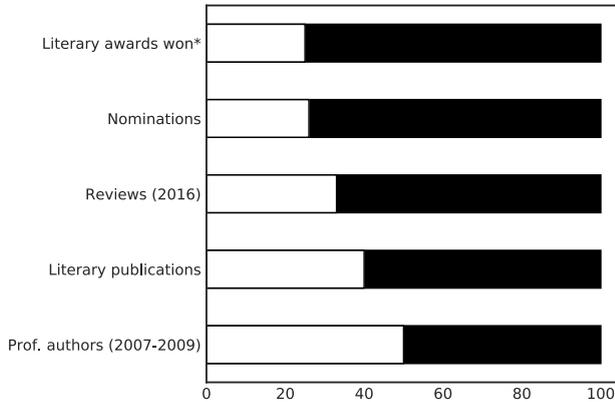


Figure 2.2: Percentage of female and male authors in Dutch literary hierarchy in the period 2007-2012, unless otherwise specified. \*The same percentage holds for the period 2007-2016.

## 2.2 RELATED WORK

Some of the numbers in the previous section are based on estimates, but recent sociological research validates my findings. In the studies and counts discussed below, literary prestige is measured by coverage in prestigious periodicals (newspapers, magazines, often in print) and award winnings.<sup>11</sup> To provide context, the studies cover not only the Netherlands, but also the United States of America and some European countries.

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11. There are new forms which help readers decide which literature to read, such as television, social media, and websites like Goodreads and LibraryThing, but their influence on literary prestige has not yet been well documented. Verboord (2010) finds that the traditional system of cultural evaluation is not affected very much by new forms of critique, rather the new system is a complement to, not a substitute for the old. He also stresses, however, that further research is necessary because of a relatively small sample. Verboord (2012) does show that

In the USA, VIDA (not an acronym) is known for counting the number of female and male authors discussed in large, national magazines and newspapers; as well as the number of female and male critics in these publications. In the Netherlands, such a count has been performed on a smaller scale by Dutch blog *Lezeres des Vaderlands*, as related in the previous section. Both these counts show that female authors are well behind their male counterparts in numbers, although some periodicals have taken measures after the first VIDA counts in 2010.<sup>12</sup> These counts are rather informal, albeit very comprehensive in the case of VIDA. Berkers et al. (2014) ties several countries together and embeds similar research within the context of professional literary authorship at large. The authors compare the gender gap in newspaper coverage of arts and culture in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA in the period 1955-2005. They find that in the whole period (even at the end) women are underrepresented in all forms of newspaper coverage, regardless of their share in the profession. For instance, in the Netherlands, 63% of all registered authors at the time of the research are female; their newspaper

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for US fiction female authors benefit from new media, in the sense that they receive more coverage; prestige is not part of this research. Thelwall (2017) analyzes a body of 50,000 reviews on GoodReads along gender lines, but does not focus on literary prestige either. The paper suggests that gender differences exist – mainly in the relationship author gender-genre. Men do get statistically significant better overall judgments in the genre of ‘Literature’, but there are many genres on GoodReads, also including Fiction and Novels; this should be looked into further for firm conclusions. As another proxy, I performed a manual count of a relatively new gatekeeper in the Netherlands, which at least ensures good sales, the Book Panel of the popular television program *De Wereld Draait Door* (a pun, it has a dual meaning: ‘the world keeps turning’ as well as ‘the world is going mad’). The Book Panel was introduced in 2012. It discusses national and international books on various fiction and non-fiction topics continually, but also presents a selection through a Book of the Month. The publisher of the chosen book immediately uses the selection by the Panel in her marketing, and sales generally rise instantly. The Panel consists of two men and two women from the book industry. From September 2012 through April 2017, 37 Books of the Month have been presented, 27 of which written by men (73%), 10 by women (27%).

12. <http://www.vidaweb.org/2014-vida-count/>. (Last visit: 31-10-2016).

coverage was about 20% (pp. 130, 135). They also conclude that there is a form of horizontal gender segregation: when women are present, they are a bigger part of the genres that have lower cultural status (modern dance, fashion) – and even in those fields there is no sign of a domination by women. The higher status genres are dominated by men; this includes theater and literary writing (p. 141). This resonates the well-known research by Tuchman and Fortin (1984) which introduced the concept of ‘edging women out’: where there is status to be gained, male authors take over and female authors are left behind.

Le Guin (2004) also shows that literary status is reserved mostly for male authors. She counts female and male prize winners of (mostly US) prizes from the moment of the establishment of said prizes. Examples are the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Pulitzer Prize for Literature, but also genre awards such as the Nebula Award (science fiction) and Newberry Award (juvenile fiction). In her count the Booker Prize performs best, with a ratio of two men winning for every woman, the Nobel Prize is worst with a ratio of 10 to 1 (p. 145). Surprisingly, except for the Nobel Prize, female authors gain no ground during the twentieth century and sometimes even see a sharp decline, as with the Pulitzer. The Pulitzer male/female ratio has been 5:1 since 1943, while it was about 1:1 during the period 1918-1943: the prize was awarded 25 times in that period, of which 12 times to a woman (p. 148). And even though female authors are the vast majority of juvenile fiction writers, they still get awarded much less often than do men.

Verboord (2012) performs a comprehensive study, diachronic and over multiple countries, and again, the picture remains quite similar. The author compares bestseller lists and literary award winners in the period 1960-2009 in France, Germany and the USA. He shows that across these countries and periods, the presence of female authors in bestseller lists is much larger than among literary award winners – albeit still smaller than the percentage of male bestseller authors. This indicates that female authors do get published, but

have troubles in reaching the more prestigious regions of the literary field.<sup>13</sup> Countries where the tradition of highbrow culture system is longer (France and Germany), have a bigger gender gap than the USA, where the system is newer. And, as in Le Guin's (2004) count, we see that rather than becoming better, prestige for female authors has stagnated or declined in two of the three countries. Only in Germany has the amount of female prize winners steadily kept rising since the 1970s (28.1% in 2000s versus 14.0% in the 1980s). The US has stagnated (30.4% in 2000s versus 31.5% in the 1980s) and in France it has declined since the 1980s (15.9% in the 2000s, 17.4% in the 1980s) (p. 402). Overall, these studies show that even though female authors are not excluded from the higher regions of the literary field, they do have a harder time reaching the top than male authors do. And, contrary to popular belief, the gender gap does not appear to get (much) smaller.

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13. Since there is little to no data on the participation of female authors in the literary production fields of these countries, it is not possible for Verboord to compare these numbers to the presence of female authors overall.

## 2.3 CONCLUSION: ON THE VERGE OF CHANGE?

The invested reader might think now: it might be true that female authors have not been equal so far, but we are on the threshold of change. There has been so much attention recently for the problematic position of female authors in the Netherlands – which is true – that this is surely from now on a thing of the past. As this is the type of reasoning that might invalidate the empirical research discussed above in a single stroke, I address this retort by way of conclusion. I will now include canonization as part of this argument, because I discuss historical research as well. By canonization I mean the acceptance of works by female authors in for instance educational curricula and literary anthologies.

### **Assumed equality**

That it is valid to address the argument that the situation is about to change, I make clear with two examples. Two recent Dutch canon formation projects, one specifically focused on female authors, and one which is not, believe that in the very recent past, the inequality has been solved. In 2010 Bel and Vaessens published an anthology on Dutch women's literary writing, which works with the assumption that the gender gap is becoming smaller. The book assembles portraits of women writers from 1880-2010. The authors acknowledge past inequality, but they are extremely cautious in describing the present-day situation and appear to suggest that there is no longer a difference between male and female authors:

*By now, the attention for female authors among critics and scholars appears to be much more obvious than twenty, thirty years ago. Literature by women is no longer a ‘separate chapter’ (van Boven). Still, it can be **useful and interesting** to turn around the old status quo, and to imagine Dutch literature by way of leaving out all male authors (...). In this book, too, the male authors have been left out, because even though female authors may have taken up a firm place in Dutch-language literature, that does not preclude that outside of **the canon, which is still quite narrow**, there is also a large richness and variety of female voices in literature.<sup>14</sup> (p.16, my stress, my translation)*

Bel and Vaessens assert the “firm place” that female authors now have in the Dutch-language literature, and state that female authors are no longer treated as a different category, separate from male authors. Their anthology, they claim, reverses the more common motivation of making a women-only canon: it does not try to add female authors, but subtracts the men, because this is “useful and interesting”. In other words, the choice to include *only* female authors is not argued solidly. If the only goal is to expand on the “quite narrow” canon (one could argue that canons are inherently a very small selection), it would also be justifiable to include an equal amount of male and female authors, or to focus on non-white authors; there is no need to restrict oneself explicitly to female authors. The narrowness of the canon they refer to could also imply that there are still few women in the canon, in which case their selection would be motivated, but this is not explicitly stated. A 2015 attempt in forming a Dutch-language literary canon appears to provide a solution to this conundrum.<sup>15</sup> It was constructed by the Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren (VFL; Flemish Fund for the Letters) and the Koninklijke

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14. Original text: “Toch kan het nog steeds nuttig en interessant zijn de oude vanzelfsprekendheid eens om te draaien, en een voorstelling te maken van de Nederlandstalige literatuur met weglating van alle mannelijke auteurs. (...) Ook in dit boek zijn de mannelijke auteurs weggelaten, want vrouwelijke auteurs mogen inmiddels een stevige plaats hebben ingenomen in de Nederlandstalige literatuur, dat neemt niet weg dat ook buiten de toch altijd betrekkelijk smalle canon een grote rijkdom en variëteit bestaat aan vrouwelijke stemmen in de literatuur.”

15. <http://litterairecanon.be/werken>. (Last visit: 31 October 2016).

Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde (KANTL; Royal Academy for Dutch Language and Letters). Of fifty-one works of literature, five works are ascribed to a female author, and none appear to be by a non-white author. The composers of the canon recognize this and feel it not to be a problem, as this imbalance will change in the future:

*There is a small note to make. The canon that lies before you, is, quite inevitably, the canon of the white male. But we are convinced that that dynamic canon will look different in the future: multi-divers. Because the canon lives. Starting today.*<sup>16</sup> (my translation)

The authors are positive that because of their criterion that the author has to have deceased by the time of inclusion in the canon, and the present-day situation is more equal now, this imbalance will resolve itself, eventually. They, like Bel and Vaessens, place a gender imbalance mainly in the past, which I have shown is incorrect. Therefore, it is valid to address the argument that any remaining gender inequality will soon disappear.

### **Pre-20th century: professional female authors do exist**

Why this reasoning is problematic, can be made clear by looking at literary history. The idea that formerly, female authors were absent or unseen, but that this situation is about to change, is centuries old. As early as the eighteenth century one critic jokingly named his age the “century of the woman” (“eeuw van de vrouw”), because female authors rose up in large numbers in his view (Schenkeveld-van der Dussen and Porteman, 1997: p. 4). Schenkeveld-van der

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16. <http://litterairecanon.be/over/uitgangspunten>. (Last visit: 31 October 2016). Original text: “Er is nog een kleine kanttekening. De canon die voorligt is, het kan eigenlijk niet anders, de canon van de blanke man. Maar wij zijn ervan overtuigd dat die dynamische canon er in de toekomst anders uit zal zien: multidivers. Want de canon leeft. Vanaf nu.” It might be interesting to calculate the time it will take to for this to happen, based on the assumption that female authors have just become equal in prestige to male authors. (Which, as I show in this chapter, is not correct.)

Dussen and Porteman (1997) also paints a similar picture for later centuries. The volume presents biographies and work of 150 Dutch female authors from 1550 through 1850. In the introduction the authors explain the rationale behind the choice for a female-centered anthology and make the following note:

*Who writes about the nineteenth-century novel in the Netherlands, will mainly have to discuss women, not because they form a separate category, but because they were the ones who called the shots. A good question is then for instance what caused the fact that the historical novel, practiced more often by men, has gotten so much more attention in literary-historical research than the contemporary novel, which was practiced by women.*<sup>17</sup> (p. 5, my translation)

Contrary to common perception, the volume argues, female authors were not outnumbered by male authors in the nineteenth century, their novels were simply valued less and were scarcely canonized (ibidem: p. 4). The authors provide no numbers, however. Kuitert (2001) does give information on the amount of female authors in the nineteenth century, although she does not provide equivalent information on male authors. She confirms that there was a large group of professional female authors in the Netherlands at the time. In a 1898 catalogue of female professionals, “as many as” 447 active professional Dutch authors were listed, of whom 183 in the “belle lettres” (p. 152). We cannot be sure if they “called the shots” based on this information, but female authors were decidedly not absent in the nineteenth century. Their work is scarcely canonized, however, based on the argument of a lack of quality (which Kuitert sustains).

Van Boven (1992), as discussed earlier, maps judgments on women’s writing in the time frame 1898-1930 in the Netherlands. She describes a similar process. At the beginning of the twentieth century, female authors start being

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17. Original text: “Wie bijvoorbeeld over de negentiende-eeuwse roman in Nederland schrijft, zal het vooral over vrouwen moeten hebben, niet omdat ze een aparte categorie vormen, maar omdat zij grotendeels de dienst uitmaakten. Een goede vraag is dan bijvoorbeeld ook hoe het komt dat de vaker door mannen beoefende historische roman zoveel meer de aandacht heeft getrokken in het literair-historische onderzoek dan de door vrouwen beoefende eigentijdse.”

acknowledged as part of the literary field in the Netherlands. Again, against assumptions, women do get coverage from literary critics. Van Boven finds 335 reviews over a period of 32 years; she provides no equivalent count of male authors, either. In bundles of such reviews however, reviews on books by women are rarely included: one or two over a course of several volumes, in other words a “non-representative small part” (p.22). Thus, women are again excluded from canonization. These examples indicate that also in earlier times, female authors were a productive part of the field of fiction – albeit not necessarily equal to male authors – but do not remain, not even in a representative percentage.

### **20th century and beyond: repeated rise of female authors**

At the end the twentieth century, the female author is still repeatedly declared to be on the rise. Haveman (1999) states that the abundance of women’s book clubs in his time will result in female authors not being overlooked anymore – notwithstanding the overall bad quality of their work. He signals that this rise began in the seventies:

*The march that started in the seventies with Hannes Meinkema, Anja Meulenbelt, Marga Minco, Hella Haasse and Mensje van Keulen, culminated in the nineties with impressive scores for Nelleke Noordervliet, Margriet de Moor, Renate Dorrestein.*<sup>18</sup>  
(my translation)

The “impressive scores” refer to sales. The author fears women will take over the literary world altogether and as a result will no longer be forgotten, which will ruin the overall quality of literary production. Interestingly, the type of Dutch authors he critiques most vehemently, Dutch female literary authors, are sparsely represented in the Riddle corpus of bestsellers. This means that they do not actually dominate sales in the period 2007-2012. Moreover, in relation to the recognition he is afraid will befall female authors: in the

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18. Original text: “De opmars die in de jaren zeventig inzette met Hannes Meinkema, Anja Meulenbelt, Marga Minco, Hella Haasse en Mensje van Keulen, culmineerde in de jaren negentig met indrukwekkende scores voor Nelleke Noordervliet, Margriet de Moor, Renate Dorrestein.”

five years after 1999, not one woman won either the Libris or the AKO Literatuurprijs. Nor has their work been equally rewarded over the last years, as I have shown in Section 2.1.

Eighteen years later, Steinz (2017) argues that the ‘new author’ is a woman and that women write better literature, because they have something to fight for. In 2017, so far, the Libris Literatuur Prijs, Fintro Literatuurprijs (former Gouden Uil), P.C. Hooftprijs and ECI Literatuurprijs were all won by white men, indicating that this new author has not yet taken her place in the hierarchy. Moreover, Steinz’s logic is flawed. Women arguably have had enough to fight for over the last centuries, but their work has not yet been acknowledged to the same extent as work by male authors.

In theory, it is possible that these authors are correct to some extent, that female authors just keep rising, and they will continue to do so. Thus, that there is change, but it is extremely slow. Section 2.2 points to the contrary, but to make a firmer case, I have performed a count of all winnings of the previously mentioned literary prizes, who all have large monetary awards (25,000 – 60,000 euro): the AKO Literatuurprijs, Libris Literatuur Prijs, Gouden Uil/Fintro Literatuurprijs and PC Hooftprijs, the only lifetime achievement award of the four.

Figure 2.3 shows that there is no obvious rise in female winnings over the last forty years. In the first decade, 1978-1987, three female authors won, but for nine of ten years, only the P.C. Hooftprijs existed, so this amounts to 37.5%. The second decade, in which the final two prizes saw the light of day, there were 27 awards, of which 6 won by women (22.2%). The third decade, 1998-2007, curiously saw a sharp decline: only 1 female author won a prize (2.5%). In the final decade, the same level of two decades earlier is reached: 22.5%. The course of development is capricious at best.

The rhetoric that lies behind the thought that a) the current age is different from the period before, and that this means that b) female authors are inevitably soon becoming equal to male authors, is problematic. If we work under the assumption that we want female authors to become equal to male authors (I do, at least), this type of reasoning might be harmful, because it leads

	AKO (ECI)	Libris	Gouden Uil (Fintro)	PC Hooftprijs
1978	-	-	-	m
1979	-	-	-	v
1980	-	-	-	m
1981	-	-	-	m
1982	-	-	-	v
1983	-	-	-	v
1984	-	-	-	-
1985	-	-	-	-
1986	-	-	-	-
1987	m	-	-	m
1988	m	-	-	m
1989	v	-	-	m
1990	m	-	-	m
1991	m	-	-	v
1992	v	-	-	m
1993	m	-	-	m
1994	m	v	-	m
1995	v	m	m	m
1996	m	m	m	m
1997	m	m	m	v
1998	m	m	m	m
1999	m	m	m	m
2000	m	m	m	v
2001	m	m	m	m
2002	m	m	m	m
2003	m	m	m	m
2004	m	m	m	m
2005	m	m	m	m
2006	m	m	m	m
2007	m	m	m	m
2008	v	v	m	m
2009	m	m	m	m
2010	m	m	m	v
2011	v	m	m	m
2012	m	m	m	m
2013	v	m	m	m
2014	m	m	m	m
2015	m	m	m	v
2016	m	v	v	v
2017	m	m	m	m

Figure 2.3. The number of times female and male authors have won one of the four largest Dutch-language literary prizes over the last forty years. Dashes indicate that the prize had not yet been initiated. It is not possible to conclude progress from this capricious development.

to complacency. Readers, either non-professional or professional, who would like the situation to be different get the sense that the situation will solve itself and will feel less inclined to take action, for instance by doing something as simple as choosing to buy a literary novel by a female author instead of by a male author. The result is that the pace of change is very slow, if the change is not levelling: Table 2.1 and the research discussed in the previous section indicate that a stagnation is just as likely.<sup>19</sup> In a period of time where many Dutch people believe women to be equal to men, chances of a female author being reviewed in the Dutch book pages, or winning a literary prose prize is decidedly below 50%.

In sum, female prose authors have never gained equal prestige to their male counterparts, not even in the present day. This is indicated by my data, but also by recent sociological studies. I would argue that there is no real equality in prestige until the picture over a number of years is steady, when we see that as many men as women have won a literary prize over a consistent period of time. This time has not yet begun. And even then there might be a caveat: will such prizes eventually result in equal inclusion in the canon? The older examples indicate that the idea of ‘female authors on the rise’ is centuries old. Merely declaring equality to be at hand does not result in equal appreciation – and perhaps even creates a backlash. Even though female authors have

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19. In a conversation with Deb Verhoeven, Associate Dean of Engagement and Innovation at University of Technology Sydney, she suggested that the maximum percentage of women “allowed” at any top level of institutions/fields is about 30%; and that without affirmative action, it will never become more. I have found no studies which confirm this, but there is evidence that gender equality is actually perceived as female domination. An example are the skewed estimates of female talking time in a conversation (Holmes, 1995). These skewed estimates result in incorrect ideas on when exactly gender equality is reached. If people (men and women) believe that men and women talk the same amount of time, when in fact men talk more, and think that women talk more than men, when there is actually equality; and we extrapolate this finding, it could be an indication that Verhoeven’s argument about ‘allowance’ of higher percentages of women is true. The literary field would not readily support an amount of female prizewinners that is equal to that of male prizewinners if that means they perceive female prizewinners to be the majority. This is a possible entry point for further research.

been present as professional authors and have been read for centuries, they are rarely assigned the highest acclaims of literary quality in prose fiction. And then, when selections for posterity need to be made, female authors are repeatedly left behind. In the end, the canon remains male.

Please note that I do not attempt to lay blame, but that I observe the situation for female authors as opposed to male authors. I show that there is an imbalance. In this chapter, I have focused on the literary genre, and have restricted myself to selection by gatekeepers. This does not paint a full picture. Therefore, in the next chapter, I zoom out from the higher regions of the literary field and instead, look at the larger picture of production and consumption, through the results of the National Reader Survey.

# 3.

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## JUDGING BESTSELLING FICTION: THE NATIONAL READER SURVEY (2013)

*The book is a typical woman's book. It is an easy to read summer story. There's nothing wrong with that, and I think it is a very nice genre, but I don't think it's literature. Literature to me is a profound, quite hard and difficult to read book.<sup>1</sup>*

The Dutch literary field does not just include professional readers, but also lay readers: people who read for fun, diversion, self-betterment, etc.. These readers are as much part of the economic and symbolic production of value as the professionals are (see Figure 3.1), and therefore should not be overlooked. A selection of these readers takes note of the movements of literary 'gatekeepers' by reading reviews for instance, and buying books because they are nominated for a literary award; others do not. Most of them have been taught in school which books are and are not considered to be 'literature', even if only through the books they were and were not allowed to read for their final exams in high school.

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1. A respondent motivates her low score in the National Reader Survey for the translation of Sophie Kinsella's *Remember me?* Original text: "Het boek is een typisch vrouwenboek. Het is een simpel te lezen zomerverhaal. Hier is niks mis mee, en ik vind het een erg leuk genre, maar ik vind het geen literatuur. Literatuur is voor mij een diepgaand, vrij zwaar en moeizaam te lezen boek."

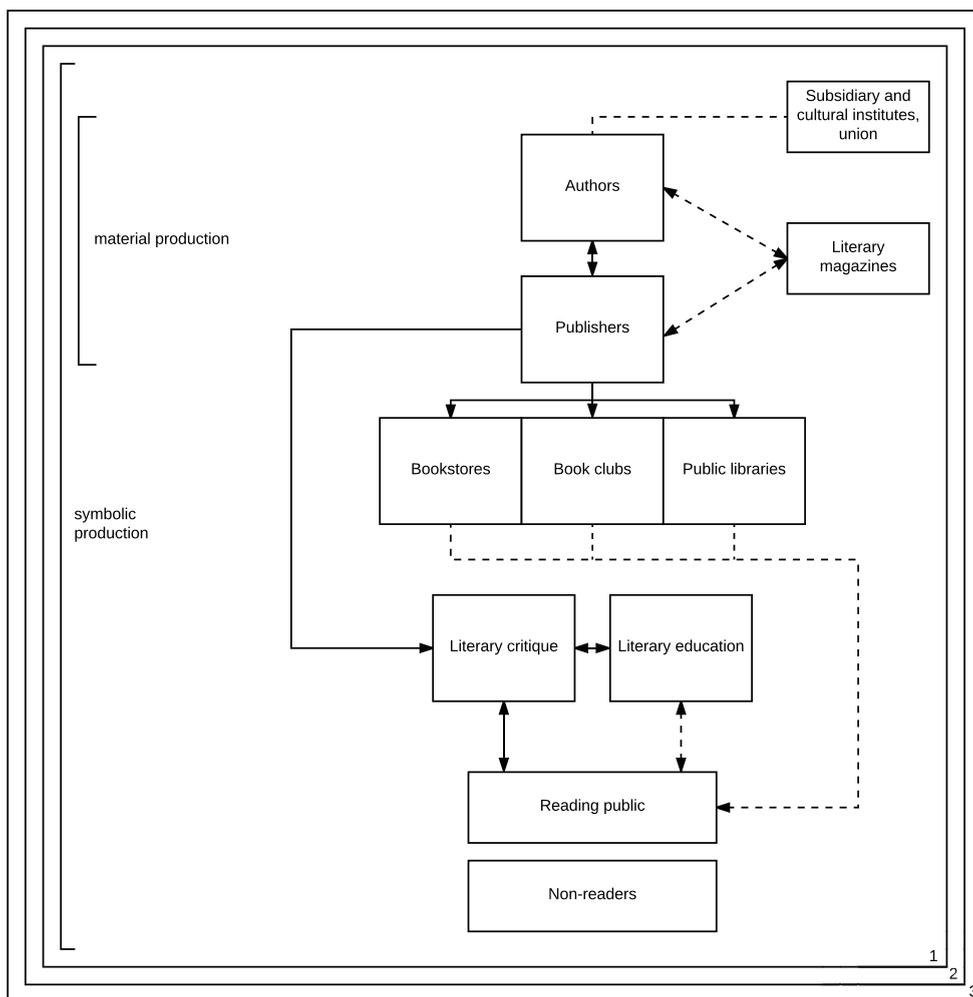


Figure 3.1: The current Dutch literary field (1), embedded in the larger cultural field (2), embedded in the larger social field (3). Replicated from Chapter 1.

The Riddle project has asked such readers about their ideas on literary quality in Het Nationale Lezersonderzoek (NLO; the National Reader Survey). Respondents, who were recruited online, were supplied with a list of recent novels and asked to give a rating of literary quality on novels they had read on a scale from 1 through 7. They were also asked to motivate one of their ratings. With this survey, the focus of this chapter shifts from literary sociology to reception theory (Jauss, 1982), or more precisely reader-response theory, as first performed in Richards (1929). We explicitly asked for dogmatic responses from the respondents and thereby acquired a wealth of information on the perception of literary quality. The Riddle project's goal was not so much to map the reader's perspective on the literary works, but to find correlations between the collected ratings and textual characteristics of the novel (see van Cranenburgh, 2016). I, however, focus on the relationship between author gender and the average ratings (see also Chapter 1). My goal with this chapter is to widen the picture of the Dutch literary field that I have presented in the previous chapter, and see if author gender matters to a larger audience. I aim to answer the question:

***In the National Reader Survey, how are author gender and the ratings of literary quality of her work connected?*<sup>2</sup>**

Note that I do not assume a causation between author gender and the rating. Rather, I map the likelihood of female and male authors to be in the position of being judged as producing works of high literary quality. More specifically, in this chapter I ask: what does it mean to be a bestselling author in the wider Dutch literary field nowadays? In which genres does her work sell? (Section 3.2) How is her work judged? (Section 3.3) Does it matter if her work is judged by a woman or a man? (Section 3.4) And how do respondents motivate their judgments of quality? (Section 3.5) These are the questions I answer in this chapter. In my discussion of the National Reader Survey, I am not trying to isolate gender. Rather the contrary, I show how several aspects of fictional work, such as genre and author gender, are entwined in the appraisal of

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2. I use 'she' and 'her' when I refer to the general author.

literary quality. But of course the question of the importance of the gender of the author *sec* remains. Therefore, the Riddle project conducted a second experiment to find out to what extent the gender of the author itself matters in judging literary quality (Section 3.6).<sup>3</sup>But first, I will disclose the details of the National Reader Survey.

## 3.1 SURVEY SETUP

The Riddle of Literary Quality project undertook The National Reader Survey (NLO) in 2013 (see also van Cranenburgh 2016, pp. 95-100).



Figure 3.2: Logo of the National Reader Survey (2013), design by Bas Doppen.

The main goal was to collect as many ratings as possible on a set of Dutch-language novels, on two scales: literariness and overall quality (see also Chapter 1). Respondents were first asked about their general reading preferences. Then they were presented with a list consisting of title and author of 401 bestselling novels (see Section 1.3 and Appendix A.1) and asked to tick which novels they had read.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Note that in this thesis, I do not have an audience of sociologists in mind, but rather the digital humanist who does not necessarily have this knowledge. Therefore I explain some basic statistical tests somewhat more extensively.

4. Note that we did not present the respondents with pictures of covers, as sometimes multiple covers of one novel exist, but also as not to influence the respondents' response with extra visual information.

The novels are all fictional, in part originally Dutch, in part translated into Dutch and spread over several genres, which include suspense and romantic novels. The respondents were then given seven of the titles they had selected as 'read' and asked to rate each of them on a scale of literary quality and a scale of overall quality. The scales were Likert scales which ran from 1-7. For the scale of literary quality, 1 was presented as 'highly literary' and 7 as 'definitely not literary'. We report reverse scores however, so that 1 means 'definitely not literary' and 7 means 'highly literary'; this is more intuitive to interpret. Each time respondents had finished rating seven novels, they were prompted to rate seven more (if they had reported to have read that many) until they opted to quit. After this, they could also opt to rate novels they themselves had not read. Respondents were not given an explanation of the concept of literary quality in order to obtain intuitive results. Some expressed difficulty with this, but many others did apply their own ideas and mentioned for instance good structure, plot, character development, etc. as elements of literary quality; I return to this in Section 3.5.

The survey ran from March 2013 through September 2013. It was accompanied by a marketing campaign, which included the publication of video's featuring famous Dutch authors. The survey gained a large response: 13,784 respondents, of which 9,791 female and 3,897 male, 96 did not provide their gender. The total amount of respondents is a good outcome for a language which is spoken by 23 million people (of which about 17 million Dutch citizens). I give a rough overview of the type of respondent. The overall average age of respondents is 52 (see Fig. 3.3), men are 55 years on average, women 51. The median lies with 58 for men and 54 for women; hence, the female group is a bit younger overall. On average, women read slightly more than men: 34 a year for men, 36 for women; the medians are the same at 25. The average education of men is slightly higher, although most respondents report a high education: either HBO (higher vocational education) or WO (university).

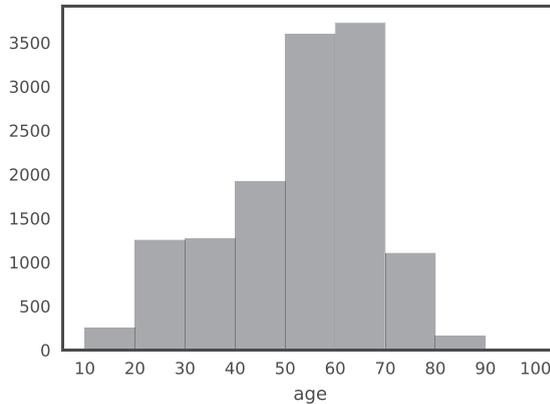


Figure 3.3: The age of the respondents. The mode lies with people in their sixties. The average is 52.

These demographics show that the respondents roughly coincide with the Dutch reading public of fiction in general.<sup>5</sup> So, even though the group is not representative for the whole of the Dutch population, it appears to be in line with the Dutch population of fiction readers.

The Riddle project's goal with the survey, as I have explained in Section 1.1, is to try to find correlations between readers' judgments of the literary quality of novels on the one hand (in the form of ratings) and textual characteristics of those novels on the other. Because of this reason the project focuses on bestsellers; it wants to collect as many judgments per book as possible to make the scores reliable – a highly literary, but obscure novel might not get enough ratings to make sound correlations based on textual characteristics. The value of the list extends beyond its intention however, as it also gives some insight into the buying and borrowing behavior of consumers, which I look into next.

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5. See the Leesmonitor 2015, <http://www.leesmonitor.nu/wie-lezen-er>. (Last visit: 17 August 2017).

## 3.2 GENDERED CORPUS

From the corpus we can deduce which fictional novels the Dutch public bought and borrowed most often in the period 2009-2012. Female authors are well represented in the corpus. Of the 401 novels, 195 have been written by women (49%), 184 by men (46%) and the other 22 by duo's or unknown authors (5%). The highest selling novel is *Haar Naam Was Sarah* ('Sarah's Key') by Tatiana de Rosnay. Note that the fact that most of these novels are bestsellers does not necessarily exclude them from being perceived as having literary value. As van Boven (2015) shows, the division literature-bestseller has faded over the years for novels. To illustrate this: the corpus contains novels that have won prestigious prizes, including the Dutch translation of Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* and Dutch award winning novels such as *De Nederlandse Maagd* ('The Dutch Virgin') by Marente de Moor. The fact that they are part of the corpus, means that they sold well. The literary prize is most likely part of the reason for their financial success (see also van Dijk, 1999).

Whereas there is no surface gender difference in the corpus, the differences can mainly be found within the genres the Riddle corpus contains (see Table 3.1). The corpus consists mostly of literary novels,<sup>6</sup> suspense novels – thrillers, literary thrillers and detectives – and it contains a smaller set of romantic and regional novels, including what is commonly known as chick lit.<sup>7</sup> A handful of novels was placed in a Miscellaneous category, including translations of *The Hunger Games* (SF) and books by Stephen King (horror). The gender imbalance per genre is visualized in Figure 3.4.

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6. Please note that in this section, the term 'literary' refers to the genres I have defined in Section 1.2, not to the ratings the respondents have given.

7. Although publishers use a certain visual strategy to suggest commonalities between the novels that are known as chick lit, there is no official code for the genre. Chick lit is often categorized as 'popular fiction'.

<b>Genre Riddle Code</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Other (unknown, multiple authors)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Literary	66	96	2	164 (41%)
<i>301 Literary Novel</i>	28	55	1	84 (21%)
<i>302 Translated literary novel</i>	38	41	1	80 (20%)
Suspense	80	80	18	178 (44%)
<i>305 Literary Thriller</i>	64	36	11	111 (28%)
<i>331 Detective</i>	0	11	0	11 (3%)
<i>332 Thriller</i>	16	33	7	56 (14%)
Romantic	38	0	2	40 (10%)
<i>343 Romance</i>	5	0	0	5 (1%)
<i>Romantic*</i>	12	0	0	12 (3%)
<i>Humoristic-Romantic</i>	21	0	2	23 (6%)
Miscellaneous	11	8	0	19 (5%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>195 (49%)</b>	<b>184 (46%)</b>	<b>22 (5%)</b>	<b>401 (100%)</b>

Table 3.1: Division of author gender per book in the Riddle corpus per genre (as defined in Section 1.2, 'Genre'). Riddle codes are the more specific codes as used by the Riddle project at large (see Section 1.3). The genres 'literary' and 'suspense' make up the largest proportion of the corpus (85%), 'romantic' contains 10% and 'miscellaneous' 5%. Novels by women and men are almost equally represented in the corpus (49% versus 46%, the rest are by either unknown authors or multiple authors), but not evenly distributed across genres. Men are overrepresented in the literary genre, and romantic is an all-female genre. An equal amount of men and women are part of suspense, although men are better represented in thrillers and women in literary thrillers.

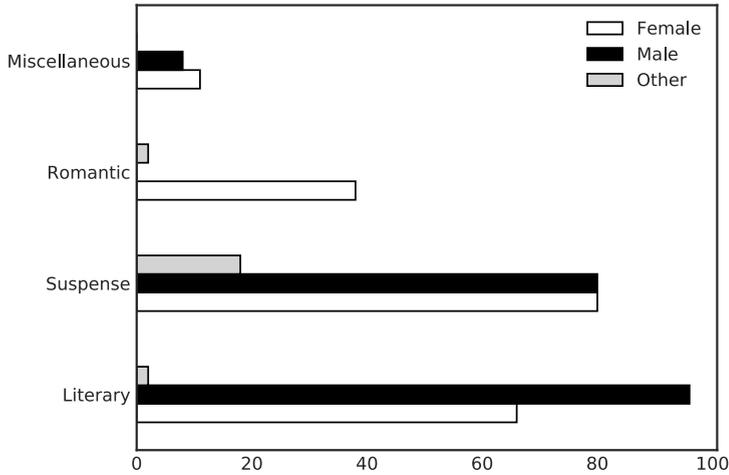


Figure 3.4: The division of the corpus in male, female authors and others (duo's of a man and a woman, unknown authors) per genre. Romantic is an almost exclusively all-female genre, there are more literary novels by men than by women and suspense is evenly distributed.

Figure 3.4 shows that literary novels in our corpus are more often written by men than women, especially when it concerns originally Dutch novels (see Table 3.1); only women (and one male-female couple) have written romantic novels. In suspense the genders are evenly distributed. Thus, although female authors are about equally present in the corpus, there is a genre-related skewness. Female authors are less present in the literary section of the corpus. This means that works by female literary authors were bought and borrowed less often than similar works by their male counterparts, especially where it concerns originally Dutch work. When I look only at the originally Dutch literary novels, 33.3% are written by female authors. Of all literary novels in the corpus, only 17% are originally Dutch novels by female authors.

This is not for lack of publication, as I have shown in Section 2.1: in the period of 2007-2012, of the total of about 5,800 literary novels produced in the Netherlands, a careful estimate is that at least 2,000 were written by

female authors. One could argue that it is a near representative sample, but as few as 84 originally Dutch literary novels made it to the list. This is a very small selection (about 1%) of these 5,800 novels; it is quite likely that there are somewhat more novels by female authors in the production which could have been picked up by the buying public.<sup>8</sup> Also note that although male authors' largest genre is literary, their work in the other genres combined, the 'popular' genres, still outsell the literary.

### 3.3 RATINGS OF LITERARY AND OVERALL QUALITY

Now for a view of how respondents rated the novels. I report averages per novel. This is a crude measure, but a fairly robust one: the scores on the books that received at least fifty ratings (only 14 did not, 3.5% of the corpus) have small confidence intervals, which means that were the experiment to be replicated multiple times, chances are high the averages would be quite similar (see van Cranenburgh 2016, pp. 97-99). For a more elaborate exploration and break-down of the data, I refer to Riddell and van Dalen-Oskam (under review).

#### **Overall ratings**

To give a general idea of how the novels score per genre, Figure 3.5 shows the distribution of the average of scores per book on a scale of literary quality and overall quality. The difference between literary and overall quality might appear subtle, but the measuring stick is a different one: a suspense novel can be considered to be good and at the same time not very literary. And in reverse, someone might consider a book to be highly literary, but not very good, because she dislikes the protagonist, for instance. There is a firm relationship between the two however, which results in a clear correlation

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8. See also Pafunda (2012) for a rebuttal of the argument of representativeness.

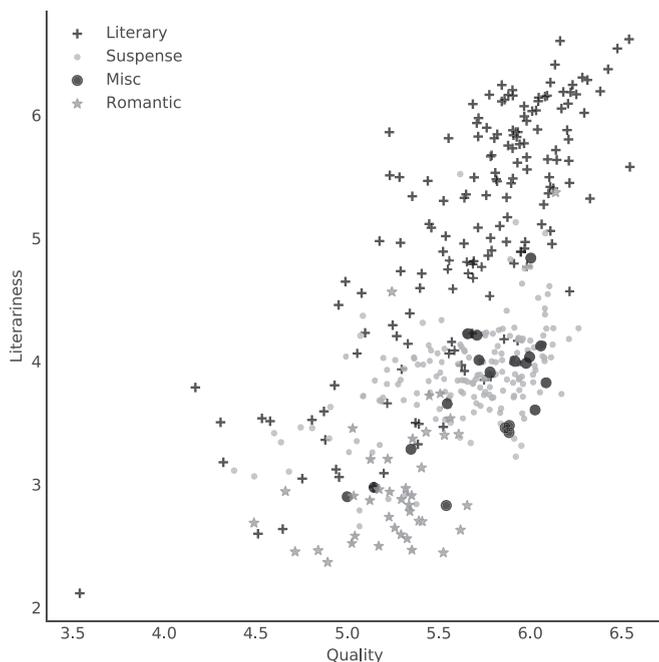


Figure 3.5: A visualization of the mean scores per book, by overall quality (y-axis) and literary quality (x-axis). The different symbols indicate the genres, derived from the publisher's label. The romantic genre is clustered at the lower end on both scales, the literary genre is spread out but is the only genre represented in the upper right corner (the best and most literary novels). The novel at the left bottom is the Dutch translation of *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James.

between literary and overall quality (van Cranenburgh 2016: 99). Still, the overall quality ratings are much more condense than the literary ratings: respondents do not report to have read books they think are bad, only books that they think are not very literary.

Figure 3.5 demonstrates that the literary genre is the most dispersed concerning quality judgments. Romantic scores lowest, the suspense novels are in the middle. Literary is the only genre that is spread out over the whole distribution of scores, but it is also the sole representative in the highest scores, showing that romantic and suspense novels are not seen as highly literary, and that the romantic novel is seen not only as being of the least literary quality, but also of the least overall quality. The dispersion of scores within the 'literary' genre

shows that in practice, it indeed appears to function as the category of 'general fiction', the label of 'literary' does not necessarily correlate to the scores on a scale of literary quality. The most prominent example is the translation of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was published as a 'literary' novel, but receives the lowest average score on a scale of literary quality (it is represented by the solitary dot at the bottom of Figure 3.5). The novels that were rated to be the most and the least literary ones can be found in Table 3.2.

The lowest scoring novels on a scale of literariness are all so-called chick lit novels except one, E.L. James's *Vijftig Tinten Grijs*, the Dutch translation of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.<sup>9</sup> *Fifty Shades of Grey* is an idiosyncratic book in the survey. Many people have read it because they wanted to know why it received so much attention. Readers who would not normally choose to read an erotic novel, now did so. This is most likely less the case for the other books in the corpus. Because it is such an outlier, I leave the *Fifty Shades* trilogy out of part of my upcoming analyses. I will indicate when this is the case.

The top 10 books are all by male authors, six of them originally Dutch, the bottom is all-female and all translated from English. Sophie Kinsella (the pen name of Madeline Wickham, who is also part of the corpus) has four novels in the bottom 10. These twenty novels are a first indication that novels by women are judged to be of lesser literary quality. Note that part of the corpus are novels by female authors which could be judged to be of high literary quality, based on their critical reception, such as Emma Donoghue's *Room*, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2010 or for Dutch authors, Marente de Moor's *De Nederlandse Maagd* ('The Dutch Virgin') which won the AKO Literatuurprijs in 2011. They do receive a relatively high score, resp. 5.4

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9. Part two and three of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy are seen as better and more literary, most likely because people who have read the sequels are less critical of them than people who only read the first and decided it was not for them.

Rank	Dutch title ( <i>Title English Translation</i> )	Author	Gender	Original title	Or. Lang.	Genre
1	Alsof het Voorbij Is	Julian Barnes	M	The Sense of an Ending	English	Literary
2	Godenslaap ( <i>While the Gods Were Sleeping</i> )	Erwin Mortier	M		Dutch	Literary
3	Gestameld Liedboek ( <i>Stammered Songbook</i> )	Erwin Mortier	M		Dutch	Literary
4	De Kaart en het Gebied	Michel Houellebecq	M	La Carte et le Territoire	French	Literary
5	Sprakeloos ( <i>Speechless</i> )	Tom Lanoye	M		Dutch	Literary
6	Norwegian Wood	Haruki Murakami	M	Noruei no Mori	Japanese	Literary
7	Tonio	A.F.Th. van der Heijden	M		Dutch	Literary
8	Grip ( <i>'Grip' - not translated into English</i> )	Stephan Enter	M		Dutch	Literary
9	Geleende Levens ( <i>'Borrowed Lives' - not translated into English</i> )	J. Bernlef	M		Dutch	Literary
10	Begraafplaats van Praag	Umberto Eco	M	Il Cimitero di Praga	Italian	Literary
(...)						
392	Drie is te Veel	Jill Mansell	V	Two's Company	English	Romantic
393	Trouwplannen	Katie Fforde	V	Wedding Season	English	Romantic
394	Champagne in Chateau Marmont	Lauren Weisberger	V	Last Night at Chateau Marmont	English	Romantic
395	Versier Me Dan	Jill Mansell	V	Take a Chance On Me	English	Romantic

396	Ken Je Me Nog?	Sophie Kinsella	V	Remember Me?	English	Romantic
397	Mini Shopaholic	Sophie Kinsella	V	Mini Shopaholic	English	Romantic
398	Chanel Chic	Lauren Weisberger	V	Chanel Chic	English	Romantic
399	Mag Ik Je Nummer Even	Sophie Kinsella	V	I've Got Your Number	English	Romantic
400	Shopaholic & Baby	Sophie Kinsella	V	Shopaholic & Baby	English	Romantic
401	Vijftig Tinten Grijs	E.L. James	V	Fifty Shades of Grey	English	Literary

Table 3.2: The highest and lowest scoring novels on a scale of literariness in the National Reader Survey.

(SD=1.19, n=537) and 5.9 (SD=.97, n=627) on average, but none score high enough to be in the top 5%.<sup>10</sup> In the top 10% are 3 novels by female authors, the novel by De Moor, one by her mother, Margriet de Moor (*De Schilder en het Meisje*, 'The Painter and the Girl'; M=5.9, SD=.84, n=613), and the highest scoring novel by a female author, Nicole Krauss' *Het Grote Huis* ('Great House'), which has an average score of 6.0 (SD=.97, n=484). To make a comparison, the translation of Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* received a 6.6 average (SD=.59, n=816), A. F. Th van der Heijden's *Tonio* a 6.3 average (SD=.90, n=768).

### Ratings per gender

Now, I look at the mean ratings for each of the 401 novels in the corpus, to see if we can find differences related to the gender of the author. I use a binary distinction, female or male (see Section 1.2). There are cases where this distinction cannot be applied easily:

10. The number of respondents (n) were calculated by subtracting the amounts of 'I do not know' answers on the question of the literary rating from the total number of 'have reads' registered for the novel.

**1.** when a novel has two authors. There are three different cases: two men, two women or a man and a woman. However, it is not always obvious to the reader that this is the case. For instance, *Lars Kepler* is written by a male-female couple, and *Ciel van Sambeek* is two women. I chose to go by the gender of the author rather than the gender of the author name for now, as I cannot know for sure whether the readers know about the people behind the pen name, and which gender they associate with the pen name. The gender of the author is the most objective parameter I can choose here, even though I realize this is problematic, as I am looking at reader judgments here; the reader who believes an author to be male because of a male pen name, might judge the novel differently than the reader who knows the author to be a male-female couple. As the group of novels by ambiguous authors is small (14 in total), and there is no way of telling what the reader knows, I have chosen to work with the gender of the author. The male couples I group with other male authors, I do the same for female couples; the male-female couples I leave out.

**2.** when the author is anonymous or unknown. There are two cases, one is Ravelli, the author of *De Vliegenvanger* ("The Fly Catcher"). It is not publicly known who this author is, so we can be fairly sure the respondents do not know the gender of this author. Another is Suzanne Vermeer. After the original author died, Paul Goeken, an unknown ghost writer took over. There are two novels by the ghost writer in our corpus. These three novels (one by Ravelli, two by Susanne Vermeer's ghost writer), I have left out.

**3.** when the author uses a pen name that suggests an author of a different gender, or uses only initials so that the reader does not know the gender of the author immediately. One example is Suzanne Vermeer, who was actually the male Dutch writer Paul Goeken, which was made public by Goeken's wife after his death. I use the author's gender. However, as we don't know whether the respondents are aware of the author's actual gender, I also perform an extra test afterwards, where I leave books out by authors who have pen names that either suggest another gender or do not give an indication of gender. This

means that in this second test, novels by S.J. Watson, E.L. James, J.K. Rowling, Kluun and Susanne Vermeer are not included.<sup>11</sup> With these restrictions, 14 novels are set aside, 387 novels remain; 196 written by women (or duos of women), 191 by men (or duos of men).

There are multiple ways in which to address gender differences in the ratings. Let me repeat that it is not my goal to separate gender as a factor from all others. I do, however, give a general sense of the difference between judgments of novels by male and female authors by considering the means of the scores.

I conducted two linear regression analyses to test which factors have an influence on the literary quality and the overall quality attributed by readers (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4). In multiple linear regression, a causal relationship is assumed between one dependent variable – the rating in this case – and multiple independent variables – here: genre, author gender, and whether the novel is a translation or not. With that assumption of causality, the strength of the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable can be tested. For instance, one could calculate how well certain marketing efforts predict sales numbers. In this case, I test how well genre, author gender and whether or not a novel has been translated (independent variables) predict the rating (dependent variable). In both models (literary and overall quality) the gender of the author is a good predictor. The results show that novels which are written by women receive lower evaluations on both the literary quality as the overall quality, even when other predictors (i.e. the genre and whether the book is translated) are taken into consideration. The regression coefficient (B) show how much the ratings go up or down per unit of change, hence, when the author is male, the average rating climbs half a point. Whether or not a novel has been categorized as a literary novel or a romantic novel, also has significant effect; being part of the literary genre contributes positively to the rating (+1.3 average points), being in the romantic genre does the opposite

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11. One could argue that J.K. Rowling and Kluun (who publishes as Ray Kluun abroad) are too much public figures for readers not to know what the gender of the author is. However, to be as strict as possible, I do not make an exception.

(-0.5). The standard error of coefficient (SE) shows how precise the estimate is, the greater the number, the less precise it is. The suspense genre hence is not a good predictor: the coefficient is 0.11, and the standard error is 0.17, which is bigger than the coefficient itself. In other words, this means that the model estimates that if a novel is a suspense novel, this adds 0.11 points, give or take 0.17 points. It could therefore also be the case that it actually subtracts somewhat from the mean rating, or does nothing. Whether or not the novel is a translation is not a good predictor either, contrary to what we might expect from the top 10 and bottom 10 novels: the top 10 contained many originally Dutch works, and the bottom only translated ones. All of the variables together explain about 55% of the variance of the ratings ( $R^2$ ), which is a fair score. It is hardly ever possible to identify all variables that explain a certain outcome.

<b>Literary quality of novels</b>			
	<b>B</b>		<b>SE</b>
(Constant)	3.081	**	.195
Literary	1.269	**	.169
Suspense	.110		.167
Romantic	-.499	*	.196
Translation	-.041		.075
Man	0.473	**	.075
$R^2 = .546$ , $N = 387$ * $p < .05$ ; ** $p < .01$			

Table 3.3: Linear regression of the average scores on literary quality. The literary and romantic genre are good predictors of the ratings, as well as gender. Translation is not a significant factor. The variance score ( $R^2$ ) shows that about 55% of the variance in ratings can be predicted with this set of independent variables.

Whether or not a novel is a translation, only has an effect with overall quality: translated novels are seen as better than originally Dutch novels (see Table 3.4). Note that the variance is much lower (only about 25%) than in the literary ratings model (which was about 55%); this means that the variables are better at predicting the mean literary scores than they do the mean overall scores.

<b>Quality of novels</b>			
	<b>B</b>		<b>SE</b>
(Constant)	5.242	**	.107
Literary	-0.32		.092
Suspense	-.110		.091
Romantic	-.431	**	.107
Translation	.297	**	.041
Man	0.210	**	.041
R <sup>2</sup> = .245, N = 387			
* p <.05; ** p <.01			

Table 3.4: Linear regression of the average scores on quality. Gender is again a factor, as is the romantic genre. Whether a novel has been translated or not, does contribute to the overall quality. The variance (R<sup>2</sup>) is much lower than that of the literary ratings model, hence the variables explain the scores less well.

When I exclude novels by authors whose actual gender is veiled by their pen name, none of the significance levels alter substantially. I have performed the linear regression again, now on 375 novels (instead of 387), and this shows that there is very little difference. Variables that differed significantly, remain so, and those that did not, still do not. Thus the linear regression shows that gender is a good predictor in the average judgments of literary and overall quality. In the remainder of this chapter I examine why this is the case.

## Within-genre differences

Now I perform a series of independent *t*-tests, to give insight into the differences within the genres. An independent *t*-test determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means – the means of the mean ratings in this case – in two unrelated groups (of male and female gender is an often used division). In other words, I calculate what the chances are that the differences in means are a coincidence. I use the ratings on the strict set of novels, where authors with non-gendered pen names are excluded – which also excludes the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy. The *t*-test shows that novels by women are indeed rated lower on literary quality and general quality, a statistically significant difference, see Tables 3.5 and 3.6.

OUTCOME	GROUP						95% CI for Mean Difference		
	Female			Male			t	df	
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
All	3.92	0.81	192	4.73	1.04	183	-0.99,-0.61	-8.34**	343.97
Literary	4.55	0.84	63	5.53	0.73	94	-1.24,-0.74	-7.60**	119.81
Suspense	3.90	0.29	80	3.89	0.49	81	-0.11, 0.14	0.27	131.39
Romantic	3.02	0.60	39	-	-	-	-	-	-
Misc.	3.69	0.62	10	3.76	0.42	8	-0.59, 0.46	-0.26	15.16

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 3.5: *T*-tests for the mean literary quality ratings. I did this for all genres together, and the separate genres Literary, Suspense, Romantic and Miscellaneous, by Author gender. The overall difference is highly significant, caused by the low ratings for Romantic novels (where there are no male authors) and the lower ratings of literary novels by women. The group of Miscellaneous novels is too small for a good comparison.

OUTCOME	GROUP						95% CI for Mean Difference		
	Female			Male			t	df	
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N			
All	5.51	0.37	192	5.81	0.37	183	-0.38,-0.23	-7.91**	373
Literary	5.53	0.42	63	5.86	0.40	94	-0.46,-0.20	-5.03**	155
Suspense	5.59	0.33	80	5.77	0.33	81	-0.28,-0.07	-3,474*	159
Romantic	5.29	0.27	39	-	-	-	-	-	-
Misc.	5.71	0.29	10	5.75	0.34	8	-0.35,0.28	-0.24	16

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Table 3.6: T-tests for the mean overall quality ratings. I did this for all genres together, and the separate genres Literary, Suspense, Romantic and Miscellaneous, by Author gender. Again, the overall difference and the difference for the literary genre are highly significant. In the suspense genre, only the overall quality of the novels by women is seen as less.

The romantic genre scores lowest overall, but there are no male writers in there to compare female writers to. The suspense genre only shows a difference in overall quality for author gender: female authors' novels are not less literary, but less good in the eyes of the respondents. The strongest difference can be found with the genre of literary novels. The overall quality (M=5.53, SD=0.42) of the literary novels by women is seen as significantly less than the overall quality of those by men (M=5.86, SD=0.40);  $t(155)=-7.91$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . The same goes for the literary quality of literary novels by women (M=4.55, SD=0.84) versus those by men (M=5.53, SD=0.73);  $t(119.81)=-7.60$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . This might be telling, as I showed that literary prizes are most often awarded to men; apparently readers see the literary novels by women in this set as less literary as well.

There are other factors of importance however, which I need to take into consideration. One part is that the genre is also gender biased along the lines of translation. Even though the linear regression showed that whether the novel is a translation or not by itself did not affect the literary quality rating much, it is not to say that it cannot have an effect in combination with gender. Within the genre of literary novels there are more originally Dutch novels by

	Female	Male	Other	Total
Literary novel	28	55	1	84
Translated literary novel	38	41	1	80
<b>Total literary</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>164</b>

Table 3.7. Division of gender over translations and originally Dutch novels. Female authors are overrepresented in the translations, male authors in the originally Dutch novels.

male authors than translated novels by male authors; for female authors, this is the other way around (see Table 3.7, extracted from Table 3.1).

Thus, I cannot claim anything definitive about the judgment on works by Dutch female authors specifically, since such works only comprise a small part of our corpus (17% of the total number of literary novels). Any statistical analysis that singles out this group would have to be judged very carefully. Therefore, I consider the group of originally Dutch female authors again in Section 3.5, which relates the motivations behind respondents' judgments.

Another factor I have yet not taken into account, is the influence of respondent characteristics, specifically their gender. Juries of literary prizes are generally not a reflection of the general reading audience, which contains proportionally more women than men – as is also the case for this survey. I therefore research this further in Section 3.4.

### 3.4 THE EFFECT OF RESPONDENT GENDER

The gender of the respondent appears to contribute to the ratings, albeit in a subtle fashion. When we look at all the ratings by women and men, for the whole corpus and within genres, there are no statistically significant differences to be found, which means that female and male raters do not give different ratings overall (see Table 3.8). However, when I also split the authors into female and male authors, there are differences to be found. First,

OUTCOME	Male resp		Female resp			95% CI for Mean Difference	r	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD	N				
<b>All novels</b>	4.65	0.96	4.65	0.98	251	-0.25,-0.36	.97**	.35	250
Female authors	4.43	0.82	4.30	0.80	71	0.08,0.19	.96**	5.13**	70
Male authors	4.78	1.02	4.84	0.08	168	-0.09,-0.02	.97**	-2.88**	167
<b>Literary</b>	5.38	0.79	5.38	0.85	125	-0.04,0.03	.97**	-0.30	124
Female authors	5.03	0.88	4.84	0.92	31	0.12,0.26	.98**	5.49**	30
Male authors	5.51	0.72	5.59	0.69	92	-0.11,-0.04	.98**	-4.63**	91
<b>Suspense</b>	3.95	0.45	3.93	0.42	115	-0.03,0.08	.77**	.76	114
Female authors	4.02	0.29	3.86	0.22	35	0.06,0.22	.62**	3.65*	34
Male authors	3.89	0.06	3.93	0.50	70	-0.33,-0.08	.81**	-1.09	69

\*p<.05,\*\*p<.01

Table 3.8: Descriptive Statistics and *t*-test Results for All novels, Literary, Suspense. Overall, female and male respondents do not differ significantly in their response. However, when I split the sets for author gender, I see for instance that female respondents give statistically significant lower scores to female authors than male respondents do.

I examine novels that were rated by at least 30 women and 30 men (so as to minimize the bias, this leaves 253 novels). Unexpectedly, men give statistically significant higher ratings to female authors and women to male authors ( $p < 0.01$  in both cases; see Table 3.8). Male authors still do get higher ratings overall. Note that in this specific set, there are no romantic novels, these were all filtered out by the criterion that the novel had to be rated by at least 30 men as well.

The same differences remain within the literary genre: overall male and female respondents give similar average ratings, but men rate female authors higher and vice versa. The suspense genre does not show this strong difference. Romantic is not part of this selection of novels, and the set of Miscellaneous novels is too small for a comparison ( $n=11$ ).

What causes this difference in average ratings? Because I would like to include the full set of novels, and not just those that were rated by at least 30 women and 30 men, I examine the distributions of all ratings within the genres of the literary, suspense and romantic novel. The ratings are normalized for the number of ratings a book received.<sup>12</sup>

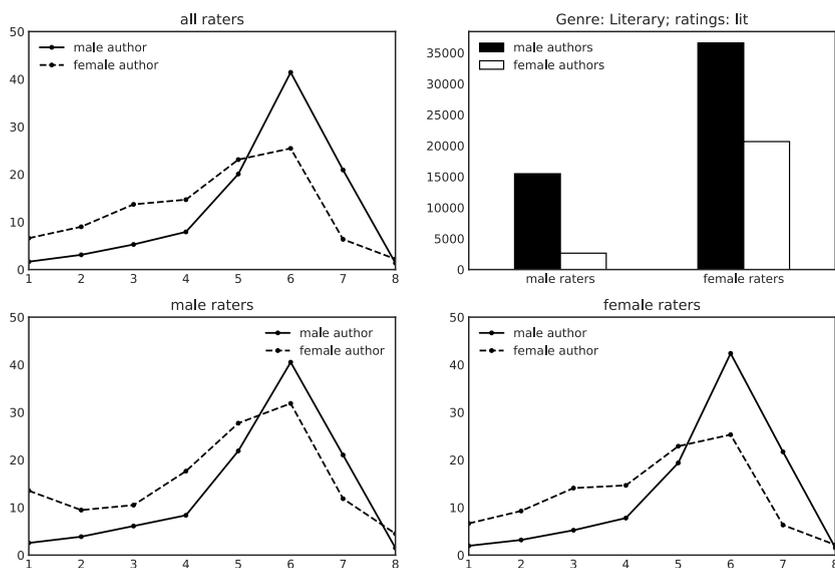


Figure 3.6: Top left (a): the percentages of literariness ratings overall for all the male and female authors within the literary genre, normalized per book. Top right (b): the number of ratings by male and female raters, split by gender of the author. Both men and women rate more books by male authors, even though books by women authors make up about 40%. Bottom (c,d): the ratings split by the gender of the respondents. Female raters tend to make a larger difference. Please note however, since there are many more female raters than male raters overall, this needs to be examined further.

12. This means that the percentages per rating of each book were used, not the number of ratings. For example: two books have been rated. Book A was rated a 1,000 times; 700 times it received a 6; 300 times a 7. Book B was rated 50 times, 30 times a 2 was chosen, 20 times a 3. In a non-normalized model, 2.9% of the scores would have been a 2 ( $30/1050 \times 100$ ), and 66.7% of the scores would have been a 6 ( $700/1050 \times 100$ ). This gives often rated books a much bigger weight. In the normalized model, the score 2 will have been received 60% of the time ( $30/50 \times 100$ ), the score 6 70% of the time ( $700/1000 \times 100$ ).

From Figure 3.6, we can tell that books by male authors more often receive the rating of 6 and 7 (the highest scores, 8 is 'I don't know'), whereas female authors more often receive ratings of 5 and lower. When we split the judgments by the gender of the raters (3.6c and 3.6d), we see that the women are more strict with female authors than the men. However, there are much more female raters than male raters for this genre (36936: 9267, a ratio of 4:1), therefore the effect of the higher rating male respondents give is marginalized. When we look at the suspense novels (see Figure 3.7), we see that a difference between books by authors of different genders, regardless of the gender of the rater, is much smaller. So not only the means are relatively close together, the number of ratings per score for all the books is divided similarly. We do see that male raters give more high ratings to female authors.

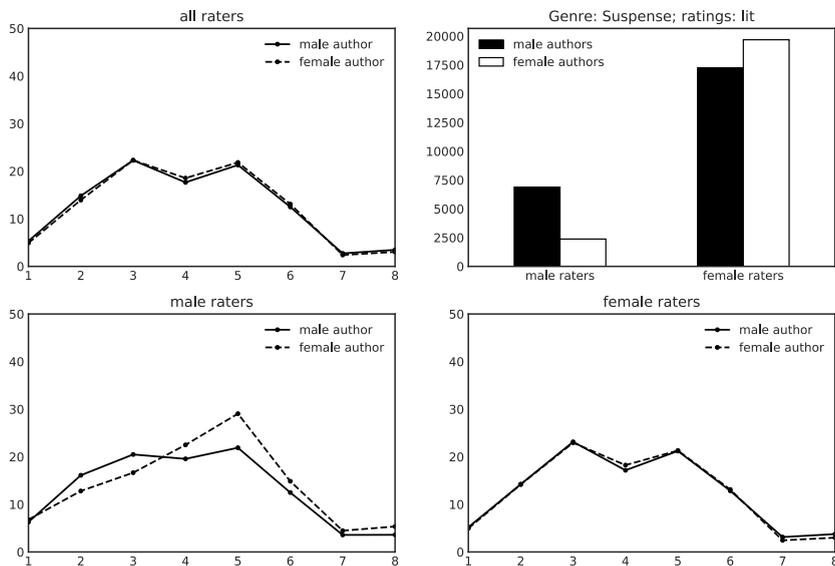


Figure 3.7: Scores per book in the suspense genre. Female respondents give similar ratings to male and female authors. Male respondents tend to give more high ratings to female authors than to male authors. For further explanation of each of the graphs, see Figure 3.6.

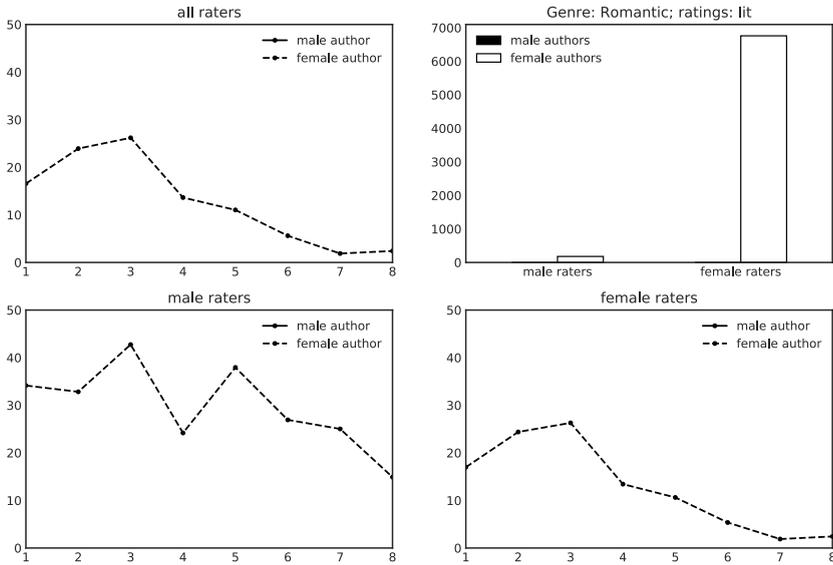


Figure 3.8: Scores per book in the romantic genre. There are no male authors in this genre, so there is no between-gender comparison possible for authors. For further explanation of each of the graphs, see figure 3.6.

Again, for romantic novels we cannot compare novels by male or female authors, as there are no male authors. We do see that there is a tendency to give novels in this genre the lowest ratings overall, and that men tend to give higher ratings, see Figure 3.9. This is interesting, even though the number of ratings by men is very small (179 ratings by men versus 6759 by women), as we also saw this tendency in the literary novels. Of all the ratings done by men, 0.7% were for romantic novels. Of all 3897 men, 137 men judged romantic novels (3.5%). This means the set of male ratings is specifically small.

This small number of ratings of men for romantic novels begs the question how often male respondents have actually read female authors: are there differences between female and male respondents in reading behavior? For the numbers in Table 3.9, I did not use the number of ratings – as respondents could opt how many of the novels they checked as ‘have read’ they wanted to rate – but the number of reported reads.

	<b>Female author</b>	<b>Male author</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fem. resp.	127,454	151,031	11,747	290,232
Male resp.	14,136	47,247	1,814	63,197
No answer	604	1018	63	1,685
<b>Total</b>	<b>142,194</b>	<b>199,296</b>	<b>13,624</b>	<b>355,114</b>

Table 3.9: Number of books respondents have marked as ‘have read’ in the corpus, split by the gender of the respondent, and by the gender of the author. Men read relatively more male authors, women slightly more male authors than female authors.

Female respondents report 290,232 reads, of which 52.0% of male authors, and 43.9% of female authors. Male respondents report to have read 63,197 novels, of which 14,136 books by female authors, 22.3% of their total reads. In other words, female respondents report reading novels by authors of both gender, with a slight preference for male authors, and male respondents report to have read quite a bit more novels by male authors than by female authors in our corpus. The respondents who have not reported their own gender, also have a strong preference for male authors (60.4%), stronger than the female respondents, but less strong than the male respondents. Thus, even though there are slightly more novels by female authors in the corpus than by male authors, and the respondent group is about 70% female, books by male authors have been reported to have read quite a bit more often (56% versus 40% for female authors).

## **In short**

To sum up my findings so far: novels by female authors are seen as less literary and of lesser quality than novels by men in the National Reader Survey. This difference can mainly be retraced in low scores for romantic novels (which were all written by women) and lower scores within the literary genre, not so much for suspense novels. Men tend to give higher ratings to women and vice versa, although overall male authors receive the highest average ratings. Female respondents have read novels by authors of both genders, with a slight preference for male authors; male respondents have proportionally read more novels by male authors. Numbers alone cannot explain the discrepancies, however. Can the motivations the respondents provide help contextualize these findings?

## **3.5 MOTIVATIONS OF RATINGS**

In the survey, the respondents were asked to motivate one of the rankings they gave in an open comment field. The novel was assigned automatically from the list of novels the respondent had chosen to rate; the respondent was presented with one of the novels she had rated lowest or highest on the scale of literary quality. I use AntConc (Anthony, 2004) for a first exploration. This gives insight into general ideas on what respondents believe literary quality entails (see also Section 1.2), but also how this is gendered.

### **General overview of the comments**

A total number of 11,950 comments were supplied – each respondent was asked to motivate one of their chosen novels, some opted not to do so and left the field empty. The respondents used 181,793 words, on average 15.2 words per response. The list of word counts gives a nice first view into what readers consider literariness to be. The most frequently used words are ‘verhaal’ (‘story’), followed by a number of words related to writing style: ‘geschreven’ (‘written’), ‘stijl’ (‘style’), ‘schrijfstijl’ (‘writing style’) and ‘taalgebruik’ (‘language use’). ‘Lagen’ (‘layers’) is also an important word. ‘Personages’ (‘characters’) and

'plot' ('plot') are also part of the top 100 of most frequent words, 'karakters' ('characters', an anglicism) can be found at position 101. 'Mooi', 'diepgang', 'spannend' ('beautiful', 'depth', 'suspenseful') are content-related words. The words 'niet' ('not', position 5, 5334 occurrences) and 'geen' ('no', position 23, 1313 occurrences) also rank high, showing that what a novel is not, is also crucial in defining its literary quality.

### Comments per gender author

I now split the comments per gender of the author and gender of the respondent. 6,864 of all responses were for male authors (57.4%), 4,754 for female authors (39.8%), the rest for novels by unknown authors or mixed gender duo's. Please note that the respondents could not choose which novel to comment on, they were randomly assigned one of the novels they had rated either high or low. The respondents used 15.8 words on average for novels by male authors, 14.6 for novels by female authors. The number of comments per author gender and respondent gender is shown in Table 3.10.

	<b>Novels by female authors</b>	<b>Novels by male authors</b>
comments by female resp.	4.130	4,376
comments by male resp.	599	2,436

Table 3.10: Number of comments per gender of the author and gender of the respondent.

I assemble comments according to the gender of the author and the gender of the respondent, resulting in four documents. However as the number of comments by male respondents for female authors is very low (see Table 3.10), I do not compare this set of comments on its own to the other quadrants, even though the keyword analysis I use, which I will explain in the next paragraph, corrects for size of the corpus. It would still be the case that relatively few comments then dictate the outcome. Therefore I either combine the male respondents with the female respondents, or only consider the female respondents in my analyses.

AntConc allows for a keyword analysis, showing which words in a corpus (one or more documents) stands out in comparison to a reference corpus. For instance, when one compares two books about dogs, the word 'dog' might not be a keyword for either of the books, because that is not what discerns them. But when one of those books is compared to a book on flowers, the word 'dog' is likely to become a keyword for the dog book as opposed to the book on flowers. AntConc uses Log Likelihood, a fairly straightforward method of comparing the frequency of words in each set as opposed to the frequency in the other set.

I first compare the top 50 keywords of all the comments on novels by female authors to those on novels by male authors. The first keyword for the set of novels by male authors is 'hij' ('he'), where the first one for female authors is 'haar' ('her'). 'He' is a subject, and therefore undertaking the action, 'her' is a direct or indirect object, which is passive; hence these personal pronouns show that male authors and characters are given a more active role than female authors and characters. The nouns in the list also paint a distinct picture. Except for their number (more nouns for male authors), the content shows a difference in perspective, see Table 3.11.

Keywords female authors (nouns)	Keywords male authors (nouns)
chicklit (chick lit) <sup>13</sup> , writer (f) (schrijfster), depth (diepgang), novel-DIM (romannetje), book (boek), children's book (kinderboek), vacation (vakantie), regional novel (streekroman), adult, daughter (dochter), Harlequin novel (doktersroman)	writer (m) (schrijver), style (stijl), language (taal), form (vorm), author (auteur), language use (taalgebruik), construction (opbouw), narrator (verteller), way (wijze), reality (werkelijkheid), journalism (journalistiek), head (hoofd), structure (structuur), humor (humor), measure (mate), originality (originaliteit), composition (compositie), set-up (opzet)

Table 3.11: Nouns from the top 50 keywords as extracted from the comments on female authors versus male authors, my translation.

These discriminative words align with the significantly lower rates for female authors. As the algorithm searches for the words that are most discriminative for each set of comments, it therefore is likely to single out comments related to romantic novels, and in this case, a few 'young adult' novels in the corpus (hence the English word 'adult' in the keyword list), the translation of the *Hunger Games* trilogy and one *Harry Potter* novel.

Rather than 'prove' that female authors are regarded less well, this keyword analysis shows which associations are typical in this set of comments for either female or male authors. This most likely results from the fact that there are more male literary authors, and that for female authors, the romantic novels are more typical (because there are almost no male romantic authors). For female authors, a comparison is made more often with 'feminine' genres that

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13. The spelling of the word chick lit might seem inconsistent, but there is a difference in Dutch and English spelling. In Dutch, the spelling is 'chicklit', in English it is 'chick lit'.

are perceived to be of low quality: ‘chick lit’, ‘streekroman’ (‘regional novel’), ‘doktersroman’ (cf. ‘romance novel’), and the more general ‘romannetje’, which is the word ‘novel’, with an added diminutive, which provides a negative association. ‘Depth’ is used for the female authors, but upon closer inspection this is often because of a mention of a lack thereof. The nouns used more often for the male authors are literary-narratological concepts: ‘stijl’ (‘style’), ‘vorm’ (‘form’), ‘taalgebruik’ (‘language use’), ‘opbouw’ (‘construction’), ‘verteller’ (‘narrator’), ‘originaliteit’ (‘originality’), ‘compositie’ (‘composition’), etc. This shows that the most unique in the comments related to female authors, are concepts related to more low-brow or ‘genre’ novels, and what is most typical for male authors are literary-narratological concepts. This does not say that female authors are seen as low-brow and male as high-brow; it does show that the literary terms used are more typical for male authors – as they are then much less often used in association with female authors. Since this is likely for the better part caused by genre differences, as discussed in previous sections, I perform an analysis of only high rated novels to see whether this holds true when lesser judged novels are left out.

### **Comments for high and low rated novels**

When I single out the comments that accompany high ratings (a 6 or a 7, not averages but single scores), differences remain prominent for male and female authors, even when I separate the female respondents from the male respondents. Because of the small number of high ratings from male respondents for female authors (only 143 out of over 11,000 comments), it is not feasible to make a comparison of the top 50 keywords – even at high positions we find keywords which only occurred in the set once. Therefore I select only the comments by female respondents. This results in a selection of 988 high ratings for female authors and 2,489 for male authors. The top 50 keywords for female authors as opposed to male authors again paint a clear picture (see Table 3.12). Even when only high rated books are discussed, the female authors receive comments that are related to the content of the novel, whereas in novels by male authors the structure and narratological elements (pertaining to how the content is presented) are discussed more. This is noteworthy – considering the fact that all respondents are female, the difference cannot be accounted for by the gender of the respondent.

<b>Keywords female authors (nouns)</b>	<b>Keywords male authors (nouns)</b>
schrijfster (writer-F), kind (child), dochter (daughter), excuses (apologies), gevolgen (effects), jongetje (little boy), milieu (environment), oordelen (judgments), tweeling (twins), stukje (a bit), jeugd (childhood), gevoelens (feelings), deel (part), aanslag (attack), acties (actions)	schrijver (writer-M) , stijl (style), taalgebruik (language use), kant (side), werkelijkheid (reality), woord (word), structuur (structure), schrijvers (writers), keuze (choice), opzet (build), vorm (form), genot (pleasure), land (country), proza (prose), perspectieven (perspectives)

Table 3.12: Keywords for high-scoring novels by female and male authors, just the nouns from the top 50 of keywords. Nouns that are typical for comments on novels by male authors are more ‘typically’ literary, using narratological concepts. The comments for novels by female authors relate to content.

Multiple explanations are possible. Perhaps female respondents relate more to the content of the novels by female authors and therefore take a less distanced view, or that certain readers read in a more distanced fashion than others. Another option is that the respondents associate male authors with a different type of literariness. It is also possible that women who give high ratings for female authors read from a different perspective than those who give high ratings for male authors; and with the selection of the high scores, I have left out the less outspoken respondents. Finally, it is possible that rather than with the respondents, the novels by female and male authors themselves differ on a certain level, for instance because there are more translations in the female literary part of the corpus. I have selected a few comments that contain the keywords to give a sense of their context.

Female author	Male author
<p>It has been a while since I have read it, but it describes amazingly well the life of a young man, one of <b>twins</b>, who really cannot deal with his life and has developed an obsession for hurricanes and such. The troublesome family relationships have been described amazingly. I could not stop reading.<sup>14</sup> (On: Blum, <i>In Tweestrijd</i>)</p> <p>It gives a different view on the <b>effects</b> of the second world war. It deals with the aftermath that it has had for the people who suffered from war violence indirectly. The writer gives an image of the power of the non-Jewish church during and after the war.<sup>15</sup> (On: Zwaan, <i>Parnassia</i>)</p>	<p>The book is an honest portrait of his mother, his <i>childhood</i> in a burrough, his father, very recognizable but written in a unparalleled beautiful language, with gorgeously creative leaps, a beautiful <b>structure</b>, with much feeling.<sup>16</sup> (On: Lanoye, <i>Sprakeloos</i>)</p> <p>Written in catchy language. Beautiful language. And not exaggerated and too fraught. The story in itself is catchy enough. That does not need an extra layer of exaggerated <b>language use</b>.<sup>17</sup> (On: Japin, <i>De overgave</i>)</p>

Table 3.13: Four examples from the comments accompanying high scores. The keywords are highlighted, words that are keywords in the opposite set are in italics.

14. Original text: “Het is even geleden dat ik het heb gelezen maar het beschrijft geweldig goed het leven van een jonge man, een van een **tweeling**, die zijn leven eigenlijk niet aankan en een obsessie heeft ontwikkeld voor orkanen enzo. Ook de moeizame familieverhoudingen zijn geweldig beschreven. Ik kon niet stoppen met lezen.”

15. Original text: “Het geeft een andere kijk op de **gevolgen** van de tweede wereldoorlog. Het gaat hier om de nasleep die het heeft gehad voor de mensen die indirect met oorlogsgeweld te maken hebben gehad. De schrijver geeft een beeld van de macht van de niet-Joodse kerk tijdens en na de oorlog.”

16. Original text: “Het boek is een eerlijk portret van zijn moeder, zijn *jeugd* in een wijk, zijn vader, heel herkenbaar maar geschreven in een weergaloos mooie taal, met prachtige creatieve sprongen, een mooie **structuur**, met veel gevoel.”

The comments in Table 3.13 show that the differences are quite subtle. The respondent who describes Blum's novel, does indeed state that the author writes well, but uses a verb construct rather than a noun ("described amazingly") to do so. The respondent who states that the structure of Lanoye's novel is well built, also describes the content.

When we look at the comments associated with low ratings (1 or 2), specifically from female respondents, the first keyword for male authors is 'hij' ('he') - again showing the importance of the agency of the male author as opposed to that of the female author; the word 'she' does not appear in the top 50 keywords for female authors. The first keyword for female authors is 'chicklit'. The counterparts in the male author list are 'thriller' and 'detective'. Closer scrutiny of the comments show that being part of such a genre is often in and of itself enough to be a motivation of low literary quality, indicating the importance of perceived genre – but remember that the lowest average genre scores are still reserved for romantic novels, specifically chick lit.<sup>18</sup> These are a few motivations – note that they are not selected from a larger motivation, this is the full response some provided as an argument to explain why a novel is of low literary quality: "more of a thriller", "thriller", "more of a chick lit", "chicklit".

In the list of comments on low scoring novels by female authors, we indeed find a number of other words for low brow genres, a counterpart of which are not present in the male list: 'romannetje' ('little novel'), 'tussendoortje' (comparable to 'easy read'), 'verhaaltje' (little story), 'niemendalletje' ('frilly thing'). However, there are some positive words or words related to narratological concepts in the female list: 'diepgang' ('depth'), 'diepgaand' ('profound'), 'verhaallijnen' ('story lines'), 'betekenis' ('meaning'), 'dialogen'

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17. Original text: "In pakkende taal geschreven. Mooie taal. En niet overdreven en te beladen. Het verhaal op zich is al pakkend. Daar hoeft een schepje overdreven **taalgebruik** niet bovenop."

18. I will zoom in on the genre of chick lit in Chapters 6 and 7, I will explain it more fully there. For now, I will summarize it as a genre which is seen as a modern variant of the romance novel.

(‘dialogues’) versus only ‘stijl’ (‘style’) and ‘opzet’ (‘construction’) for the male keyword list. When we look at the context of these words, for instance ‘depth’ and ‘story lines’, it shows that they are used with a negation, which is not surprising in this context – it is however that these words are mainly used with female authors in a negating sense, whereas in case of the male authors, such concepts are also used in a positive context when they do receive high scores.

In sum, the keyword analysis for the comments show that male and female authors are judged in a different sense; even when I restrict the variables to include only novels that received a high rating from the respondents, as well as only include female respondents. The differences are subtle enough to be missed when the comments are only judged by the human eye, but a fairly simple measure such as Log Likelihood singles them out. Whereas style and language are markers for male authors who write well, content words are markers for female authors with a good pen, in the view of female respondents in this survey. The biggest problem with this conclusion, is that it could be caused by the the variable of translation – is the novel translated or not? – and hence, I cannot isolate gender. There are very few originally Dutch female literary authors in the corpus, so I cannot make a sound comparison with the originally Dutch male authors. Therefore, as an illustration, I also look into a few novels by female Dutch literary authors now.

### **Dutch female literary authors**

To make a comparison, I pick the three novels by Dutch female authors who received the highest average rating. I choose two comments from the highest and one from the lowest score, see Table 3.14. The reason I only choose one comment for a low rating, is that there are not that many low scores for these novels, so it is often the only comment for that rating. The positive comments I selected were chosen because they either attempt to give a comprehensive explanation, or because they chose certain striking words or phrases – I do not claim to be objective in my selection.

Title and author	7 – highly literary	1 – definitely not literary
<p><i>De Schilder en het Meisje</i> ('The Painter and the Girl'), Margriet de Moor</p>	<p>"The sentences were well-formulated and appeared to me to be an artwork. I also noticed that the story was not so much about events and building of tension, but more about what a certain event or meeting can do to people. The writer (f) did not get stuck on the narrative plane, but delved deeper into things."<sup>19</sup></p> <p>"The writing style is beautiful: imaginative, suggestive and beautiful concerning language. Much is suggested in the story without explicit description. Themes are touched that are important and with which I can empathize."<sup>20</sup></p>	<p>"Shallow and not credible because of word usage that did not fit the time the story is set."<sup>21, 22</sup></p>

19. Original text: "De zinnen waren goed geformuleerd en kwamen op mij over als een kunstwerk. Ook viel me op dat het in het verhaal niet zozeer ging om gebeurtenissen en spanningsopbouw, maar meer om wat een bepaalde gebeurtenis of ontmoeting kan doen met mensen. De schrijfster is niet blijven hangen op het verhalende vlak, maar is wat dieper op dingen ingegaan."

20. Original text: "De schrijfstijl is mooi: beeldend, suggestief en mooi qua taal. In het verhaal wordt veel gesuggereerd zonder het expliciet te benoemen. Er worden thema's aangeroerd die belangrijk zijn en voor mij invoelbaar."

21. Original text: "Oppervlakkig en niet geloofwaardig door woordgebruik die niet bij de tijd paste waarin het verhaal speelt."

22. This novel did not have any comments for a rating of 1 ('definitely not literary'), so I picked the lowest available, which was a 3 ('tending towards not literary').

Title and author	7 – highly literary	1 – definitely not literary
<p><i>De Nederlandse Maagd</i> ('The Dutch virgin'), Marente de Moor</p>	<p>“The way of writing, the sentence structure and the vocabulary used. I believe it also won some literary awards.”<sup>23</sup></p> <p>“You experience the development of the main character: you get to know her thoughts and feelings. Her doubts, but also her curiosity for the fencing teacher keep your attention. You increasingly feel the threat of an unanswered love. The book has been written in beautiful Dutch: varied word usage, original way of formulating. A language that is too beautiful for everyday life.”<sup>24</sup></p>	<p>“[T]he story was mediocre, linguistically it was not good. Not compelling at all. It does not rise above the Mills and Boon novel. Incomprehensible that this book has won a prize.”<sup>25</sup></p>

23. Original text: “De manier van schrijven, de zinsopbouw en het gebruikte vocabulaire. Heeft ook meen ik een aantal literaire prijzen gewonnen.”

24. Original text: “Je maakt de ontwikkeling mee van de hoofdpersoon: je leert haar gedachten en gevoelens kennen. Haar twijfels, maar ook haar nieuwsgierigheid naar de schermleeraar houden je aandacht vast. Je voelt steeds meer de dreiging van een niet beantwoorde liefde. Het boek is geschreven in mooi Nederlands: afwisselend woordgebruik, originele manier van formuleren. Een taal die te mooi is voor het dagelijks leven.”

25. Original text: “het verhaal was matig, taalkundig gezien was het niet goed. Absoluut niet boeiend. Het stijgt niet uit boven een bouquetreeks roman. onbegrijpelijk dat dit boek een prijs gewonnen heeft.”

Title and author	7 – highly literary	1 – definitely not literary
<i>De Verdovers</i> ('The Anesthetizers'), Anna Enquist	<p>“Because her writing is to me, but likely also for others, very relatable, there is a nice way of handling language, and it is timeless.”<sup>26</sup></p> <p>“The sentences are beautifully built. Anna has done much research on the topic and put this in a well-constructed story.”<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>“Enquist doesn’t know how to go beyond a doctor’s novel.<sup>28</sup> Even an added sonata structure and classical music theme does not lift it up from the adulterous situations and love issues. The writing style does not speak to me either, very banal.”<sup>29</sup></p>

Table 3.14: Motivations for high and low scores in the National Reader Survey, on the three highest score originally Dutch novels by female authors.

26. Original text: “Omdat haar schrijven ook voor mij, maar waarschijnlijk ook voor anderen heel herkenbaar is, op een mooie manier met taal wordt omgegaan, en tijdloos is.”

27. Original text: “De zinsconstructies zijn prachtig. Anna heeft veel onderzoek gedaan over het onderwerp om het vervolgens middels een goed opgebouwd verhaal neer te zetten.”

28. The doctor’s novel is a typical genre novel, that is part of the genre of romance novels. The topic is usually a potentially dangerous love between a male doctor and a female nurse. One of the story lines in the Enquist novel is an affair between a male psychoanalyst and a female anesthesiologist.

29. Original text: “Veel verder dan een doktersnovelle weet Enquist het niet te krijgen. Zelfs een toegevoegde sonatestructuur en klassieke-muziekthema verheft het niet boven overspelige situaties en liefdesperikelen. De schrijfstijl spreekt mij ook niet aan, erg plat.”

The characteristics of motivations that I signaled as a marker for male authors in the corpus, namely that structure and writing style are of greater importance than content, are visible here, too. Overall, the female authors are judged along the lines of the same concepts as the male author markers that I identified. So, my hypothesis is that the differences would in fact be more subtle had the corpus of the Riddle been less skewed along gender lines. However, notable markers for low literary quality that are connected to female authors, as identified in the previous section, can also be found here. These are the overt references to 'female' genres, specifically the Mills and Boons novels, which indicate that a bias is not entirely absent. I will return to this in the next chapter.

To sum up my findings on the motivations, I find that there are quite some commonalities in the information respondents provide. There is, in a way, a consensus of literary quality, which includes that respondents are highly aware of some type of genre division. The motivations are gendered overall, but the skewness along the lines of genre and translation prevent me from concluding that this is solely attributable to author gender. There are indications however that gender-related bias in comments is not absent. In other words, what I have not yet done, is answer the question whether author gender causes these differences. The National Reader Survey is not set up to analyze gender, and thus, the variable of author gender cannot be neatly isolated. It is not impossible, but then there is the problem that there are very few representatives of originally Dutch literary works by female authors, who are my main focus. Therefore, the Riddle project undertook a second experiment, which is summarized in the next section.

## 3.6 ISOLATING GENDER AS A VARIABLE

In Koolen et al. (in preparation), the central question is: “Does author gender play a role when a reader judges a literary text on a scale of literary quality?” To find this out, we attempt to isolate author gender as a variable. Goldberg (1968), in similar research, finds that even women are prejudiced against women’s writing, but later research (Levenson, 1975) concludes that his results could not be replicated. Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) varies the name of an applicant (apparently female or apparently male) in a job application for a scientific position and shows that a gender bias in science still persists. We build on such research, and specifically attempt to find out if not just male respondents, but also female respondents judge work by a female author differently than work by a male author.

### **Experimental setup**

A sample of 600 subjects was used, with groups of 200 in one of three conditions. Each group contained as many women as men; and their age and education was chosen so as to reflect the spread of these variables in the National Reader Survey, which means, for instance, that 49% of respondents were in the age group of 45-65. In other words, this is a reflection of the Dutch fiction-reading public, and not so much of the Dutch general public. Respondents were presented with a 250-word fictional text:

*Outside, alongside the track, between the pale birch trees and the stiff larches, walks an elderly, naked man. He is not naked like a newborn or a nudist on the beach, he is naked like you would be in your living room. Undressed, a little bit freed and a little bit secretive. The trees tremble in the wind, but the man doesn't. He apparently finds that he does not need a shirt, pants, or underpants. He did put on walking shoes, heavy brown clogs surrounding delicate ankles. And in the hollow between shoulders and buttocks a small red backpack hops along with every step.*

*I am not in the quiet area of the train, but the people here feel no need to make use of their right to noise. Every one of them is quietly bent over a screen, monks over*

*bibles. I look around, hoping someone will look up, send an affirming smile my way, suppress a snorting laugh. That someone saw it, too.*

*No one looks up.*

*I look for the senior man, his yellowy arms and legs between all the brown and green, but outside there are only the barks of trees. The man is gone and I am the only one who saw him. Like the red-eared turtle that I had has a child, without my parents knowing. An aquarium no bigger than a dishpan, hidden away in my wardrobe. It would swim there in the dark, for five weeks, and I would whisper to him that he had to grow tall and strong. Until we went on vacation.*

*An elderly man behind the window of a train is a safer pet. In my head he can wander forever.*<sup>30</sup> (my translation)

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30. Original text: "Buiten, langs het spoor, tussen de bleke berken en de stramme lariksen, loopt een bejaarde, naakte man. Hij is niet naakt zoals een pasgeboren baby of een nudist op een strand, hij is naakt zoals je dat bent in je huiskamer. Uitgekleed, een beetje bevrijd en een beetje stiekem. De bomen bibberen in de wind, maar de man niet. Hij vindt klaarblijkelijk dat hij geen shirt, broek, of onderbroek nodig heeft. Wel heeft hij wandelschoenen aangedaan, zware bruine klompen om iele enkels. En in de holte tussen schouders en billen huppelt een kleine rode rugzak mee met elke stap.

Ik zit niet in een stiltecoupé, maar de mensen hier hebben geen behoefte om gebruik te maken van hun recht op lawaai. Elk van hen zit zwijgend gebogen over een scherm, monniken boven bijbels. Ik kijk om me heen, hopen dat iemand opkijkt, een bevestigende glimlach mijn kant op stuurt, een proestlach onderdrukt. Dat iemand het ook zag.

Niemand kijkt op.

Ik zoek de bejaarde man, zijn gelige armen en benen tussen al het bruin en groen, maar buiten zijn alleen nog de basten van bomen. De man is weg en ik ben de enige die hem heeft gezien. Zoals die roodwangschildpad die ik had als kind, zonder dat mijn ouders ervan wisten. Een aquarium niet groter dan een afwasteil, verborgen in mijn kledingkast. Daar zwom hij in het donker, vijf weken lang, daar fluisterde ik tegen hem dat hij groot en sterk moest worden. Tot we op vakantie gingen.

Een bejaarde naakte man achter een treinraam is een veiliger huisdier. Door mijn hoofd mag hij eeuwig wandelen."

The text was preceded by an introduction, which depended on the condition the respondent was assigned:

Condition 1: the author is said to be a man;

Condition 2: the author is said to be a woman;

Condition 3: the gender of the author is not specified.

The introduction reads as follows for the first condition:

*A man of 29 years, who has not yet published a book, has sent a manuscript to a literary publisher. It is a novel (fiction). The publisher's editorial board needs to decide whether the novel will be published or not. The man waits patiently what the publisher will decide. The man has been writing short stories all his life, but if his novel were to be published, he would consider that to be a confirmation of his talent. He has worked and revised the novel for over two years. He hopes the book will be considered as sufficiently literary. The publisher will only publish the book when it has literary quality. The editorial board now asks you to judge the literary quality of a part of his manuscript.*<sup>31</sup> (my translation)

The strong repetition of author gender in the introduction was decided upon, when after some pre-testing it proved to be necessary in order for a reasonable percentage of the readers (about 70%) to remember the gender of the author after reading the text. The text, written by Dutch female literary author Emy Koopman, was purposefully written to be perceived as 'gender-neutral'. This

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31. Original text: "Een man van 29 jaar, die nog niet eerder een boek heeft gepubliceerd, heeft een manuscript naar een literair uitgever gestuurd. Het betreft een roman (fictie). De redactie van de uitgeverij moet nu een besluit nemen of zijn roman gepubliceerd gaat worden. De man wacht ondertussen geduldig af wat de uitgever gaat beslissen. De man schrijft al zijn hele leven korte verhalen, maar als zijn roman zou worden uitgegeven, zou hij dat ervaren als een bevestiging van zijn talent. Hij heeft ruim twee jaar geschreven en geschaafd aan zijn boek. Hij hoopt dat het boek literair genoeg wordt bevonden. De uitgever wil het alleen uitgeven als het boek literaire kwaliteit heeft. De redactie vraagt nu aan u om de literaire kwaliteit van een deel van zijn manuscript te beoordelen."

means that the style was not obviously marked according to ideas about gendered writing (i.e. many diminutives, or numbers); that the main character has no identified gender, nor undertakes activities or has thoughts that can be perceived as highly gendered based on stereotypes.<sup>32</sup>

Respondents, like in the National Reader Survey, were asked to assign a rating to the excerpt on a scale of 1-7; in which 1 is 'highly literary', and 7 is 'barely literary' – we again report reverse scores for readability. They also answered additional questions, for instance concerning their interest in the task. Our hypotheses were based on the overall results of the National Reader Survey:

*(H1) Readers who believe the text to have been written by a woman, assign a lower average score to the fictional text than readers who believe to have been written by a man.*

*(H2) Female respondents are more critical of female authors than male respondents are.*

## **Results**

Against expectation, there are no significant differences between the group means of the scores assigned to the literary text, as determined by a one-way ANOVA ( $F(2,552)=1.263, p=.28$ ). The mean of male authors is only slightly higher ( $M=4.6, SD=1.25$ ) than that of female authors ( $M=4.4, SD=1.43$ ) and that of the author of unknown gender ( $M=4.5, SD=1.30$ ). In other words, the perceived gender of the author appears to be of little consequence in the literary judgment. This does not change when only the respondents are selected who correctly remembered the gender of the author (70% recollection for male authors, 78% for female authors), or when the gender of the

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32. In an informal exploration, this notion was tested. Approximately twenty test subjects (who were not part of the final survey) were presented with the text and asked if they thought it had been written by a woman or a man. The results were roughly evenly split between the genders. All subjects provided arguments to validate their choice, which concerned topic and/or style. One example is the mention of keeping a pet turtle: one subject reported this as a typically female activity, another as a typically male activity.

respondent is taken into account. Female respondents are not significantly more critical of female authors ( $M=4.51$ ,  $SD=1.31$ ) than male respondents are ( $M=4.80$ ,  $SD=1.22$ );  $t(186)$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . In other words, both hypotheses (H1 and H2) are rejected.

Respondents were also asked to guess the gender of the main character, which they tended to equate with the gender they believed the author had. Even though this might sound quite trivial, one could imagine it makes quite a difference for a reader to believe the protagonist to be either a woman or a man. Different sets of beliefs will be activated, about what is typical for this character, and what would be atypical, what the protagonist looks like, etc.. Respondents who were not provided with an author gender (condition 3) were asked if they had a notion of what the author's gender was, which they could judge on a scale. 52% thought that the author was surely or likely male, 13% thought the author was surely or likely a woman; 34% did not know or had not thought about it. Subsequently, in this condition 55% believed the main character to be a man, 29% stated they did not know, or did not think about it, 16% thought it was a woman.

The only significant difference in judgment of literary quality found, was between respondents who reported to have no idea of the gender of the protagonist ( $M=3.84$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ), and those who did ( $M=4.67$ ,  $SD=1.27$ );  $t(553)$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . This result is similar for the respondents who were in condition 3, and did not imagine the gender of the author at all ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=1.48$ ), as opposed to readers who did ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD=1.18$ );  $t(180)$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Imagining the gender of the author and the protagonist is tied to a higher appraisal of literary quality. It might simply indicate the importance of the investment of readers in the story they read, but it might also show the importance for readers to know author and/or protagonist gender to gain such investment.

In sum, when knowledge about the author and the novel are stripped away, specific author gender is not of great consequence when it concerns judgments of literary quality. The literary quality of the excerpt was judged roughly the same, if the respondent believed to have been written by a woman or a man. The only strongly gendered outcome was the fact that respondents more often assumed the author (and the main character) to be a man, if no author gender

was provided. This indicates that, even though respondents believe female authors to be as capable of producing literary text as male authors, readers still more readily imagine a (literary) author as a man. I use parentheses for 'literary' here, because we cannot deduce if readers would have also assumed the author to have been male, if the text had been presented without the context of literary fiction, or with a different context; this could be a venue for further research. Respondents also equated the character's gender – which was not given – to the (known or imagined) gender of the author, indicating the strong identification of the author with the protagonist.

### **3.7 PRESTIGE: RATINGS OF NON-READ NOVELS**

How can we relate the fact that readers appear to believe female authors as capable of writing literary prose to their low ratings in the National Reader Survey? The explanation that the novels in the corpus were simply not good enough, I will address in the second part of this thesis. Here, I will focus on another possible connection, based on results from the National Reader Survey. After the respondents were asked to rate novels they had read, they were also asked if they wanted to rate some novels they had *not* read. I compare these scores to the scores on reported read novels. The sociological aspect of the literary ratings can be demonstrated quite adequately with the outcome. Especially for the novels that score high on the scale of literary quality, the consensus between respondents who have claimed to have read the books and the ones who said they did not, is high (see Figure 3.9). The fact that non-readers and readers agree highly on the high-scoring novels supports the argument that especially in the case of the literary novels, the respondents judge a novel's (and quite likely an author's) literary prestige.

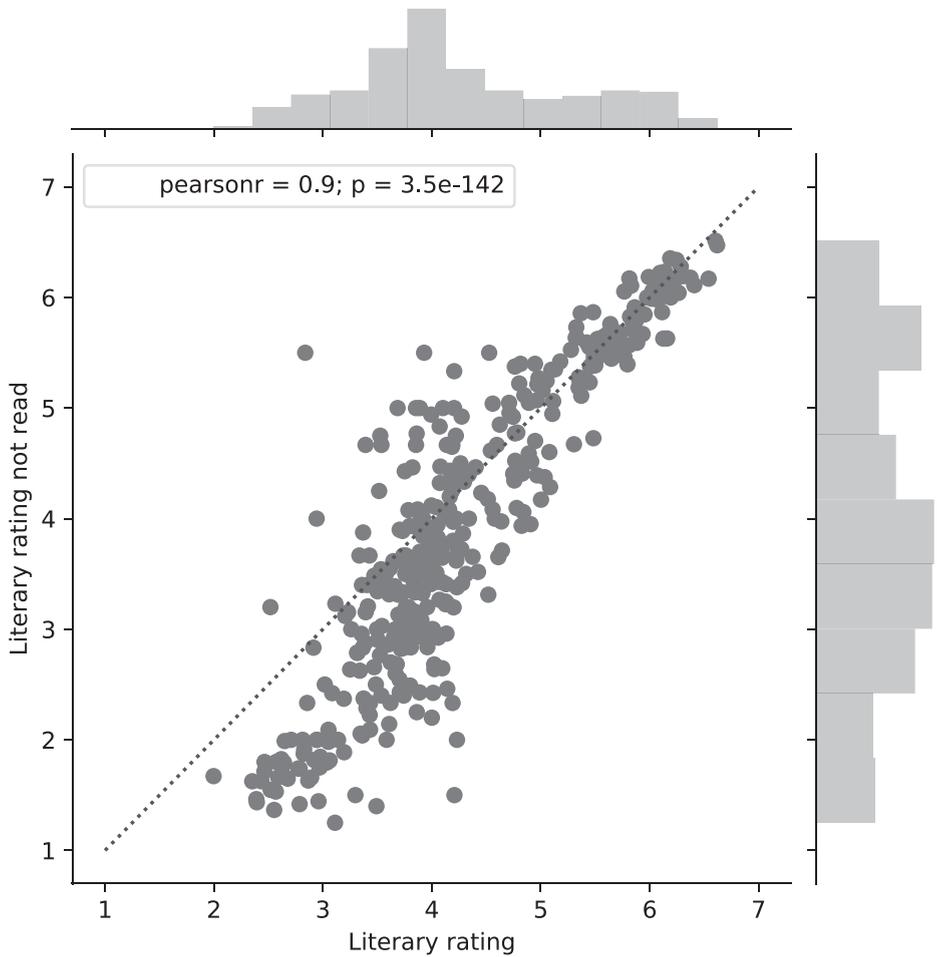


Figure 3.9. The correlation between literary ratings of book read and the literary ratings of books not read is high (0.9) and statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation is stronger with the higher ratings. Pearson's correlation coefficient is used, which calculates the statistical likeliness of a linear relationship between the values of two variables.<sup>33</sup>

33. See for instance: <https://libguides.library.kent.edu/SPSS/PearsonCorr>. (Last visit: 14 November 2017).

In our follow-up survey, prestige was of no consequence: in all conditions, the author was claimed to be a novice, an unpublished author. As Verboord (2003) ascertains, the hierarchy in the Dutch literary field is built on prestige, and male authors more readily gain it in the actual literary field than female authors do. Vos (2008) shows that actively building a literary image can indeed aid female authors. However, I also think it not to be the whole answer. Prestige is based on certain ideas of what literary quality is and is not, and there, gender does still play a role. The text we offered readers was purposefully gender-neutral, that is to say, there was no clear evidence of ‘genderedness’ of thoughts or activities that could be imposed upon the text through stereotyping. What I mean by this, and why it matters, I will address in the next chapter.

## **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The National Reader Survey shows that female authors are bought differently (they have a lower share in the literary genre, higher in the romantic genre), are read differently (very little by men), and judged differently (overall lower scores of literary quality, but also within the literary genre). In other words, male authors are read more widely across genders, are overall more strongly connected to the literary genre, and ultimately receive higher ratings. Female authors, according to this data, are indeed more strongly connected to genres of perceived lesser literary quality than male authors are. Perhaps this is also the reason that the nominated and awarded literary works by female authors in this corpus cannot be found in the top 5%, but this is speculation. The motivations respondents gave are also highly gendered, but an examination of a few highly rated Dutch female authors proved that this is most likely at least partially caused by an absence of Dutch female literary authors in the corpus. A follow-up experiment indeed indicates that the Dutch reading public may believe that female authors are as capable of writing literary prose as male authors are; but they more readily associate (literary) authorship with male authorship. In other words, more research needs to be undertaken. The prestige an author has in the public eye might be a crucial aspect that we have

excluded in our follow-up experiment, as the high correlation between ratings of read and non-read books shows for high scoring novels. Thus, it appears as though the social aspect of judgments of literary quality cannot fully be separated from the text, at least where it concerns female authors. Another important finding of the National Reader Survey is that female readers are more critical of female authors than of male authors (even though this could not be replicated for an unknown author in the follow-up survey), and hence, the argument that large female readership will result in better appreciation (see for instance Haveman, 1999) is not necessarily correct.

# CONCLUSION TO PART I

Note that so far, I have largely suspended my critical view on the outcome of the National Reader Survey. I have purposefully only provided a state-of-affairs, the situation as is. I have also not tried to pinpoint a culprit, instead, I have chosen to take a path that I think is more productive. I have shown with the previous chapters, that the whole Dutch literary field, the full system – from the consumer through the award jury; all the people in it, including the female consumer – perpetuates the situation that disfavors work by Dutch female literary authors. This results in a situation where female authors are in general seen as less literary, even though Dutch readers appear to believe that they are, in theory, equally capable of producing literary works. Each party in the field can shift responsibility when asked: publishers can state it is consumers' buying behavior, consumers can argue it is the publishers and/or critics who influence them, award juries might point to the relatively small amount of novels by female authors they receive from publishers. Since it is a self-perpetuating cycle, the question who is responsible for the gender imbalance, is not the right question.

The skeptical reader of this thesis might now claim that there is no longer a need to make a fuss: the lower literary scores are valid, because the works by women on this list are of lesser literary quality, especially the romantic novels. The critic might also say that the association of 'male' with 'literary' is based on 'the truth' and that I have simply shown that female authors do not have what it takes to make it to the literary top: if the general reader believes female authors to be as capable as male authors to write literary prose, and the female authors are not at the top, then it is somehow their own fault. Let me analyze this reasoning. What does it mean to be capable enough to make it to the literary top? For female authors, it is not a lack of output that makes them incapable. I have shown, Chapter 2, that female authors' presence and literary production is large enough for them to be awarded more often; out of the hundreds of literary novels published by female authors each year, it is not a stretch to believe that at least a couple each year could be selected to receive one of the four most prestigious Dutch-language literary awards – and not

zero or one, which is now most often the case.

But, here comes the pivotal point. A critic could still argue that it is a stretch, that female authors simply *do not write materials of high enough quality* (according to the current literary quality consensus), that there are too few novels by female authors which deserve recognition. This means, in other words, that the gender of the author causes her work to be inferior somehow. Infamously, van Mersbergen (2016) wondered if female authors who discuss each other's work are instead too busy with their "tea and cookies" to talk about content; and consecutively, contends that we should talk about literary quality, not quantify the absence of female authors. Such literary quality arguments have left female authors out of the canon for centuries, and it is therefore the main focus of the second and third part of this thesis. Is author gender really that crucial as a determiner in literary prose?

Please note that I am not going to try to prove that female authors write materials of the same quality as male authors or even that they write similarly. I am going to turn the the matter upside down and show why author gender is not as crucial in writing as some (often subconsciously) believe; and, more importantly perhaps, I will show how to read differently to get past the author's gender. I do this by examining the actual texts of the novels. Not by singling out a female author, not by focusing on a couple of works, not by looking at only literary novels, but by comparing a large amount of novels by female and male authors, both popular and literary. In Chapter 4 I will first supply the theoretical background for this analysis: how has gender been tied to the notion of literary quality in the past, and how does this take shape in more recent views on literary quality? To answer the second part of that question, I turn to the National Reader Survey again.

# PART 2A

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## Literary texts bottom-up: gendered writing style

In this part, I first build the theoretical framework for the rest of this thesis (Chapter 4) and then take the full texts of the novels of the Riddle of Literary corpus (for the preparation of the corpus, see van Cranenburgh, 2016: pp. 177-184) to perform computational analysis on along gender lines (Chapter 5). I call this bottom-up analysis, because I do not look for specific features in the text, rather I analyze the full texts through computational means and then interpret the results.



# 4.

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## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: CONNECTING (FEMALE) GENDER TO TEXT

*Literature is the archive of a culture. We turn to literature to discover what makes other human beings suffer and laugh, hate and love, how people in other countries live, and how men and women experienced life in other historical periods. To turn women into second-class citizens in the realm of literature is to say that women's experiences of existence and of the world are less important than men's.*  
(Moi, 2008)

In Part 1, I have shown that female authors in the Dutch literary field are not fully equal to male authors. Their work for instance does not gain equal attention in the higher regions of the literary field. My goal in the second part of this thesis is to find out how strongly an author's gender can be connected to her writing style, because an unresolved argument against affirmative action remains the lack of quality of female authors' work (see for instance van Mersbergen, 2016). But before I examine the texts of the novels, I need to establish two more things. First, I want to build a theoretical framework for the final parts of this thesis, because I want to determine which textual factors might be of importance for my analyses. Second, I want to establish more firmly how female authors are actually judged differently – all other textual factors being equal.

Let me summarize my findings so far. In the Introduction, I explained what I understand to be literary quality: a consensus, influenced by the literary

establishment, which consists of a combination of extra-textual (for instance genre) and textual qualities (for instance sentence complexity).<sup>1</sup> Many of the respondents in the National Reader Survey (NLO) – at least to a certain extent – proved to be aware of both types of criteria of literary quality, as I showed in Section 3.5. I established general ideas behind the literary quality consensus and showed that in the NLO these are mostly tied to male authors by respondents; as was to be expected based on the gendered genre skewness of the corpus we base ourselves on. Since the National Reader Survey does not allow me to properly isolate gendered judgments, at least not for the highly literary novels, I want to investigate them further. And even though a follow-up survey (see Section 3.6) has shown that female author gender in and of itself is not a reason for a lower literary judgment, I still want to know in what other possible ways gender is connected to judgments of literary quality, especially since prestige was not considered as a variable in that survey.

So, to further research how female author gender might be connected to literary appraisal of text characteristics, I choose to apply a more narrow focus in this chapter. I turn to the discipline where the role of author gender in literature has been researched well and that is feminist literary theory. This will help me achieve my first goal with this chapter, to build a framework from which I can start to examine the texts of the novels themselves: which elements do I need to consider? My second goal is to establish more firmly my idea that literary judgments are nowadays not completely free from gender bias. To see if the feminist critique is still applicable, I connect the theory to the motivations respondents supplied in the National Reader Survey.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Although I use 'genre' as an example of an extratextual element, because it is applied by publishers and readers, one could argue that this is at least partially based on textual components.

2. I do not supply further information on the respondent, not even her gender, for it would merely function to satisfy curiosity. As established in the previous chapter, respondent gender does not explain differences in judgments of literary quality of female authors.

Note that by analyzing ideas the general reader provides, I do not automatically claim that all readers have such ideas – I merely show they are still in existence. In other words, I ask the questions:

*How has female author gender historically been connected to literary quality judgments? Can we still trace such a connection in the answers to the National Reader Survey?*

I choose to focus on the answers from the National Reader Survey, rather than for instance reviews, because the survey covers more ‘popular’ genres as well as the literary genre. Genres such as romance and suspense are generally not included in appraisal of literary quality, it is interesting to find how these are viewed in relation to gender. A final note is that I mainly focus on female gender, simply because female authors tend to draw the short straw in the Dutch literary field, as the previous chapters have shown. This does not mean there is nothing interesting to say about masculinity, however.<sup>3</sup>

## 4.1 FROM FEMALE AUTHORSHIP TO LOW LITERARY QUALITY

The history of female gender and its relationship with literary critique has been well-documented. A few centuries ago, female author gender could simply replace a qualitative judgment. Showalter (1977) relates how female authors have been equated with their gender first, and their profession second; if their professional status was recognized at all. She does this through the examples of British female authors in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, among whom Charlotte Brontë. Examples of gender superseding the work itself can be found in literary critique published at the end of the nineteenth century: through what Showalter calls “the double critical standard”

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3. And, one could argue, the unmarkedness of masculinity as opposed to the markedness of femininity is part of the issue of undervaluation of female authors’ work. Therefore, I do return to the masculine perspective in Chapter 7.

the idea arose that a happy woman would feel no need to write; the women who did write would be altered, become less feminine and hence, critics conclude, women should not write (pp. 61-81).

Such critique is no longer fathomable. However, as Russ describes in her highly influential *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), the mechanisms applied then transformed into other forms of female gender-related criticism. Russ presents a set of categories into which dismissals of female-authored penmanship can be divided. She illustrates the categories with numerous examples. The first mechanism is the entry point for my inquiry, which is the denial of authorship ("she didn't write it"), for instance when the work by a female author is said to have been written by a man instead, often a husband, brother or father. An interesting contemporary example of this can be found in the National Reader Survey, of a respondent who gives a high rating to the translation of Nicole Krauss's *Great House* and explains why:<sup>4</sup>

*She obviously has adopted her husband's writing style, but to me literature is where a good writing style and a good story collide.*<sup>5</sup>

The author assumes that Krauss's style is copied from her husband's (Jonathan Safran Foer); this is most likely based on the fact that he became famous first. It remains a hasty and biased assumption, however, especially the fact that the respondent believes was "adopted" rather than "influenced by". The credit for the style of writing is transferred to Krauss's husband, as if Krauss did not develop it herself.

Another updated version of "she didn't write it" is a denial of female gender, for instance when a female author is said to be un-female-like, and it is meant as praise: "[I] was told at a writer's party by a male colleague that I was a wonderful writer who 'did not write like a woman' and that – pianistically

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4. All translations of National Reader Survey motivations in this chapter are my own.

5. Original text: "Ze heeft wel duidelijk de schrijfstijl van haar man overgenomen, maar voor mij is literatuur waar een goede schrijfstijl en een goed verhaal samenkomen."

speaking – I had a man’s ‘reach’” (Russ, 1983: p. 23). This probably means that she has the ability to go beyond what the average female author produces: in piano playing, larger hands allow a player to reach more keys without having to move hands. Quality is inherently linked to the masculine gender in such a compliment, a female author can at best strive to become more like a male author. It is not fully clear however what is meant with “a man’s reach”. The gender of the author is in such critique no longer directly a cause for dismissal, but it is indirectly connected to characteristics of the text of the novel itself. Ellman (1968) has coined the term ‘phallic criticism’ to describe the double standard critique, where the gender of the author precedes the text itself in assessing quality:

*With a kind of inverted fidelity, the discussion of women’s books by men will arrive punctually at the point of preoccupation, which is the fact of femininity. Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips. (p. 29)*

This “intellectual measuring of busts and hips” includes ascribing ‘feminine’ qualities to a text, and using these as a cause for dismissal without further substantial argumentation (pp. 40-42).

Van Boven (1992) is one of the theorists who shows how this is performed – through (supposed) character traits of women in general or the female author specifically. Figure 4.1 visualizes the process she outlines.

Not all steps are always explicitly discussed in critique, nor is the gender of the author necessarily guiding in the gendered traits that follow. For instance, Ellman (1968) also notes that phallic criticism is not only applied to female authors, a male author can be put aside with the same criteria, with Truman Capote – who was gay – as an example (p. 42). This is important, because it shows that perceived genderedness of text is not exclusive to female authors. Of this, we also find an example in the National Reader Survey motivations, about George Mastras’s *Tranen over Kashmir* (‘Fidaly’s Way’): “Resembles more

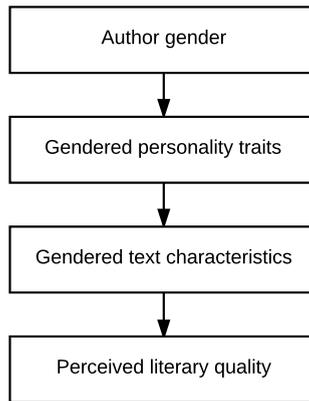


Figure 4.1. The steps in which author gender permeates judgments of literary quality. The female gender is applied most often in such critique.

an easily readable ladies' novel."<sup>6</sup> Here then, lies the key to gendered literary quality judgments: the gender of the author is strongly connected to it, but it is not the sole aspect of 'genderedness' that is considered. The 'female' or the 'male' is thus perceived to be visible in textual characteristics, even possibly, but not commonly, separate from author gender. One respondent explains a low rating of literary quality for Danielle Steel's *De Weg van het Hart* ('Matters of the Heart'): "as a man I find it too feminine".<sup>7</sup> The definition of the gendered lens thus needs to be broadened: "a way of reading a text that is – either subconsciously or consciously – affected by the gender of the author and/or the perceived genderedness of the text." To explain what I mean by 'perceived genderedness of the text', and specifically concerning perceived 'femaleness' of text, I discuss three elements that recur in feminist literature: genre, style and topic.

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6. Original text: "Heeft meer weg van een makkelijk te lezen damesromannetje."

7. Original text: "als man zijnde te vrouwelijk".

## 4.2 GENRE

As I have shown in the previous chapter, genre is of great importance in the relationship between gender and perceptions of literary quality. Texts by female authors are judged to be significantly less literary, partially because of genre: romantic novels are the least literary of all novels in our corpus, according to the respondents in the National Reader Survey. Moreover, in the motivations I found that terms related to genres that can be considered as 'women's novels' (chick lit, romance novels, etc.) are applied to indicate what literature is not (Section 3.5).<sup>8</sup> Female author gender and genre are not easily separated in such judgments. But what is the significance of this connection?

In the past, work by female authors in the Netherlands was conceived to be a genre, even without explicit marketing by publishers. Van Boven (1992) describes how female Dutch authors at the end of the nineteenth century were grouped according to their sex by literary critics and judged in this light, even though they did not assert ties among themselves. On the contrary, in the few literary statements that they have made, they stressed their individuality. This is what Russ (1983) calls 'false categorizing' (pp. 49-61). Notwithstanding thematic and stylistic differences, novels written by these women were labeled as if they were a genre: "De Dames-roman" ('The Ladies-novel'), "Vrouwenboeken" ('Women's books'), "mevrouwenromans" ('madam's novels'), etc. (p. 15). Novels by women were seen, especially by the new cohort of male writers, as old-fashioned, in the realistic tradition of the then no longer popular group of authors named 'Tachtigers' - a view taken over by later literary historians.<sup>9</sup>

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8. I must note that genres such as thrillers and detectives are also used to explain why a novel is not very literary. However, there is no such concept as the 'men's novel' to group such genres, which means that these are less gendered.

9. Tachtigers' roughly means 'Eighties-persons', referring to the decade when these authors started writing and became famous.

Even though men still wrote novels in that genre and there were women writers who did not fit in, the term ‘damesroman’ became almost synonymous to the ‘old’ style of writing.

Vogel (2001), following Van Boven (1992), discusses the use of the term ‘damesroman’ (‘ladies’ novel’). The term is still in use after 1945, and it is used in two ways: to praise the author by separating her work from such novels or to dismiss her work by comparing it to them. A male counterpart is non-existent, which shows that only women in the period are judged according to their gender (p. 176). Groos (2011) manually analyzes three hundred reviews of Dutch female literary authors in the period 1994-2000 for gender-based comments. She shows that gender of the author is still often part of the judgment. One of her examples is the application of the Dutch affix ‘vrouwen-’ (‘women’s’) in a qualitative sense: novels in that period are dismissed when they are put in the category of ‘vrouwenboek’, (‘women’s book’), the present-day equivalent of the ‘damesroman’ (‘ladies’ novel’). The presence of female protagonists is, according to Groos, one important reason to deem a novel to be a ‘woman’s book’, whereas the male equivalent does not exist (p. 33).

Some of the ideas behind the term might have changed through time, but the construct is still used as measuring stick to (mainly) compare female authors to. In the National Reader Survey, this is evident, as I have already given an indication of in the previous chapter. There is still repeated pejorative use of terms such as ‘ladies’ novel’ or ‘women’s novel’, and more specific variants such as ‘keukenmeidenroman’ (‘kitchen maids’ novel’) and ‘huisvrouwenroman’ (‘housewives’ novel’) – where male equivalents are practically absent.<sup>10</sup> I have performed a (semi-manual) count of all terms that respondents applied to indicate why a novel is seen as not highly literary by the respondent, which ended with ‘-roman’ (‘novel’), ‘-boek’ (‘book’) and ‘-verhaal’ (‘story’).<sup>11</sup>

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10. The recurring use of the specific word of ‘keukenmeidenroman’ (‘kitchen maids’ novel’) is most likely caused by the Dutch translation of the title *The Help* as *Een Keukenmeidenroman*: ‘A Kitchen Maids’ Novel’. This unfelicitious choice might have given the term new vigor.

11. I manually checked for variations, including typical spelling errors people make in Dutch, to be as complete as possible.

I found 369 such qualifications, including ‘vakantieroman’ (‘vacation novel’) and ‘wegleesroman’ (comparable to ‘easy read’). Of all of these qualifications, 11% were ‘women’s book’ or similar concepts related to the female gender: ‘damesroman’ (‘ladies’ novel’), ‘vrouwenroman’ (‘women’s novel’), ‘huisvrouwenroman’ (‘housewives’ novel’), ‘keukenmeidenroman’ (‘kitchen maids’ novel’), ‘keukenmeidenboek’ (‘kitchen maids’ book’), ‘meidenboek’ (comparable to ‘teenage girl book’), ‘meisjesboek’ (‘girls’ book’), ‘vrouwenboek’ (‘women’s book’). The concepts related to masculinity were ‘jongensboek’ (‘boys’ book’) and ‘mannenboek’ (‘men’s book’). These made up 0.5% (both were mentioned once). The terms that related to other types of ‘women’s novels’, but which are more easily connected to genre, such as the ‘bouquetreeksroman’ (‘Harlequin novel’ or ‘Mills and Boon novel’) I did not count, but these also have many counterparts.

Even though there appears to be little proof that such genres actually exist, we cannot pretend them to be completely void of meaning. First, let us take a look at what the respondents think the terms signify.

*I think the book is more of a simple read, a real women’s book, not suited for all people who love literature. With literature, I think more of Harry Mulisch: hard words, big books which make you think and I did not think that is what this book did. Even though I really liked the book!<sup>12</sup>*

Much of the reasoning is implicit in this statement. Basically, we can assume, the book (*Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert) is not literary, because it is a ‘women’s book’ according to the respondent, even though this is only implied through juxtaposition. Partially because it is a “real women’s book”, it is “not suited for all people who like literature”. And it is not literature, because it is easy to read, it has few hard words – which, we might assume, equates these qualities to the women’s book. The size of the book also appears to

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12. Original text: “Ik vind het boek meer een tussendoortje, een echt vrouwenboek, niet geschikt voor alle mensen die van literatuur houden. Bij literatuur denk ik meer aan Harry Mulisch: moeilijke woorden, dikke boeken waar je bij na moet denken en dat vind ik van dit boek niet. Hoewel ik het een leuk boek vond!”

be considered by the respondent: literary books are bigger than ‘women’s novels’.<sup>13</sup> Overall, we can conclude that the style of a women’s book is not complex. However, this is not a sufficient explanation. Detective novels are also generally not ‘big’, do not use many hard words, but cannot really be classified as ‘women’s novels’ (nor as ‘men’s novels’, as such a construct does not appear to exist).

Another respondent motivates a low rating for Kim Moeland’s *Weerloos* (roughly: ‘Defenseless’) as such:

*Trivial literature, responding to sadness, so-called specific feminine strength, empathy and emotions, no beautiful language use, in short: bad kind of woman’s book.*<sup>14</sup>

Emotions and empathy are key to this criticism – connecting the woman’s book to a ‘feminine’ style. Here the transferral of feminine qualities to the text can be identified, as I signaled in the previous section. Both these quotes indicate the existence of a style associated with the woman’s book or femininity in general.

Apart from the style of the text, one might also argue that a combination of female author, female protagonist and a female audience is what discerns romantic fiction from for instance suspense. Romantic fiction, like Hollows (2000) discusses, is a good example of what is, in the public eye, seen as a women’s novel, with the aforementioned ‘chick lit’ as an example, which is well-represented in the Riddle corpus. These generally have the combination of female author-protagonist-audience. In the previous chapter I showed that these novels receive the lowest average ratings in the National Reader Survey. First I will discuss the audience. Some respondents explicitly note that a book is not very literary in their view, because it is intended for women. The following respondent motivates a low score for *Gooische Vrouwen* (roughly:

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13. She likely has a certain novel in mind, Mulisch’s *De Ontdekking van de Hemel* (‘The Discovery of Heaven’), a hefty book which was well received by the general public.

14. Original text: “Triviaalliteratuur, inspelen op zieligheid, zg. specifiek vrouwelijke kracht, meeleven en emoties, geen mooi taalgebruik, kortom slecht soort vrouwenboek.”

'Women from 't Gooi') by Emile Proper and Sabine van den Eynden as: "For a reading public of young, highly educated women!!"<sup>15</sup> Intriguingly, the high education does not save the female audience from being an explanation for the perceived low literariness of the novel. Second, the gender of the protagonist or author. These are not directly commented upon in the NLO, as far as I have found. Moreover, the follow-up survey discussed in Section 3.6 shows indeed that just having a (perceived) female author and protagonist does not appear to be a reason for a respondent to downplay the literary quality of a text.

In other words, I should look at a combination of factors in the text: the gender of the author and the protagonist by themselves do not appear to be a reason for assigning lower literary quality (except when the intended audience of works with these characteristics is also perceived as female), but combined with a certain perceived 'femininity' or 'femaleness' of the text style a certain level of literary quality can never be reached in the eyes of the respondents. The intended audience I do not further examine in the next chapters however, because this I cannot trace in the text of the novels. The idea of a feminine style I will discuss next.

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15. Original text: "Voor een lezers-publiek van jonge, hoogopgeleide vrouwen!!"

## 4.3 GENERAL WRITING STYLE

Van Boven (1992), apart from the other aspects mentioned previously, analyzes Dutch literary criticism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century through the lens of then current ideas on the female psyche, and shows how these are applied in criticism. Examples are emotionality, subjectivity, intuition, lack of originality and lack of reason/logic (p. 207). The ‘female subjectivity’ for instance results, according to critics, in an inability to write about anything other than women and their own world – which male authors are able to do, because of their objective perspective. Critics assume that novels with a female protagonist are autobiographical because of this subjectivity and those are labeled as ‘confessional’. The same term was still applied in the nineteen seventies to Erica Young’s *Fear of Flying*. It is an explicitly sexual book and was put aside by some critics as ‘confessional’, a stab at the literary quality of the novel. According to Russ (1983), who describes this response, the term also serves to cover up the idea that a woman should not have written about such a topic (p. 29). ‘Confessional’ does not appear to be a gendered term, it is in fact a few steps removed from author gender (see Figure 4.1), but Russ concedes that it is seldom applied to male authors. The only evidence that I have found where a word is used that could only be applied to a female author (*Eat, Pray, Love* again), is the following quote:

*This book is no more than a lament of a woman in her midlife crisis. What a whining broad, that Elizabeth.*<sup>16</sup>

The word used in Dutch is ‘zeikwif’, which I have translated here as ‘whining broad’. ‘Wif’ has the same etymology as ‘wife’, but in current-day Dutch, it is not used to indicate one’s spouse (unless when someone is joking or intends to be mean), and it only has a negative or vulgar connotation. The text is

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16. Original text: “Dit boek is niet meer dan een klaagzang van een vrouw in haar midlife crisis. Wat een zeikwif is die Elizabeth zeg.”

perceived to be an 'lament', a 'klaagzang' in Dutch. It constitutes a part of style that is hard to grasp, like 'confessional' is, too. It might be in part seen as related to the content, but also in part to a more general sense of writing style, the use of negative imagery for instance. These are hard to isolate, but the general style of the novels can be researched through computational means.

Vogel (2001) describes pairs of features of a literary text, of which one is seen as male and literary and the other as female and hence less literary, that are applied in post-World War II literary critique. They resonate the features Van Boven (1992) describes. These are – male first, female second – an attention to central issues vs. an attention to detail; reaching the core vs. verbosity; a distanced/analytical view vs. emotionality; innovative vs. old-fashioned; well-structured vs. shapeless. To choose an example that is still important, distanced versus emotional, I have performed a search on both words (in Dutch 'afstandelijk' and 'emotioneel'; respectively 2 and 14 mentions). Emotionality is in the eyes of the respondents of the NLO not necessarily a bad thing, but mainly when they mention how they were affected personally. They expect to be touched somehow by a novel for it to be considered literary. If the style of the text itself is perceived to be (too) emotional however, this is generally a negative marker for literary quality:

*It has been a while that I have read the book, but I remember that the writing style did not appeal to me. The story was more important than the writing style and I found it over the top, over emotional, too forced, and – with all due respect – housewife-like.<sup>17</sup>*

This respondent, who does not like the overly emotional style, also specifically makes a reference to a housewife, which is markedly female; the female audience as a marker for low literary quality I have discussed in the previous section. One respondent actually equates all literary writing with emotionality:

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17. Original text: "Het is al een poos geleden dat ik het boek gelezen heb, maar ik herinner me dat de schrijfstijl mij niet aanstond. Het verhaal was belangrijker dan de schrijfstijl en ik vond het overdreven, overemotioneel, te gemaakt en - met alle respect - huisvrouw-achtig."

*The stories of Baantjer are short and powerful no emotional whining, which typifies that which is mostly called 'Literature'.<sup>18</sup>*

Baantjer is the main character of a series of formulaic detectives written by Simon de Waal. It is interesting to note that this reader of detectives treats literary novels as a monolith, and attaches emotions to it as a genre, not considering gender. Emotionality, to sum up the respondents' views, is not a positive aspect of writing style. The antonym of 'emotional', 'afstandelijk' ('distanced') is only used once to indicate why a respondent sees a novel as borderline literary ("too distanced"), and once to explain why a novel is highly literary, so this is not consistent enough for an explanation. Thus, emotionality and simplicity of style can be identified as two factors that by respondents have been connected to a woman's novel. There might be others, but for now, I have some evidence that general writing style is indeed still a fruitful text factor to pursue. Finally, there is another aspect of perceived femininity of text that is repeatedly mentioned in feminist literary theory, that of topic.

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18. Original text: "De verhalen van Baantjer zijn kort en krachtig geen emotioneel gezemel, kenmerk van wat meestal 'Literatuur' wordt genoemd."

## 4.4 TOPIC

Virginia Woolf (1929) famously claimed:

*Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battle-field is more important than a scene in a shop — everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.*

This relates that certain topics are seen as more valuable and hence more literary because they are seen as more male (albeit also a monolithic type of masculinity), and others less literary because they are seen as more female. D'Addario (2013) shows that a topic like dating is seen as chick lit-like, and that critics use this association to automatically dismiss any potential literary quality of a work. This is mirrored in one of the comments of the Reader Survey as well. A respondent explains a low literary rating as such: “is about a love story” – and this assertion is repeated a couple of times in the Survey as an explanation for a low rating.<sup>19</sup> The topic in itself is evidence enough for low literariness, but one respondent connects it to the female reading audience: “Thin love story for women”.<sup>20</sup> Another respondents equates love stories to “boeketreeks” (roughly: ‘Mills and Boons novels’). Hence, the connection between a love story and femaleness or the woman’s novel is implicitly made in the comments.

Attention to fashion or physical appearance is an example of a topic that is still seen as ‘trivial’ (now a more common term than ‘narrow’). Hollows (2000) explains the linkage between this trivialness and femininity: “[W]omen’s investment in what is seen as the shallow, trivial and irrational

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19. Original text: “gaat over een liefdes geschiedenis [sic]”.

20. Original text: “Dun liefdesverhaaltje voor vrouwen.”

world of fashion is used to associate femininity with shallowness, triviality and irrationality (and vice versa)” (pp. 137-8). Through the gender of the agent (in this case the author, reader, and/or the protagonist), the topic is connected to femininity.

Piper and So (2016) provide some evidence that gendered associations with the content of the fictional text are still in place, albeit for the US literary establishment. They perform a keyword analysis on over 10,000 reviews of the New York Times’s Sunday Book Review since 2000, split by the gender of the novel’s author. They choose this supplement, because it is seen as a literary gatekeeper and the *New York Times* undertook affirmative action after the first VIDA counts (see Section 1.1). They find that female authors are still described distinctly different from male authors:

*A better numerical representation of women in the pages of The New York Times has not done much to alter how women writers are being talked about in the press. These forms of speech are proving deeply intractable. The discourse around gender we find in the last five years in the Times has essentially reproduced the public/private split bequeathed to us from the nineteenth century: Women writers are still being defined by their “sentimental” traits and a love of writing about “maternal” issues, while men are most often being defined by their attention to matters of science and the state.*

In other words, female authors are referred to by words related to family, and male authors by words referring to politics. The authors mention that this distinction is not caused by the topics of the novels discussed, but do not offer proof for this statement; nor do they show if this dichotomy results in lower judgment for female authors. This outcome resonates the fact that female experience has traditionally been seen as more narrow, because it deals with domestic life. Ellman (1968), like Woolff, points this out – not without humor:

*[Women’s] experience is narrow, their characters never leave “the bedroom and the salon” (...). It is also customary to speak of these rooms as “hermetically sealed”. Women are incapable of dealing with such airy spaces as Wall Street or the Pentagon.* (p. 92)

A Dutch literary award committee in 2015 also still made the association of

‘the personal’ with female authors, thereby implying that this is a negative quality for a literary book. In a jury report of a literary debut prize, Niña Weijers is praised for overcoming this trap of writing about the personal – so-called ‘backhand praise’ (see for instance Register, 1989: p. 9): this woman, unlike other women, does not write about ‘the personal’ (what this means is not made clear) and hence deserves to be lauded. Whereas a male author, as I have shown with the example of Dewulf winning the prestigious Libris Literatuur Prijs with a book about him raising his children, is allowed to write about such a topic, and is praised for his “guts” in choosing such a topic. One respondent proved to be aware of this application of the gendered lens, in explaining a low score for Dewulf’s novel:

*It was kind of a journal of his home life, but if it had been written by a woman, it would never have been received this well, then it would have been women’s talk. Now it was ‘so moving’ a man talking about his kids, even though in fact very little happens.<sup>21</sup>*

When a woman writes about her life at home, it is “women’s talk” according to the respondent; that topic has a perceived female genderedness. Russ (1983) states that this attests to a larger movement of hiding female experience from the public view:

*The social invisibility of women’s experience is (...) a socially arranged bias persisted in long after the information about women’s experience is available (sometimes even publicly insisted upon). (p. 48)*

This aligns with the quote by Moi at the beginning of this chapter. If a text is perceived as feminine or female, it receives less value. As a result, it is hidden from view. In fact, this is what happens when female literary authors’ work is denied literary credibility based on the low literary quality of the topics, style, etc., simply because they can be associated with femininity or femaleness.

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21. Original text: “Het was een soort dagboek van zijn thuissituatie, maar als het door een vrouw was geschreven, was het nooit zo goed ontvangen, dan was het vrouwenpraat geweest. Nu was het zo ontroerend ‘een man die over zijn kinderen vertelt, terwijl er eigenlijk vrij weinig gebeurt.”

This is nicely summarized in the words of Ellman (1968): “The word feminine alone, like a grimace, expresses a displeasure which is not less certain for its being undefined” (p. 37).

In postmodern theory, the binary distinction between women and men is reported as a cause for such displeasure. Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva for instance have analyzed the importance of binary opposites in perpetuating differences between men and women (in: Palmer 1989, p. 14). Man/woman is one such binary opposition, and the latter half is always the negative, the less powerful. Cixous has coined the term *écriture féminine* to get past such a binary distinction (Cixous et al., 1976); she argues that the style of a text can be feminine, or masculine, but this is not necessarily connected to the sex of the author. However, she feels that female authors should write in their own style, and should not feel the need to copy the masculine style that is the standard, and hence, she does not really transgress the binary opposition. Her concept of *the other bisexuality* is another construct used to redefine gendered writing style (ibidem: p. 884). Applying it to the general idea of style – rather than specific instances of style – she argues for completeness, where neither of the sexualities is excluded from the text, although she believes that female authors are better capable to write in such a bisexual style than male authors are, and therefore, that it is more likely to be “*women’s writing*” (Moi 1985: p. 110, stress in original). Cixous does not explicate what either of these styles (*écriture féminine* or *other bisexuality*) entail, as she believes them to be untheorizable, and hence, offers no direct handles to deal with her notions of style (Cixous et al., 1976; Moi 1985: p. 109). However, the sense that there are femininities and masculinities in texts, but that they are not absolutes, is quite useful as a starting point for a computational exploration of the texts of the novels, which I will undertake in the next chapter.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

All the examples show that the female gender is used to explain what literary quality is *not*, whereas a male equivalent is rarely found. As I have noted, the mistake we should not make, is to believe that judgments are based *solely* on the gender of the author, because that would oversimplify the situation. Author gender is important, in the sense that it changes the lens a reader applies. And to a certain extent, this is intuitively graspable. It matters whether a woman or a man writes about family or politics, because such choice either follows or upheaves social ideas on masculinity and femininity (see also Pruis 2011, pp. 37-57).

But there are two problems. First, the hierarchy attached to the dichotomy male-female (first noted in Mead, 1935); why femininity is a negative marker for literary quality is never made perfectly clear. As I have shown, it can be connected to postmodern theory, where it is seen to be the result of the patriarchal construction of the binary opposition male/female, where the female is seen as the negative, and hence, the less valuable (i.e. Cixous et al., 1976). The second problem with using the gender of the author as a lens is that ideas on female gender (rarely male gender) seep through all textual levels – real or applied. An undeniable text factor is the gender of the protagonist(s). More subjective factors are ‘femininity’ of the genre, of the general writing style and of the topics, as examined in this chapter; all of these I will research in the remainder of this thesis.

In Chapter 5 I computationally examine all three characteristics: genre, style and topics in over 400 novels, in order to see to which extent author gender matters in relation to the text of the novel; in Chapter 6 and 7 I specifically look at the intersection of author gender, protagonist gender, genre and topic. I do this by applying a feminist perspective to a ‘feminine’ topic in the genres of the literary novel and of chick lit (a type of so-called ‘women’s novel’): attention to characters’ physical appearance.



# 5.

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## COMPUTATIONAL ANALYSIS: AUTHOR GENDER IN THE FICTIONAL TEXT<sup>1</sup>

*Inevitably, a woman writer writes as a woman, not as a generic woman, but as the (highly specific and idiosyncratic) woman she is.*  
(Moi, 2008: p. 268)

To what extent author gender matters in writing style, is a question that mesmerizes many. In the context of this thesis, it is of course a pivotal question. At the same time, it is a problematic one. The issue is that it is often interpreted as a search for difference, but, obviously, this is only part of the truth since there will be commonalities among authors of different genders, too. These are not as enticing to report, but they are especially crucial to consider when we want to know to what extent it is warranted to read an author's work through the lens of gender. Therefore, rather than only searching for and reporting differences (which I do not deny exist), this chapter takes another approach. It shows how Natural Language Processing (NLP) research into gender might be carried out in a different way, to do better justice to the relationship between author gender and her text.

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1. This chapter is an extended version of Koolen and van Cranenburgh (2017b). The research was a good example of cooperative digital humanities work. Most of the research, including the development of the method and selection of visualizations, was done together. Andreas van Cranenburgh performed the computational analyses and wrote the critique on the machine learning experiments. I have written the introduction, theory, interpretations, the connection of the experiments and the conclusion. The use of 'we' in this chapter reflects the joint effort.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Women write more about emotions, men use more numbers (Newman et al., 2008). Conclusions such as these, based on Natural Language Processing (NLP) research into gender, are not just compelling to a general audience (Cameron, 1998), they are specific and seem objective, and are published regularly. The ethical problem with this type of research however, is that stressing difference—where there is often considerable overlap—comes with the tendency of enlarging the perceived gap between female and male authors; especially when results are interpreted using gender stereotypes. Moreover, many researchers are not aware of possible confounding variables related to gender, resulting in well-intentioned but unsound research. But, rather than suggesting not performing research into gender at all, we look into practical solutions to conduct it more soundly.<sup>2</sup>

The reason we do not propose to abandon gender analysis in NLP altogether is that female-male differences are quite striking when it comes to cultural production. Female authors still remain back-benched when it comes to gaining literary prestige: novels by females are still much less likely to be reviewed, or to win a literary award (see Chapter 2). And literary works by female authors are readily compared to popular bestselling genres typically written by and for women, referred to as ‘women’s novels,’ whereas literary works by male authors are rarely gender-labeled or associated with a gendered genre (Groos, 2011; Chapter 4). If we want to do research into the gender gap in cultural production, we need to investigate the role of author gender in texts without overgeneralizing to effects more properly explained by text-extrinsic perceptions of gender and literary quality.

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2. We are not looking to challenge the use of gender as a binary construct in this chapter, although this is a position that can be argued as well, see Section 1.2 ‘Gender’. Butler (1990) has shown how gender is not simply a biological given, nor a valid dichotomy. We recognize that computational methods may encourage this dichotomy further, but we shall focus on practical steps.

In other words, NLP research can be very useful in revealing the mechanisms behind authorial gender differences, but in order for that to be possible, researchers need to be aware of the issues, and learn how to avoid essentialistic explanations. Essentialism means that the assumption is made that characteristics found in some persons of one gender, can unproblematically be extrapolated over all persons of said gender (Allport, 1954; Gelman, 2003). Thus, our question is:

***How can we use NLP tools to research the relationship between gender and text meaningfully, yet without resorting to stereotyping or essentialism?***

Analysis of gender with NLP has roughly two methodological strands, the first descriptive and the second predictive. First, descriptive, is the technically least complex one. The researcher divides a set of texts into two parts, half written by female and half by male authors, processes these with the same computational tool(s) and tries to explain the observed differences. Examples are Jockers (2013, pp. 118–153) and Hoover (2013). Olsen (2005) reinterprets Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine* to validate an examination of female authors separately from male authors (see Cixous et al., 1976). The second, at a first glance more neutral strand of automated gender division, is to use predictive methods such as text categorization: training a machine learning model to automatically recognize texts written by either women or men, and to measure the success of its predictions (e.g., Koppel et al., 2002; Argamon et al., 2009). Johannsen et al. (2015) combines descriptive and predictive approaches and mines a dataset for distinctive features with respect to gender. We apply both descriptive and predictive methods as well.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2 discusses two theoretical issues that should be considered before starting NLP research into gender: preemptive categorization and the semblance of objectivity. These two theoretical issues are related to two potential practical pitfalls, the ones which we hope to remedy with this chapter: dataset bias and interpretation bias (section 5.3). In short, if researchers choose to do research into gender (a) they should be much more rigorous in selecting their dataset, i.e., confounding variables need to be given more attention when constructing a dataset; and (b) they need to avoid potential interpretative pitfalls, namely essentialism

and stereotyping. Next we provide computational evidence for our argument, and give handles on how to deal with the practical issues, based on a corpus of Dutch fictional novels: section 5.4 discusses sentiment analysis with Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), section 5.5 machine learning classification and 5.6 topic modeling. Section 5.7 ties the analyses together.

We want to show how fairly simple, commonly used computational tools can be applied in a way that avoids bias and promotes fairness—in this case with respect to gender, but the method is relevant to other categorizations as well.

## 5.2 THEORETICAL ISSUES

Gender research in NLP gives rise to several ethical questions, as argued in for instance Bergvall et al. (1996) and Nguyen et al. (2016). We discuss two theoretical issues here, which researchers need to consider carefully before performing NLP research into gender.

### **Preemptive categorization**

Admittedly, categorization is hard to do without. We use it to make sense of the world around us. It is necessary to function properly, for instance to be able to distinguish a police officer from other persons. Gender is not an unproblematic category however, for a number of reasons. First, feminists have argued that although many people fit into the categories female and male, there are more than two sexes (Bing and Bergvall, 1996: p. 2). Our having to decide how to categorize the novel by the transgender male in our corpus published before his transition is a case in point (we opted for male).

Second, it is problematic because gender is such a powerful categorization. Gender is the primary characteristic that people use for classification, over others like race, age and occupational role, regardless of actual importance (Rudman and Glick, 2012: p. 84). Baker (2014) analyzes research that finds gender differences in the spoken section of the British National Corpus

(BNC), which indicates gender differences are quite prominent. However, the context also turned out to be different: women were more likely to have been recorded at home, men at work (p. 30). Only when one assumes that gender causes the contextual difference, can we attribute the differences to gender. There is no direct causation, however. Because of the saliency of the category of gender, this ‘in-between step’ of causation is not always noticed. Cameron (1996) altogether challenges the “notion of gender as a pre-existing demographic correlate which accounts for behavior, rather than as something that requires explanation in its own right” (p. 42).

This does not mean that gender differences do not exist or that we should not research them. But, as Bing and Bergvall (1996) point out: “The issue, of course, is not difference, but oversimplification and stereotyping” (p. 15). Stereotypes can only be built after categorization has taken place at all (Rudman and Glick, 2012). This means that the method of classification itself inherently comes with the potential pitfall of stereotyping. Although the differences found in a divided corpus are not necessarily meaningful, nor always reproducible with other datasets, an ‘intuitive’ explanation is a trap easily fallen into: rather than being restricted to the particular dataset, results can be unjustly ascribed to supposedly innate qualities of all members of that gender, and extrapolated to all members of the gender in trying to motivate a result. This type of bias, as explained before, is called essentialism.

Rudman and Glick (2012) argue that stereotypes (which are founded on essentialism) cause harm because they can be used to unfairly discriminate against individuals—even if they are accurate on average differences (p. 95). On top of that, ideas on how members of each gender act do not remain descriptive, but become prescriptive. This means that based on certain differences, social norms form on how members of a certain gender should act, and these are then reinforced, with punishment for deviation. As Baker (2014) notes: “The gender differences paradigm creates expectations that people should speak at the linguistic extremes of their sex in order to be seen as normal and/or acceptable, and thus it problematizes people who do not conform, creating in- and out-groups. The result is inequality” (p. 42). Thus, although categorization in itself can appear unproblematic, actively

choosing to apply it has the potential pitfall of reinforcing essentialistic ideas on gender and enlarging stereotypes. This is of course not unique to NLP but the lure of making sweeping claims with big data, coupled with NLP's semblance of objectivity, makes it a particularly pressing topic for the discipline.

### **Semblance of objectivity**

An issue which applies to NLP techniques in general, but particularly to machine learning, is the semblance of neutrality and objectivity (see Rieder and Röhle, 2012). Machine learning models can make predictions on unseen texts, and this shows that one can indeed automatically identify differences between male and female authors, which are relatively consistent over multiple text types and domains. Note first that the outcome of these machine learning classifiers are different from what many general readers expect: the nature of these differences is often stylistic, rather than content-related (e.g., Flekova et al. 2016; Janssen and Murachver 2005, pp. 211–212). For men they include a higher proportion of determiners, numerical quantifiers (Argamon et al., 2009; Johannsen et al., 2015) and overall verbosity (longer sentences and texts; Newman et al. 2008). For women a higher use of personal pronouns, negative polarity items (Argamon et al., 2009), and verbs stands out (Johannsen et al., 2015; Newman et al., 2008).

What these differences mean, or why they are important for literary analysis (other than a functional benefit), is not generally made sufficiently evident. But while evaluations of out-of-sample predictions provide an objective measure of success, the technique is ultimately not any more neutral than the descriptive method, with its preemptive group selection. Even though the algorithm automatically finds gender differences, the fact remains that the researcher selects the gender as two groups to train for, and the predictive success says nothing about the merits (e.g., explanatory value) of this division. In other words, it starts with the same premise as the descriptive method, and thus needs to keep the same issues in mind.

## 5.3 PRACTICAL CONCERNS

Although the two theoretical issues are unavoidable, there are two practical issues inextricably linked to them, dataset and interpretation bias, which the researcher should strive to address.

### **Dataset bias**

Strictly speaking, a corpus is supposed to be a statistically representative sample, and the conclusions from experiments with corpora are only valid insofar as this assumption is met. In gender research, this assumption is too often violated, as potential confounding factors are not accounted for, exacerbating the ethical issues discussed.

For example, Johannsen et al. (2015) work with a corpus of online reviews divided by gender and age. However, reflected in the dataset is the types of products that men and women tend to review (e.g., cars vs. makeup). They argue that their use of abstract syntactic features may overcome this domain bias, but this argument is not very convincing. For example, the use of measurement phrases as a distinctive feature for men can also be explained by its higher relevance in automotive products versus makeup, instead of as a gender marker. Argamon et al. (2009) carefully select texts by men and women from the same domain, French literature, which overcomes this problem. However, since the corpus is largely based on nineteenth century texts, any conclusions are strongly influenced by literary and gender norms from this time period (which – at least partially – differ from contemporary norms).

Koppel et al. (2002) compose a corpus from the BNC, which has more recent texts from the 1970s, and includes genre classifications which together with gender are balanced in the resulting corpus. Lastly, Sarawgi et al. (2011) present a study that carefully and systematically controls for topic and genre bias. They show that in cross-domain tasks, the performance of gender attribution decreases, and investigate the different characteristics of lexical, syntactic, and character-based features; the latter prove to be most robust.

On the surface the latter two studies appear to apply a reasonable approach of controlling variables where possible. One remaining issue is the potential for publication bias: if for whatever reason women are less likely to be published, it will be reflected in this corpus without being obvious (a hidden variable).

In sum, controlling for author characteristics should not be neglected. Moreover, it is often not clear from the datasets whether text variables are sufficiently controlled for either, such as period, text type, or genre. Freed (1996) has shown that researchers too easily attribute differences to gender, when in fact other intersecting variables are at play. We argue that there is still much to gain in the consideration of author and text type characteristics, but we focus on the latter here. Even within the text type of fictional novels, in a very restricted period of time, as we shall show, there is a variety of subgenres that each have their own characteristics, which might erroneously be attributed to gender.

### **Interpretation bias**

The acceptance of gender as a cause of difference is not uncommon in computational research (see Section 5.1). Supporting research beyond the chosen dataset is not always sought, because the alignment of results with ‘common knowledge’ – which is generally based on stereotypes – is seen as sufficient, when in fact this is more aptly described as researcher’s bias. Conversely, it is also problematic when counterintuitive results are labeled as surprising or inexplicable (e.g., the findings of ‘song’ as a male marker in early 20th century poetry in Hoover, 2013). This is a form of cherry picking. Another subtle example of this is the choice of visualization in Jockers and Mimno (2013) to illustrate a topic model. They choose to visualize only gender-stereotypical topics, even though they make up a small part of the results, as they do note carefully (Jockers and Mimno, 2013: p. 762). Still, this draws attention to the stereotype-confirming topics.

Regardless of the issue whether differences between men and women are innate and/or socially constructed, such interpretations are not only unsound, they promote the separation of female and male authors in literary judgments. This does not mean that there are no examples of acceptable gender-related

text research. Rybicki (2015) for instance set out to solve the question whether a corpus thought of as all-female might actually contain novels by male authors. Another good example of research based on careful gender-related analysis is Muzny et al. (2016) who consider gender as performative language use in its dialogue and social context.

Nevertheless, dataset and interpretation bias are quite hard to avoid with this type of research, because of the theoretical issues discussed in Section 5.2. We now provide two experiments that show why it is so important to try to avoid these biases, and provide first steps as to how this can be done.

## 5.4 EXPERIMENT 1 – LIWC

To support our argument, we analyze two datasets. The first is the corpus of the Riddle of Literary Quality (see Chapter 1; Appendix A.1). Note that in the genre of literary novels, there are more originally Dutch works by male authors, and more translated works by female authors.<sup>3</sup> The second corpus (henceforth: Nominees corpus) was compiled because of this skewness; there are few Dutch female literary authors in the Riddle corpus. It is a set of 50 novels that were nominated for one of the two most well-known literary prizes in the Netherlands, the AKO Literatuurprijs (currently called ECI Literatuurprijs) and the Libris Literatuur Prijs, in the period 2007-2012, but which were not part of the Riddle corpus (see Appendix A.2). Variables controlled for are gender (24 female, 25 male, 1 transgender male who was then still known as a female), country of origin (6 from Belgium and 44 from the Netherlands), and whether the novel won a prize (3 male, 2 female) or not. The corpus is relatively small, because the percentage of female nominees was small (26.2 %). Note that because of this selection, we ensure that the chance we are actually focusing on the variable of gender is larger, but it has the downside that we cannot extrapolate our results over all published literary works by female and male authors in that period.

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3. For an explanation of the use of 'literary novels' as a genre, see Section 1.2 'Genre'.

Newman et al. (2008) relate a descriptive method of extracting gender differences, using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2007). LIWC is a text analysis tool typically used for sentiment mining. It collects word frequencies based on word lists and calculates the relative frequency per word list in given texts. The word lists, or categories, are of different orders: psychological, linguistic, and personal concerns; see Table 5.1; LIWC and other word list based methods have been applied to research of fiction (e.g., Nichols et al., 2014; Mohammad, 2011). We use a validated Dutch translation of LIWC (Zijlstra et al., 2005).

## **Riddle corpus**

We apply LIWC to the Riddle corpus, where we compare the corpus along author gender lines. We also zoom in on the two biggest genres in the corpus, literary novels and suspense. When we compare the results of novels by male authors versus those by female authors, we find that 48 of 66 LIWC categories differ significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ), after a Benjamini-Hochberg False Discovery Rate correction (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995).<sup>4</sup> In addition to significance tests, we report Cohen's  $d$  effect size (Cohen, 1988). An effect size  $|d| > 0.2$  can be considered non-negligible. The results coincide with gender stereotypical notions. Gender stereotypes can relate to several attributes: physical characteristics, preferences and interest, social roles and occupations; but psychological research generally focuses on personality. Personality traits related to agency and power are often attributed to men, and nurturing and empathy to women (Rudman and Glick, 2012, pp. 85-86). The results in Table 5.1 are selected from the categories with the largest effect sizes. These stereotype-affirming effects remain when only a subset of the corpus with literary novels and suspense novels is considered. In other words, quite some gender stereotype-confirming differences appear to be genre independent here. Included are some characteristics that were also identified by the machine learning experiments mentioned in section 5.2.

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4. When many variables over a relatively small sample are tested, it is possible false positives are found. The Benjamini-Hochberg False Discovery Rate correction is a method that is widely accepted and applied in the sciences to correct for such false discoveries.

Novels by female authors score significantly higher overall and within genre in Affect, Pronoun, Home, Body and Social; whereas novels by male authors score significantly higher on Articles, Prepositions, Numbers, and Occupation. The only result here that counters stereotypes is the higher score for female authors on Cognitive Processes, which describes thought processes and has been claimed to be a marker of science fiction— as opposed to fantasy and mystery—because “reasoned decision-making is constitutive of the resolution of typical forms of conflict in science fiction” (Nichols et al., 2014: p. 30). Reasoned decision-making is stereotypically associated with the male gender. It is quite possible to leave the results at that, and attempt an explanation. The differences are not just found in the overall corpus, where a reasonable amount of romantic novels (approximately 10 %, almost exclusively by female authors) could be seen as the cause for a gender stereotypical outcome. The results are also found within the traditionally ‘male’ genre of suspense (although half of the suspense authors are female in this corpus), and within the genre of literary novels.

		Female		Male		Effect	
LICW category	Examples	mean	SD	mean	SD	Size (d)	Sign.
<b><i>Linguistic</i></b>							
Prepositions	To, with, above	11.38	0.86	11.92	0.86	-0.63	*
Pronouns	I, them, itself	12.58	1.90	10.14	2.10	1.22	*
Negations	No, not, never	2.02	0.31	1.78	0.35	0.74	*
Article	A, an, the	8.48	1.08	9.71	1.19	-1.08	*
Numbers		0.61	0.15	0.79	0.25	-0.86	*
<b><i>Psychological</i></b>							
Social	Mate, talk, child	10.81	2.00	9.54	1.73	0.68	*
Friends	Buddy, friend	0.10	0.04	0.09	0.04	0.23	
Humans	Body, woman	0.43	0.16	0.41	0.15	0.11	
Affect	Happy, cried	2.84	0.49	2.35	0.38	1.12	*
Positive Emotions	Love, nice, sweet	1.38	0.34	1.13	0.23	0.86	*
Cognitive processes	Cause, know, ought	5.51	0.67	5.03	0.72	0.69	*
<b><i>Personal concerns</i></b>							
Occupation	Work, class, boss	0.54	0.15	0.67	0.20	-0.75	*
Home	Apartment, kitchen	0.42	0.13	0.34	0.14	0.57	*
Money	Cash, taxes, income	0.20	0.10	0.21	0.10	-0.12	
Body	Ache, breast, sleep	1.30	0.41	1.06	0.33	0.63	*

Table 5.1: A selection of LIWC categories with results on the Riddle corpus. The indented categories are subcategories forming a subset of the preceding category. \* indicates a significant result.

Nonetheless, there are some elements to the corpus that were not considered. The most important factor not taken into account, is whether the novel has been originally written in Dutch or whether it is a translation. As noted, the category of literary novels is skewed along gender lines: there are very few originally Dutch female authors in our corpus. Another, more easily overlooked factor is the existence of subgenres which might skew the outcome. Suspense and literary novels are categories that are already considerably more specific than the ‘genres’ researched in the previously mentioned studies, such as fiction versus non-fiction. For instance, there is a typical subgenre in Dutch suspense novels, the so-called ‘literary thriller’, which has a very specific content and style (Jautze, 2013). The gender of the author—female—is part of its signature. Readership might play a role in this as well. The percentage of readers for female and male authors, taken from the Dutch 2013 National Reader Survey (approximately 14,000 respondents) shows how gendered the division of readers is.

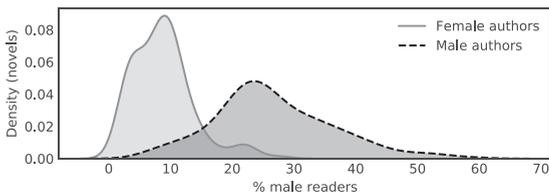


Figure 5.1: Kernel density estimation of the percentage of male readers with respect to author gender.

This distribution is visualized in Figure 5.1, which is a Kernel Density Estimation (KDE). A KDE can be seen as a continuous (smoothed) variant of a histogram, in which the x-axis shows the variable under scrutiny, in this case which percentage of male readers reads novels by either female or male authors, and y-axis indicates how common instances are for a given value on the x-axis. The graph thus indicates the number of novels read by a given proportion of male versus female readers. In other words, as shown in Chapter 3, male readers barely read the female authors in our corpus, female readers read both genders; there is a selection of novels which is only read by female readers. Hence, the gender of the target reader group differs per genre as well, and this is another possible influence on author style.

In sum, there is no telling whether we are looking purely at author gender, or also at translation and/or subgenre, or even at productions of gendered perceptions of genre.

### **Comparison with Nominees corpus**

We now consider a corpus of novels that were nominated for the two most well-known literary awards in the Netherlands, the AKO Literatuurprijs and Libris Literatuur Prijs. This corpus has less confounding variables, as these novels were all originally written in Dutch and are all of the same genre. They are fewer, however, fifty in total. We hypothesize that there are few differences in LIWC scores between the novels by the female and male authors, as they have been nominated for a literary award, and will not be marked as overtly by a genre. All of them have passed the bar of literary quality—and few female authors have made the cut in this period of time to begin with; thus, we contend, they will be more similar to the male authors in this corpus than in the Riddle corpus containing bestsellers. However, here we run into the problem that significance tests on this corpus of different size would not be comparable to those on the previous corpus; for example, due to the smaller size, there will be a lower chance of finding a significant effect (and indeed, repeating the procedure of the previous section yields no significant results for this corpus). Moreover, comparing only means is of limited utility. Inspection does reveal that five effect sizes increase: Negations, Positive emotions, Cognitive processes, Friends, and Money; all relate more strongly to female authors. Other effect sizes decrease, mostly mildly.

In light of these problems with the *t*-test in analyzing LIWC-scores, we offer an alternative. In interpretation, the first step is to note the strengths and weaknesses of the method applied. The largest problem with comparing LIWC scores among two groups with a *t*-test, is that it only tests means: the mean score for female authors versus the mean score for male authors in our research. A *t*-test to compare means is restricted to examining the groups as a whole, which, we as we argued, is unsound to begin with. That is why we only use it as a means to an end. A KDE plot of scores on each category gives better insight into the distribution and differences across the novels; see Figure 5.2.

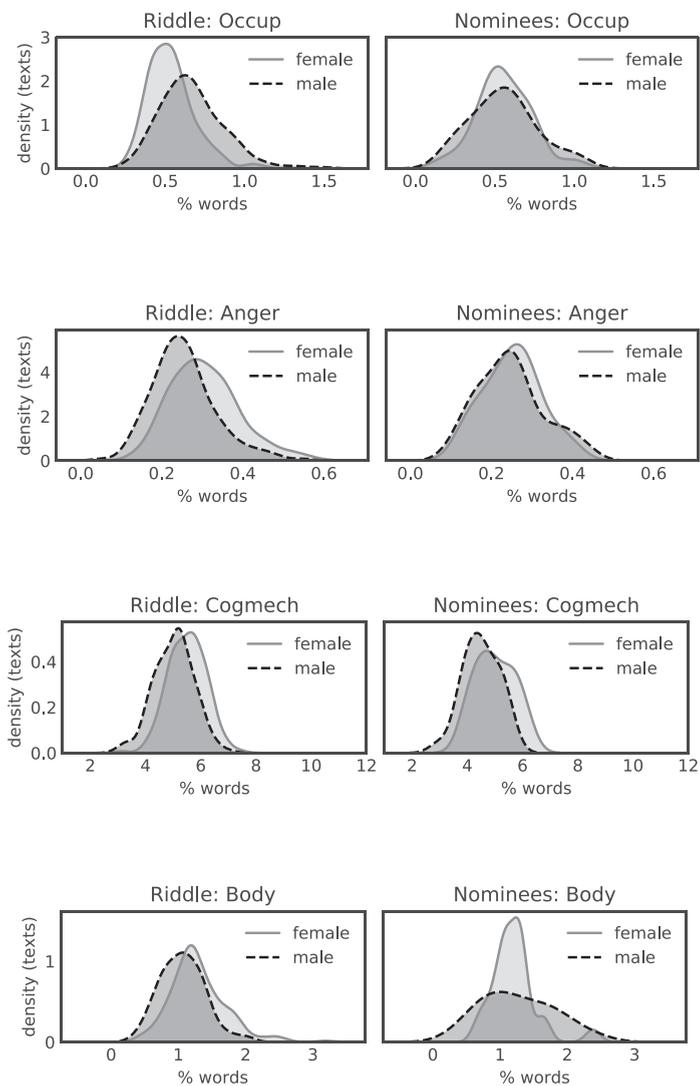


Figure 5.2. Kernel density estimation of four LIWC categories across the novels of the Riddle (left) and Nominees (right) corpus.

Occupation and Anger are two categories of which the difference in means largely disappears with the Nominees corpus, showing an effect size of  $d < 0.1$ . The plots demonstrate nicely how the overlap has become near perfect with the Nominees corpus, indicating that subgenre and/or translation might have indeed been factors that caused the difference in the Riddle corpus. Cognitive processes (Cogmech) is a category which increases in effect size with the Nominees corpus. We see that the overlap with female and male authors is large, but that a small portion of male authors uses the words in this category less often than other authors and a small portion of the female authors uses it more often than other authors.

While the category Body was found to have a significant difference with the Riddle corpus, in the KDE plot it looks remarkably similar, while in the Nominees corpus, there is a difference not in mean but in variance. It appears that on the one hand, there are quite some male authors who use the words less often than female authors, and on the other, there is a similar-sized group of male authors who—and this counters stereotypical explanations—use the words more often than female authors. This example shows how careful one must be in comparing means of groups within a corpus, with respect to (author) gender or otherwise. The individual differences between authors appear to be more salient than differences between the means; contrary to what the means indicate, Body apparently is a category and topic worth looking into. Since attention to physical appearance is seen as a feminine topic (see Chapter 4.3); and the binary opposition of female/male-body/mind has been explored extensively in feminist theory (i.e. Scott and Morgan, 1993), such visualizations could be used as a basis for further deconstruction.

## 5.5 EXPERIMENT 2 – MACHINE LEARNING

In order to confirm the results in the previous section, we now apply machine learning methods that have proved most successful in previous work. Since we want to compare the two corpora, we opt for training and fitting the models on the Riddle corpus, and applying those models to both corpora.

We replicate the setup of Argamon et al. (2009), which is to use frequencies of lemmas to train a support vector classifier. We restrict the features to the 60% most common lemmas in the corpus and transform their counts to relative frequencies (i.e., a bag-of-words model; BOW). Because of the robust results reported with character n-grams in Sarawgi et al. (2011), we also run the experiment with character trigrams, in this case without a restriction on the features. We train on the Riddle corpus, and evaluate on both the Riddle corpus and the Nominees corpus; for the former we use 5-fold cross-validation to ensure an out-of-sample evaluation. We leave out authors of unknown or multiple genders, since this class is too small to learn from. See Table 5.2 for

<b>Riddle</b>	Bow	Char3grams	Support
Female	83.7	80.8	196
Male	82.1	79.9	191
Avg/total	82.9	80.4	387
<b>Nominees</b>	Bow	Char3grams	Support
Female	63.2	57.9	24
Male	77.4	74.2	26
Avg/total	70.6	66.4	50

Table 5.2: Gender classification scores ( $F_1$ ) on the Riddle corpus (above) and the Nominees corpus (below).<sup>5</sup>

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5. For an explanation of f-measure, precision, and recall, see Jurafsky and Martin (2009), pp. 455–6.

the results; Table 5.4 shows the confusion matrix with the number of correct and incorrect classifications.

As in the previous section, it appears that gender differences are less pronounced in the Nominees corpus, shown by the substantial difference of more than 10  $F_1$ -percentage points for the best scoring model (BOW). We also see the effect of a different training and test corpus: the classifier reveals a bias for attributing texts to male authors with the Nominees corpus, shown by the distribution of misclassifications in Table 5.3.

<b>Riddle</b>	Female	Male
Female	<b>170</b>	26
Male	40	<b>151</b>
<b>Nominees</b>	Female	Male
Female	<b>12</b>	12
Male	2	<b>24</b>

Table 5.3: Confusion matrices for the SVM results with BOW. Numbers in bold are the correctly predicted authors. The rows show the true labels, while the columns show the predictions.

Wrongly classified as written by a male author are novels by Fresco, Goemans, Goldschmidt, Haveman, Hemmerechts, Hermsen, Kessels, Meijssing and Noordervliet. The only novels classified wrongly as written by a female author are those by Vlaminck, one of few novels in the Nominees corpus with a male author and female protagonists; and the novel by Februari, who is a transgender male. The cause is most likely the gender bias in the Riddle corpus concerning originally Dutch literary authors. Contrary to popular belief (as described for instance in Groos (2011)), Dutch male literary authors had more bestsellers in the period 2007-2012 than Dutch female literary authors; and hence the classifier was trained on a set of novels where the literary ones most resembling the novels of the Nominees corpus were most likely to be of a male pen. Thus, on the one hand, the success can be explained by similarities of the corpora. On the other, the male bias reveals that the model is also affected

by particularities of the training corpus. Sarawgi et al. (2011) show that with actual cross-domain classification, performance drops more significantly.

A linear model is in principle straightforward to interpret: features make either a positive or a negative contribution to the final prediction.<sup>6</sup> However, due to the fact that thousands of features are involved, and words may be difficult to interpret without context, looking at the features with the highest weight may not give much insight; the tail may be so long that the sign of the prediction still flips multiple times after the contribution of the top 20 features has been taken into account. Indeed, looking at the features with the highest weight does not show a clear picture: the top 20 consists mostly of pronouns and other function words.

We have tried to overcome this by filtering out the most frequent words and sorting words with the largest difference in the Nominees corpus (which helps to focus on the differences that remain in the corpus other than the one on which the model has been trained). As an indication of the sort of differences the classifier exploits, Table 5.4 shows a selection of features; the results cannot easily be aligned with stereotypes and it remains difficult to explain the success of the classifier from a small sample as this. We now turn to a different model to analyze the differences between the two corpora in terms of gender.

Gender	Features
Female	toespraak (speech <sub>NN</sub> ), engel (angel), energie (energy), champagne (champagne), gehoorzaam (docile), grendel (lock), drug (drug), tante (aunt), echtgenoot (spouse), vleug (tad)
Male	wee (woe), datzelfde (same), hollen (run), conversatie (conversation), plak (slice), kruimel (crumb <sub>NN</sub> ), strijken (iron <sub>VB</sub> ), gelijk (right/just), inpakken (pack <sub>VB</sub> ), ondergaan (undergo)

Table 5.4: A sample of 10 distinctive, mid-frequency features.

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6. Other models such as decision trees are even more amenable to interpretation. However, in the context of text categorization, bag-of-word models with large numbers of features work best, which do not work well in combination with decision trees (see for instance Bird et al., 2009: section 6.4.1)

## 5.6 EXPERIMENT 3 – TOPIC MODELING

We use a topic model of the Riddle corpus presented in Jautze et al. (2016) to infer topic weights for both corpora. This model of 50 topics was derived with Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), based on a lemmatized version of the Riddle corpus without function words or punctuation, divided into chunks of 1000 tokens. We compare the topic weights with respect to gender by taking the mean topic weights of the texts of each gender. From the list of 50 topics we show the top 5 with both the largest and the smallest (absolute) difference between the genders (with respect to the Nominees corpus), see Figure 5.3.<sup>7</sup> Note that the topic labels were assigned by hand and other interpretations of the topic keys are possible.

The largest differences contain topics that confirm stereotypes, for instance military (male) and settling down (female). This is not unexpected: the choice to examine the largest differences ensures these are the extreme ends of female-male differences.<sup>8</sup> However, the topics that are most similar for the genders in the Nominees corpus contain stereotype-confirming topics as well—i.e., they both score similarly low on ‘looks and parties.’ And the large difference on dialogue and colloquial language shows that speech representation might form a fruitful hypothesis for explaining at least part of the gender differences. Finally, it is interesting to note that four of the five most discriminating topics are more present with female authors, and that the one more marked for male authors is a small topic – which means that it is only highly present in few of the novels. This might be an indication that

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7. By comparing absolute differences in topic weights, rarer topics with small but nevertheless consistent differences may be overlooked; using relative differences would remove this bias, but introduces the risk of giving too much weight to rarer topics. We choose the former to focus on the more prominent and representative topics.

8. Note that the topics were derived from the Riddle corpus, which contains both romance and spy novels.

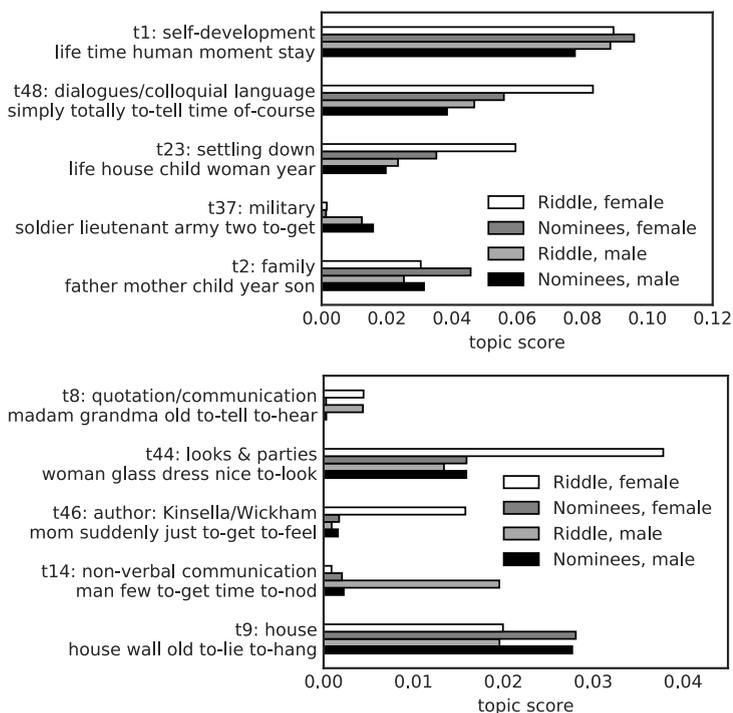


Figure 5.3: Comparison of mean topic weights with relation to gender and corpus, showing largest (above) and smallest (below) male-female differences.

female authors write about certain topics that male authors do not and that male authors hardly write about topics that female authors do not touch.

We want to now have a closer look at the commonalities and differences found. We first make some notes on the method itself, as it is crucial to know its strengths and weaknesses in forming an interpretation, as we have stated earlier. First it is important to note again that the topic model was trained on the Riddle corpus, and then applied to the Nominees corpus. Hence, the topics were formed based on a corpus that contains chick lit, spy novels, literary novels, romantic novels, thrillers, etc.; and the topics reflect this mix of genres. Second, topic models are models not trained to find actual topics, but to find words that are often found in each other's proximity, which means that topics are not necessarily intelligible, although the input can be modified in such a

way that they appear to be (for instance by excluding function words, as we did, or even go as far to only include nouns, as Jockers (2013) does). Third, topic modeling is quite different from applying LIWC, in the sense that it has many settings which can be tweaked in order to get the desired result – it is less fixed. Moreover, no two runs of a topic model, even with the same settings, give the exact same output; in other words, the precise composition of the topics may vary in several runs. The most obvious setting that can be altered is the number of topics. Another one, which is less often discussed, is the relative presence of the topics in the corpus. In other words, the fact that some topics are present in many novels, while others are only present in a few, is not a coincidence: the model was specifically trained to find such a distribution of topics.

We now take two topics, one that is prominent with male authors, and one for female authors, and take a closer look at their presence in the novels.

### **Topic 37, ‘military’**

The four novels that score highest on the military topic, do have a military motif running through the novel. Grunberg’s (m) *Onze Oom* for instance, is the story of a major – somewhere in South-America – who takes in a child after having murdered her family. This ‘daughter’ then grows up to be an arms dealer. Trujillo’s (f) *Terugkeer van Lupe Garcia* deals with a woman who returns to the unspecified South-American country where she was born, to make a documentary on the consequences of its previous military dictatorship. The topic appears to be adequate to analyze as a theme in the novels, and we can see that it is indeed more often applied in novels by male authors. A visualization of the average topic score per novel for the ‘military’ topic shows however that it is not possible to generalize over all male authors here: a few outliers score high, whereas many novels barely contain the topic (see Figure 5.4).

Moreover, the association with male authors does not mean that these novels do not deal with ‘female’ topics, only that the balance is different for a selection of the novels. We now turn to one of the topics associated with female authors to show this.

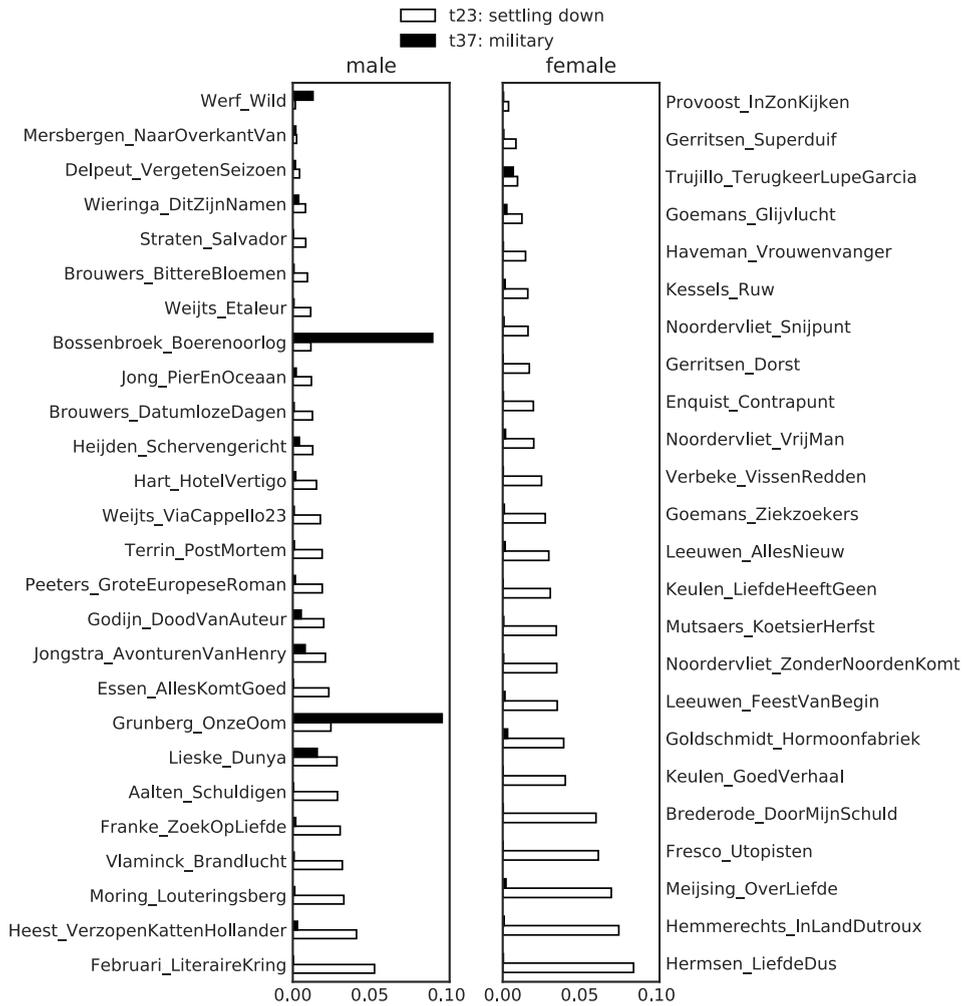


Figure 5.4. The scores for topic 37, 'military' and topic 23 'settling down' per novel. The novels by male authors are on the left.

## Topic 23, 'settling down'

'Settling down', as a topic, is a larger one, and is part of all of the novels. The first 50 keywords of the topic can be found in Table 5.5.

	English (translation)	Dutch (original)
T23 'settling down'	life house child woman year day man to_get to_marry to_feel time week beautiful work new to_work marriage together love to_live to_give old long month feeling glad to_stay home girlfriend felicitous to_take to_tell happy continually mother human very friend a_couple sweet night own totally older even money two young to_eat just	leven huis kind vrouw jaar dag man krijgen trouwen voelen tijd week mooi werk nieuw werken huwelijk samen liefde wonen geven oud lang maand gevoel graag blijven thuis vriendin gelukkig nemen vertellen blij steeds moeder mens erg vriend paar lief avond eigen helemaal ouder zelfs geld twee jong eten net
T37 'military'	soldier lieutenant army two to_get war officer boy sergeant marine first one to_follow colonel military to_start day back three hour major to_give commander platoon captain after to_hear general to_take ground far man fast to_walk command company to_call new rifle grenade unit to_fight couple attack rest map place uniform small to_lie	soldaat luitenant leger twee krijgen oorlog officier jongen sergeant marinier eerste één volgen kolonel militair beginnen dag terug drie uur majoor geven commandant peleton kapitein daarna horen generaal nemen grond ver man snel lopen bevel compagnie roepen nieuw geweer granaat eenheid vechten paar aanval rest kaart plek uniform klein liggen

T48 'dialogues/ colloquial'	just totally to_tell once of_course to_hear bite <sup>9</sup> only to_get very thing actually time to_mean to_start to_ give else nice to_talk human/person to_look_at to_laugh immediately to_feel certain repeatedly to_try one to_stay day to_happen head to_walk to_need a_couple strange to_believe sometimes quite to_know friend idea way to_work to_take back exactly hand work first	gewoon helemaal vertellen keer natuurlijk horen beet net krijgen erg ding eigenlijk tijd bedoelen beginnen geven anders leuk praten mens aan_kijken lachen meteen voelen zeker steeds proberen één blijven dag gebeuren hoofd lopen hoeven paar gek geloven soms best kennen vriend idee zin werken nemen terug precies hand werk eerst
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Table 5.5. First 50 keywords of selected topics (translations our own).

Apart from some adverbs, which are often of a positive nature ('happy', 'beautiful', 'sweet'), we see nouns and verbs pertaining to general life ('marriage', 'home', 'work', 'money', 'child', 'to marry', 'to feel', 'to work', 'to live') and to time ('time', 'night', 'week', 'month'). Perhaps 'everyday life' would have been a more accurate description. It is not strange, seeing the general nature of the words used, that they are part of many of the novels. However, a plot of the average topic score per novel shows that it is more often prominent in novels by female authors (see Figure 5.4). From Figure 5.4, apart from the associations with each gender, we can also conclude something else. 47 of the 50 novels contain the 'settling down' topic more than the 'military' one, even the novels by male authors. Hence, even though it is true that topic 37 is more strongly associated with male authors, and topic 23 with female authors, this does not mean that topic 23 is exclusive to female authors, nor even that its presence is smaller than that of the military topic with male authors.

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9. This translation is not really apt. The Dutch word 'beet' means 'bite', but we have discovered that in this case, it is likely to be the lemmatization of 'beetje', which means '(a) little', which has no proper function without the diminutive suffix.

When we compare the topics 23 and 37 directly, we see more clearly what the importance of the outliers is; see Figure 5.5. We see that the highest scoring novels on each topic are exclusively female for ‘settling down’ and male for ‘military’, but also there is no strict separation between all male and all female authors.

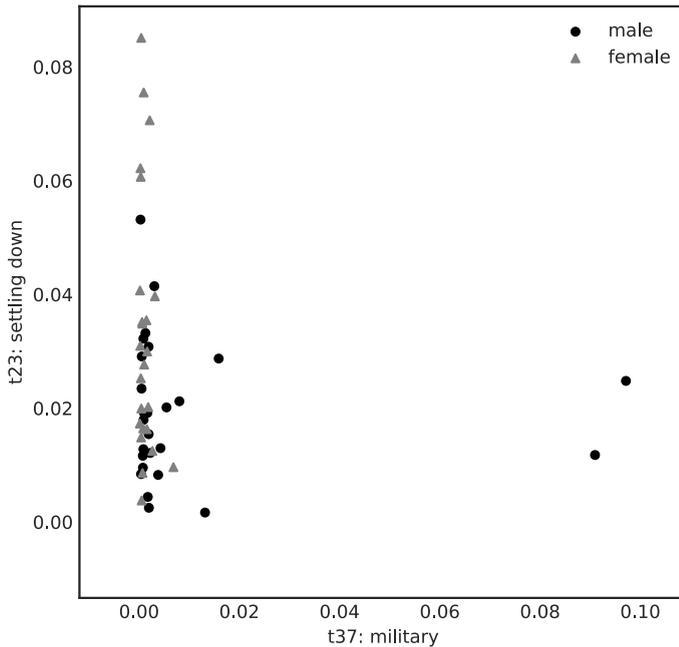


Figure 5.5. Scatter plot of topics 23 ‘settling down’ and 37 ‘military’.

There are topics that are discernibly more associated with male or female authors when looked at separately, but by cross-referencing topics in separate novels we can see apparent obvious conclusions soften. ‘Female’ topics need not be absent in novels by male authors, not even when these topics are the ones that differ most between male and female authors. Even the most

discriminating topics are not exclusive to either gender. Searching for and/or stressing of difference results in a general idea of the female and male gender as two separate groups, whereas the truth is that even though differences can be found, they are not completely separable; there is a considerable middle ground where novels by authors of both genders exist.

## 5.7 CONNECTING THE EXPERIMENTS

What the prior tests and the interpretation of the most differentiating topics show, is that a gender fingerprint – and this is hardly new, but it could use some repetition – is a matter of spectrum. This means that there are gender differences, but they are not absolute, in the sense that we can fully separate female from male authors, or that all female authors are more alike female authors than alike male authors. Now, as a final step, we want to examine the female authors in the Nominees corpus and consider which ones were classified wrongly and which were classified correctly by the SVM classifier (see Table 5.6), and what we can learn from this when we combine this with the outcome of the other experiments.

Classified as	Authors
Female	Brederode, Enquist, Gerritsen, van Keulen, van Leeuwen, Mutsaers, Provoost, Trujillo, Verbeke
Male	Fresco, Goemans, Goldschmidt, Haveman, Hemmerechts, Hermsen, Kessels, Meijjing and Noordervliet

Table 5.6. The female authors in the Nominees corpus and how they were classified by the SVM classifier.

When we look at the most differentiating topics, two topics show an alignment with the (mis)classification. The highest scoring novels by female

authors on topic 1, ‘self-development’, are misclassified as novels by male authors, whereas the highest scoring novels by female authors on topic 48, ‘dialogues/colloquial language’, are correctly classified. The first 50 words in topic 48 can be found in Table 5.5, it contains many verbs (‘to work’, ‘to know’, ‘to laugh’, ‘to talk’), and adverbs/adjectives (‘nice’, ‘totally’, ‘just’, ‘quite’). When we plot the two topics together, it is interesting to note that the misclassified ones are not outliers (except for one, Hermsen’s *De Liefde Dus* (‘So, Love’), a novel about author Belle van Zuylen), whereas the correctly classified novels are, see Figure 5.6. In other words, six of the novels that were correctly classified as being written by a female author appear to contain more dialogue and colloquial language than the others.

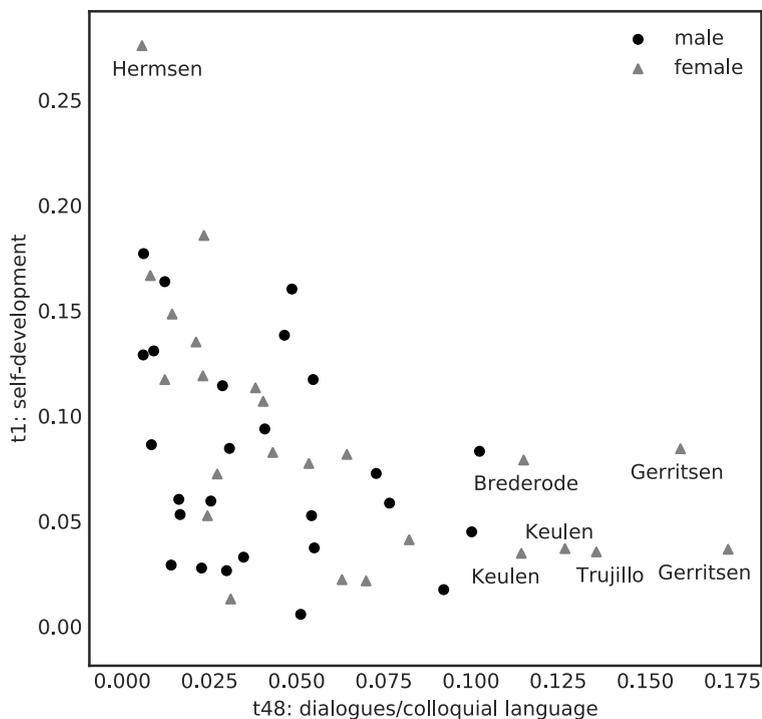


Figure 5.6: A scatter plot of two topics, t1 ‘self-development’ and t48 ‘dialogues/colloquial language’, with the authors of the outliers identified.

Let us now take a closer look at some of these novels, to see if they indeed are more focused on dialogue and colloquial language. Esther Gerritsen is an author with a very distinct style, she was originally trained as a theatre writer and is known for her dialogue, see for example the following excerpt:

*“Are you sleeping with Laura?”*

*“No.”*

*“Not yet.”*

*“I am not sleeping with her.”*

*“But you do love her?” No response. She repeats. “You love her?”*

*“I could love her.”*

*“But you don’t.”*

*“It’s possible.”<sup>10</sup>*

(Gerritsen, 2012, my translation)

The novel by Carolina Trujillo (2009), who was the only female author to score high on the ‘military’ topic with her novel, also contains much of the ‘dialogues’ topic. The story is narrated by a former street kid, who still reasons in a child-like manner and who falls in love with Lupe, the main character. He wants to impress her. When we look into the sections of the text that score high on the topic, it becomes clear that it is a mixture of colloquial language, reported speech and dialogue that accounts for the score.

We compare this to Joke Hermsen’s *De Liefde Dus*, where the topic is virtually absent, but which scores high on another ‘female’ topic, self-development. The final chunk of this novel scores low on ‘dialogues’ but high on ‘self-development’:

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10. Original text: “Ga je met Laura naar bed?” “Nee.” “Nog niet.” “Ik ga niet met haar naar bed.” “Maar je houdt van haar?” Het is stil. Ze zegt het nog eens. “Je houdt van haar?” “Ik zou van haar kunnen houden.” “Maar je doet het niet?” “Het zou kunnen”.

*Our luck is that we only have to accept our, let us say friendship in love, as a gift, without having to connect it to any expectation or dreams of the future whatsoever. With this I do not belittle or deny my feelings for you, on the contrary. You know you are a final flame of life to me, but I do not wish or permit myself to ever consider this a form of possession. That is our freedom and our luck. Dear Constantinus, be careful in England, come back safe, and come tell me everything afterwards.*<sup>11</sup> (Hermsen, 2008, my translation)

The difference is striking, and again, this might point to the importance of dialogue/reported speech. This novel, that scores highest of all novels on two 'female' topics, namely topic 23 'settling down' and topic 1, 'self-development', is nonetheless misclassified as a novel by a male author. The highest scoring novel on the 'dialogues' topic by a male author, Eric Vlaminck's *Brandlucht*, was misclassified as by a female author, which might point to an association of dialogue-like text with female authorship.<sup>12</sup>

But what does this finding imply? The topic model and the classifier are trained on the Riddle corpus, which has a gender bias in genre division (more popular novels by female authors, more literary novels by male authors, see Chapter 3). It is probable that the popular novels contain more dialogue/reported speech/colloquial language, whereas the literary novels contain more narration. As a speculation, the 'female' use of personal pronouns, verbs and adverbs over 'male' use of determiners and nouns as detected by the machine learning classifications reported in sections 5.2 and 5.3 – and partially reflected in the LIWC-scores – might also be an indication of this distinction. This

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11. Original text: "Ons geluk is dat wij onze, laten we zeggen verliefde vriendschap, alleen als een geschenk hoeven te aanvaarden, zonder er welke verwachting of toekomstdroom dan ook aan te verbinden. Hiermee verklein of ontken ik mijn gevoelens voor jou niet, integendeel. Je weet dat je voor mij een laatste levensvlam bent, maar ik wens en permitteer mijzelf niet deze ooit nog als een vorm van bezit te beschouwen. Dat is onze vrijheid en dat is ons geluk. Lieve Constantinus, wees voorzichtig in Engeland, kom behouden terug, en kom mij daarna alles vertellen."

12. SVM classification based on the gender of the characters' main characters proved unfruitful, showing that this is not the likely cause of the misclassifications.

dialogue-narration hypothesis thus warrants further exploration; it might be the step ‘in-between’ that we have missed before: it is possible that a selection of female authors writes more dialogue(-like) text, pulling the means of the group of female authors towards a certain type of language use that can be distinguished from male authors who rely more on narrative.

## 5.8 CONCLUSION

Gender is not a self-explanatory variable. We have used fairly simple, commonly applied Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to demonstrate how a seemingly ‘neutral’ corpus – one that consists of only one text-type, fiction, and with a balanced number of male and female authors – can easily be used to produce stereotype-affirming results, while in fact (at least) two other variables were not controlled for properly. The machine learning classifier shows that, based on its training data (the Riddle), with its bias towards male literary novels, the novels by male nominees were quite easy to classify, whereas it got the novels by female authors wrong half the time.

A cross-reference of the results points to the possible importance of dialogue, reported speech and colloquial language, which might also explain the syntactic differences generally found between female and male authors: the correctly classified novels by female authors for a large part scored (very) high on a topic we call ‘dialogues and colloquial language’; whereas misclassified novels scored low on ‘dialogues’ and higher on other ‘female’ topics such as ‘self-development’. It could be the step ‘in-between’ that we missed before: a selection of female authors writes more dialogue, which could account for gender differences found. Note, however, that more than half of the novels by female authors do *not* score high on the ‘dialogues’ topic, only a selection of authors has a preference for such a style. We cannot conclude, not even for this data set, that *all* female authors have a preference for dialogue.

Based on this analysis, we argue that researchers need to be much more

careful in selecting their data and interpreting results when performing NLP research into gender, to minimize the ethical issues discussed. From an ethics point of view, care should be taken with NLP research into gender, due to the unavoidable ethical-theoretical issues we discussed: (1) Preemptive categorization: dividing a dataset in two preemptively invites essentialist or even stereotyping explanations; (2) The semblance of objectivity: because a computer algorithm calculates differences between genders, this lends a sense of objectivity; we are inclined to forget that the researcher has chosen to look or train for these two categories of female and male.

The good news is that we can take practical steps to minimize their effect. We show that we can do this by taking care to avoid two practical problems that are intertwined with the two theoretical issues: dataset bias and interpretation bias. Dataset bias can be avoided by controlling for more variables than is generally done. We argue that apart from author variables (which we have chosen not to focus on in this chapter, but which should be taken into account), text variables should be applied more restrictively. Fiction, even, is too broad as a genre; subgenres as specific as 'literary thriller' can become confounding factors as well, as we have shown in our set of Dutch bestsellers, both in the experiments with LIWC as well as the machine learning experiments.

Interpretation bias stems from considering female and male authors as groups that can be relied upon and taken for granted. We have shown with visualizations that statistically significant differences between genders can be caused by outliers on each end of the spectrum, even though the gender overlap is large on the one hand; and that possibly interesting within-group differences become confounded by solely using means over gender groups on the other hand, missing differences that might be interesting. Taking extra visualization steps makes for a better basis for analysis that does right by authors, no matter of which gender they are.

A good example is the LIWC category of 'Body'. Even though words pertaining to the body are significantly more present with female authors in the Riddle corpus, and such difference cannot not be found in the Nominees corpus, a visualization of results shows, that the body is in fact a topic worth

looking into for both corpora. There is more variance in the topic in the Nominees corpus. The female authors use it quite consistently, then there are two groups of male authors to be discerned: a group which uses words pertaining to the body less, and a group which uses them more than the female authors. Since attention to physical appearance, in other words, the body, is seen as a feminine topic (see Section 4.3) and the body/mind distinction has frequently been the basis of feminist analysis, this is another fruitful track for further exploration, which will be done in the coming chapters.

There is a downside to using the corpora we have used. Because we only compared the Riddle corpus to nominated novels, novels we know have passed the bar of the literary quality consensus at least once, we cannot extrapolate our results over all published literary works written by female and male authors, which is something some readers of this thesis might have hoped for. However, this was not our goal with this research. Rather than ‘prove’ that all female and male authors are alike and that is why female authors should be awarded more often, which is quite pointless, we have shown that gender is not the all-compassing factor it sometimes appears to be and that it is fruitful as well as interesting from a literary-critical perspective to use a different lens for literary judgment.<sup>13</sup>

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13. The code and results for this chapter are available as a notebook at <https://github.com/andreasvc/ethnlpgender>. (Last visit: 7 November 2017).

# PART 2B

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## Literary texts top-down: the 'feminine' topic of physical appearance

This final part consists of two chapters pertaining to the differences between literary and chick lit novels, from a top-down perspective now, which means that I do look for a specific feature of the text. This is based on two outcomes of the previous two chapters. First, the body proved not to be a topic exclusive to female authors in the computational explorations in Chapter 5. Second, I identified attention to physical appearance as a topic perceived as feminine in Section 4.3. Therefore, I want to find out whether the topic of attention to physical appearance is indeed more connected to 'femaleness' (female authors, female protagonists) than to 'maleness'. I do this in two steps. The first chapter relates a computational analysis, whereby I explain the attempt to extract descriptions of characters' physical appearance from a set of thirty chick lit and literary novels. In the second chapter follows the interpretation of a set of such descriptive sentences, whereby I examine the 'gendered' layers of a literary text as discussed in Chapter 4: the genre, the author, the topic and the protagonist.

# 6.

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## COMPUTATIONAL ANALYSIS: LOCATING DESCRIPTIONS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE<sup>1</sup>

Chick lit and literary novels are assumed to be of a different class. Chick lit is humorous fiction about young, mostly urban, middle-class women who struggle with work and finding love. In literary theory, chick lit is often analyzed as a genre, on a thematic level. Only quite recently has the novel's treatment of its themes been interpreted as an act of feminine or even feminist subversiveness in feminist critique. For instance, Smith (2007) has argued that the genre challenges consumerism.

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1. This chapter is a slightly modified version of the article that has appeared in *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, Koolen and van Cranenburg (2017a). The division of labor is as such: I have developed and executed the query method. Andreas van Cranenburg has developed an interface where the queries could be run. He programmed the evaluation of the extraction. Sander Wubben (Tilburg University) has performed the initial machine learning experiment, which I replicated. Andreas has helped with the evaluation and has performed the additional machine learning runs, including the hybrid approach. I have created the baseline, have performed the additional testing which involved the queries alone (adding new ones, changing the word list). The manual classification, interpretation, including that of the misclassifications, and most of the writing has been done by me. The use of 'we' in this chapter reflects the fact that it was a joint effort.

Literary novels are not bound to specific topics or themes, although they often deal with interpersonal relationships. In general, literary novels are considered to be of higher literary quality than other novels, either through style, characterization, theme, or other factors (see Section 3.5; van Peer, 2008). Recognition can be achieved, among other things, by reviews in certain newspapers and magazines or by winning a literary prize. Recently published literary novels are more readily scrutinized on the stylistic level and treated individually rather than as a genre, like chick lit is. In the Netherlands, publishers apply a specific code to discern literary novels from other novels (see Section 1.2 ‘Genre’), but these do not always align with ideas in the literary field (see Chapter 3). In this chapter, we do not just follow the publisher’s code, as done in previous chapters, but also rely on the judgment of the gatekeepers in the literary field; we will explain this further in Section 6.2.

One of the assumed differences between the two genres, is a an exaggerated attention to physical appearance chick lit, see for instance Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006), as opposed to less attention to this topic in literary novels.<sup>2</sup> So far, the genres have yet to be analyzed on the same level; if this is a true difference has yet to be tested. For an example of what we consider a description of physical appearance, see (1) – a description of the male love interest in a chick lit novel called *In Zeven Sloten* (‘Out of Harm’s Way’).<sup>3</sup>

(1) Hij had blauwe ogen en een beetje rosig haar.  
*He had blue eyes and somewhat reddish hair.* (Harrewijn, 2007)

We aim to compare the genres on the same textual level, by comparing descriptions of physical appearance in novels of each genre. To find such descriptions, we need more than a single or a couple of novels. However,

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2. This topic of attention to physical appearance will be analyzed further in the next chapter.

3. Because of the importance of the exact shape of the sentences, rather than providing the original sentence in a footnote, as usually done in this thesis, they are sided with the translation in this chapter. Note that all translations are our own. We try to stay as close to the original Dutch sentence as possible. This may sometimes result in word choices and word order that may not be preferred by native English speakers.

to manually interpret a large number of novels is not feasible, therefore we attempt to extract sentences that contain a description of physical appearance computationally. There are no off-the-shelf tools to do this. A tool such as LIWC, discussed in the previous chapter, contains a word list to identify body parts, but does not allow to zoom in on specific types of bodily descriptions. Therefore the development of such a tool receives a full chapter. This chapter describes the attempt to develop a computational approach for extracting sentences containing a description of physical appearance, to make a distant reading of the corpus possible. We answer the question:

***How well can we extract sentences containing descriptions of physical appearance from two genres of prose fiction?***

Locating sentences that contain a description of a character's physical appearance is a complex task for automated extraction, because there is no fixed set of words and phrases that reliably signal such sentences, let alone a set that can be enumerated exhaustively. Moreover, it is a non-trivial task to discern descriptions of physical appearance from other descriptions that contain physical features (such as a physical fight). We attempt to cope with these challenges by testing multiple extraction methods with different strengths, as well as combinations of them.

## 6.1 RELATED WORK

Extraction of information from novels is most often performed on a higher level of abstraction. Examples include extraction of narrative structure or plot lines (Chambers & Jurafsky, 2008; Finlayson, 2012) and timelines (Mani, 2010). Extraction of descriptions, as far as we know, has not yet been done.

Extraction of information on characters has mostly been concerned with character roles, their actions and interactions, for instance social network extraction (i.e. Elson et al., 2010) or personas (Bamman et al., 2013). Zöllner-Weber (2008) casts a wider net and includes physical appearance in her ontology-based extraction of character information. However, this system relies on pre-encoded text and we aim to develop a system that is able to recognize new descriptions.

Beauty (not physical appearance in general) has been a topic for quantitative analysis. Gottschall (2008) and Weingart & Jorgensen (2012) use folk tales to analyze ideas on beauty and youth. Both papers use manual annotation of adjectives and nouns which are then counted. However, our goal is automated extraction. Moreover, we aim to research full descriptions; therefore we focus on the sentence level, rather than just extract information on separate features.

We tie a number of approaches together in a novel way, in order to perform the extraction of sentences containing a description of physical appearance. We use both a semi-manual and a fully automated approach to be able to assess the value of each for this specific task. In the next sections, we explain the corpus we use, how we have annotated it and consecutively, how we use automated methods on these annotations to extract the sought-after sentences.

## 6.2 CORPUS

For our automated extraction, the corpus of Jautze et al. (2013) is used (see Appendix A.3).<sup>4</sup> It contains thirty-two novels, of which sixteen are chick lit novels and sixteen are literary novels, with a total of thirteen different authors. Selection criteria for the chick lit novels are the publishers' NUR-code for genre ('popular fiction') and presence on [www.chicklit.nl](http://www.chicklit.nl), a popular national website that discusses newly released chick lit. The literary novel is harder to categorize overall, as we have discussed in Section 1.2 ('Genre'). We first follow the publishers' choice of NUR-code, '301 Literary fiction, novella'. An additional criterion is applied, however, in this chapter: the author needed to have won a national literary prize at least once.

The novels in both genres contain novels written from a first person perspective as well as from a third person perspective and the settings are diverse: rural and urban surroundings are included in both sets. Most novels take place in the protagonist's home or work place. There are other factors which could not be controlled for. As Jautze et al. (2013) attempts to include as much variation in author style as possible, 50% male authors and 50% female authors are included in the literary set; but as there are no male chick lit authors in the Netherlands, that part of the corpus contains only female authors. This also results in a skewness in gender of the protagonist, as the chick lit set contains mainly female protagonists, while there is a more even distribution in protagonist gender in the literary set (see Appendix A.3). This is unavoidable, and we need to consider this when doing our final comparisons. The corpus is split into two parts:

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4. These novels are not all part of the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus. At the time this research was performed, the Riddle corpus had not yet been finished, nor had the National Reader Survey been undertaken.

1. an exploratory set of two novels, which we have classified manually from front to back into sentences that either contain a description of physical appearance or that do not contain such a description. The goal is to make an inventory of possible variations in descriptions of physical appearance. This inventory is then used to manually develop a set of queries for extraction. This is explained further in Section 4.3 and 4.4.

2. a test set of the remaining thirty novels. Of these novels, we have classified the first 500 sentences for sentences containing a description of physical appearance, roughly 1–2 chapters. We have decided to not do the classification on random chapters, as our hope is that most characterization takes place in the first few chapters, when characters are generally introduced. On this set we test the automated extraction. Note that our ultimate aim is to find a method to automatically extract sentences previously unseen by the computer.

## 6.3 CLASSIFICATION

We focus on the sentence level in order to find descriptions of physical appearance, our goal is to have the computer decide: does a sentence contain a description of physical appearance or not? We choose not to consider the paragraph or larger level, because of the relative rarity of such descriptions; it is seldom the case, as was for instance more regular in nineteenth century literature, that characters are introduced in paragraph-length descriptions. Rather, snippets of information are released throughout the text. Looking for smaller units of information, such as clauses, could be considered for further research. To investigate sentences containing a description of physical appearance, we start with manual classification, where for a selection of sentences we decide whether they contain a description of physical appearance or not. First, we classify two full novels. One of the two novels is a literary psychological novel, *De Schilder en het Meisje* ('The Painter and the Girl') by Margriet de Moor (2010); the other is a chick lit novel called *Zwaar Verliefd!*

(‘Heavily in Love!’) by Chantal van Gastel (2009). We do this in order to get a sense of the shape and content of such descriptions, and to have a basis for the development of the semi-manual method, which we explain in Section 6.1. Sentences are marked as either containing a description of physical appearance or not. This task requires a working definition of a description of a character’s physical appearance.

### **Classification scheme**

Characterization is a process in fiction where specific traits are ascribed to a character, be it directly (spelled out in the text) or indirectly (attributed to the character by the reader); see Jannidis (2013). We search only for direct characterization, traits that we can locate in the text. Only very recently in narratological research have physiological and locative characteristics been recognized as traits ascribed to characters; before, the focus was nearly exclusively on psychological and social traits (*ibidem*). The relative invisibility of these types of characteristics, even though they are generally present, makes it a relatively unexplored strand of research in this field. But when do we consider an ascription of physiological traits to a character to be a description of physical appearance?

In this first round of classification, we follow a broad definition of description. Bal defines description as ‘a textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects’ (Bal, 2009: p. 36). This definition contains three important elements:

- ‘textual fragment’: the type of fragment we consider, is the sentence (see Section 6.1);
- ‘features’: which we restrict to physiological ones;
- ‘objects’: which we translate into ‘human character’ – a human character being a human acting entity in the novel who has a role in the plot.

These substitutions leave the following definition for a description of a character's physical appearance: 'a sentence in which physiological features are attributed to a human character.'

This implies a broad selection, which we have purposefully chosen, to be able to gather as much information as possible; especially since such descriptions are rare. As physiological features, we include all references to physical appearance of human characters. This includes not only features of face and body, but also mentions of age, and categorizations such as 'young', clothing, and values about appearance, such as 'beautiful'. Moreover, a sentence does not need to be concerned mainly with appearance (examples in (2)): even when the description is restricted to a single clause, this sentence is also classified as containing a description of physical appearance (examples in (3)).

(2) a. Zijn voorhoofd vol horizontale rimpels gaf hem het voorkomen van een denker, wat hij ook was.

*His brow full of horizontal wrinkles gave him the appearance of a thinker, which he was.* (de Moor, 2010)

b. Ik ben te dik om nog in 'gewone' winkels mijn kleren te kopen.

*I am too fat to be able to buy my clothes in 'normal' stores.* (van Gastel, 2009)

(3) a. Door de rook heen keek hij naar de porseleinen wangen van mevrouw Cloeck, milder gestemd.

*Through the smoke he watched Mrs. Cloeck's porcelain cheeks, in a milder mood.* (de Moor, 2010)

b. Zijn gezicht is zo dicht bij het mijne dat ik zijn aftershave kan ruiken en de stoppeltjes op zijn kaken kan zien.

*His face is so close to mine that I can smell his aftershave and can see the stubble on his chin.* (van Gastel, 2009)

After this classification, we perform an exploration of the sentences classified as 'containing a physical description', a selection of 164 out of 4436 sentences from de Moor (3.7%) and 301 out of 8862 (3.4%) from van Gastel. We compare them to a randomly selected set of equal size (the same number

of sentences, roughly the same amount of tokens) of sentences that do not contain a physical description, from now on called the reference set. For this we use van Cranenburgh's Treebank Search, which allows me to search for syntactic patterns within the sets, both bottom-up and top-down.<sup>5</sup>

This leads to the following observations:

- 1.** The number of adjective-noun-co-occurrences is greater in the set of sentences containing a physical description than in the reference set, 1.8 times more in van Gastel, 1.6 times more in de Moor.
- 2.** There are certain syntactic structures that occur more often in the set of sentences with a physical description, for instance predicates (i.e. 'she is *beautiful*') and modifying clauses (i.e. 'he is a man *with blue eyes*'). This will be dealt with more in-depth in Section 4.4.
- 3.** The sentences containing a physical description in de Moor are much longer than the average sentence in the novel (22.4 versus 16.8), but with van Gastel, the difference is not that great, they are even somewhat shorter (10.7 versus 11.4). Perhaps such sentences in de Moor are more descriptive in general, and therefore contain more clauses, thereby lengthening the sentence.
- 4.** In de Moor, many of the sentences are not mainly concerned with physical description, but rather part of a minor clause or subordinate part of the sentence. 21.3% of all sentences classified as containing a description of physical appearance have the description as their main subject; for van Gastel, this is 34.5%.

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5. See <http://andreasvc.github.io/>. (Last visit: 7 November 2017).

The first two observations we use to shape the first automated extraction method, see Section 4.4. The third and fourth lead us to the decision to focus the classification differently for the remainder of the test. Our goal is to compare two methods: a query-based one and a machine learning method for automated classification. For the machine learning method, we want the sentences to be mainly concerned with physical appearance. Should we choose to include long sentences like the ones in de Moor, that only deal partially with appearance, we run the risk of training the classifier on the wrong information. This would make it harder to apply the model to unseen data. The downside is, that this choice also diminishes the amount of data we can use; this risk we decide to take to make the classification method more likely to recognize physical descriptions.

A sentence is seen as mainly being concerned with a description of physical appearance if:

- 1.** It deals with the description of a human characters' physical appearance, i.e. including her/his age, bodily features, facial features, attending to physical features (such as grooming), clothing, evaluation of appearance;
- 2.** This description is the primary topic of the sentence;
- 3.** The description is part of the main sentence, not only of a (subordinating) clause.

In other words, we make the decision to classify only sentences that are centred around a description of physical appearance in our test set (example (2)) as 'containing a description of physical appearance', rather than for instance sentences that deal with a completely different topic, but mention physical appearance (example (3)). This decision is made to ensure single sentences contain as much information related to physical description as possible, and hopefully therefore make correct selection more likely.

## Examples

We demonstrate the model by giving a number of examples and counterexamples from de Moor (2010) and van Gastel (2009), concerning the content, and the shape of the sentence and amount of the sentence the description needs to cover.

### Content

The sentence needs to have the description of physical appearance as a main topic, but the net for such a description is cast fairly wide. The general description of a characters' physical appearance is the most simple example.

√ Hij was een kleine, wasbeerachtige man met een ijzerkleurige baard en krullende bakkebaarden tot aan zijn mondhoecken, wat hem een goeiig voorkomen gaf.

*He was a small, raccoon-like man with an iron-colored beard and curling side-burns touching the corners of his mouth, which gave him a benevolent appearance .*

The description can also be left a bit more implicit, for instance when a word implies a certain physical appearance, like 'matron' in the next sentence, when the sentence obviously concerns a physical description; age is also considered to be a part of a physical description.

√ Mina Cloeck was een matrone van midden vijftig met een opvallend mooie porseleinachtige huid.

*Mina Cloeck was a matron in her mid fifties with an exceptionally beautiful porcelain-like skin.*

Simply naming body parts is not enough, there needs to be some form of description of those body parts included, their shape, colour, etc. Hence the next sentence is not classified as containing a description of physical appearance.

x Ik kijk eerst naar mijn blote voeten en mijn kuiten.

*I first look at my bare feet and my calves.*

Several descriptive elements are seen as part of a physical description, such as clothing and hair. Descriptions of how a character is dressed or what his or her hair style is, are thus included.

√ Hij droeg een vaalzwart buis, een vaalzwart schort, erg stoffig, en een muts van leer.

*He wore a sallow black chef's jacket, a sallow black apron, very dusty, and a leather cap.*

√ *Mijn haar valt net over mijn schouders.*

*My hair just covers my shoulders.*

The sentence does not mainly need to concern itself with 'objective' description (if such a thing is possible); judgments on appearance or are also seen as a description of physical appearance.

√ Je bent jong, mooi en inmiddels ook slank.

*You are young, beautiful and now even slim.*

√ Ze ziet er heel hip uit.

*She looks very hip.*

√ Ze was een heel mooi meisje dat in maart van het komend jaar achttien zou worden.

*She was a very beautiful girl who would turn eighteen in March next year.*

But not if those judgments are solely concerned with a person's state of mind:

x Eigenlijk ziet hij er doodongelukkig uit en een golf van medelijden gaat door me heen.

*He actually looks extremely unhappy and a gush of pity runs through me.*

In sum, when features are ascribed to a human, that concern only their outer appearance (hair, body, clothes, age, facial features; but not referring to a state of mind), including judgments on this appearance (beautiful), these are considered to be descriptions of physical appearance. Not only the type of description is important however, it is also important which part of the sentence the description concerns.

### **Shape and amount**

The description needs to be part of the main sentence, so it is not enough if there is a description present, but it is not the main topic. In the following sentence, the approach of the ex-girlfriend is the main topic. Although her appearance is an important second one, this sentence is not included.

*x Ze loopt in een rechte lijn naar Ruben toe en ze verpest mijn uitzicht met haar slanke taille die bloot gelaten wordt door een veel te strak topje.  
She walks at Ruben in a straight line and she ruins my view with her slim waist that is left bare by a much too tight top.*

Although the next sentence does deal with physical appearance, the main part is about contemplation, and hence, it is excluded.

*x In een halfversleten vooroorlogse kamerjas staat de schilder voor het doek en wrijft zich over de kaken.  
In a half-worn pre-war house coat the painter stands before the canvas and rubs his cheeks.*

It is, however, fine if the description is performed through looking, seeing or judging – even though the viewing is then the main topic.

*√ We kijken met z'n drieën naar de perfect getrainde mannenkont die hij onder zijn goedzittende spijkerbroek verborgen houdt.  
The three of us watch the perfectly trained man's ass that he keeps hidden under his well-fitting jeans.*

It is also acceptable when the sentence itself is not descriptive, as long as it involves working on physical appearance, such as grooming.

*√ Ik trek mijn vestje erover aan en maak opnieuw een staart van mijn haren.  
I put on my vest and again make a pony tail in my hair.*

If there is only a subclause that describes a character's appearance, this is not included. In the next sentence, the man's profession is the main subject, not his

appearance.

x Hij was een voormalige huisknecht, mager en krom, die tegenwoordig op bestelling schreef.

*He was a former housekeeper, scrawny and crooked, who nowadays wrote on order.*

Sentences are allowed to be elliptic:

√ Witjes, met de tere blauwe kringen van een doorwaakte nacht onder de ogen.

*Pale, with the tender blue circles of a sleepless night under the eyes.*

But do have to be mainly concerned with physical appearance, so the following example is not included:

x Een oud, lelijk en niet eens echt onsympathiek mens, hooguit een beetje immoreel wat de geldverdienerij aangaat.

*An old, ugly, and not even really unsympathetic woman, who was at most a bit immoral when it came to making money.*

The main topic of the sentence is a description of the landlady, but physicality is only a minor part (old, ugly), her character is of greater importance.

To summarize, the main topic of the sentence needs to be a character's physical appearance, or judging/viewing a character's physical appearance, or attending to appearance. Also, the main clause in the sentence needs to be the clause concerned with appearance, not a subordinate clause. Elliptic sentences are allowed, but also need to abide by the aforementioned rules.

Subsequently, we classify the first 500 sentences of the other 30 novels, which forms our test set; we identify 234 sentences that contain a description of physical appearance (1.6% of the total number of sentences of the chapters selected). We choose to do manual classification rather than automated selection to ensure that the classifications are of high quality; on the one hand false positives need to be avoided, but we also want to ensure that for a given range of sentences, all physical descriptions are selected (i.e., avoid false negatives). Automated methods could introduce an unwanted bias. We

considered using Named Entity Recognition and co-reference resolution to eliminate a large amount of sentences, but unfortunately, there is no co-reference resolution software available for Dutch that is sufficiently accurate for our purposes.

Note that we have not controlled for sentence length or total number of words, only for the number of sentences, because we use the sentence as a unit.

## 6.4 AUTOMATED EXTRACTION

### Extraction Method 1: Lexical-Syntactic Queries

In the exploration of the fully classified novels, we find that a number of the sought-after sentences follow a certain base pattern or make more use of typical grammatical constructions than sentences that do not contain a description of physical appearance. To see if we can make use of the recurring patterns in descriptions of physical appearance, we use a pattern-based approach first pioneered by Hearst (1992) and since applied in many supervised and unsupervised information extraction methods (see Wimalasuriya & Dou, 2010). Hearst uses lexical-syntactic patterns for (manual) recognition of hyponyms, terms that denote subcategories of general classes. By identifying patterns for hyponyms, for example:

(4) such NP as NP<sub>1</sub>, ..., or/and NP<sub>n</sub>

tuples are extracted with information on hyponymic relations. Tuples are finite lists of ordered elements. Patterns like this could also be used to automatically identify physical-descriptive sentences from the novels. For example:

(5) Sentence: 'is een man met heldere, mooie, blauwe ogen'  
*is a man with clear, beautiful, blue eyes.*

Pattern: is NP met ADJ<sub>1</sub> ... [en] ADJ<sub>n</sub> N  
is NP with ADJ<sub>1</sub> ... [and] ADJ<sub>n</sub> N

To be able to include both the lexical and syntactic level, the novels are automatically parsed with Alpino. Alpino is a parser for the Dutch language. Given a text, it returns a parse tree per sentence. Alpino parse trees provide rich linguistic information on sentences, such as part-of-speech tags (including nouns and verbs) and grammatical functions of constituents (e.g., subject or

object), allowing for various ways of describing particular syntactic structures (Bouma et al., 2001; van Noord, 2006). Specifically, patterns in sentences can be defined as queries on parse trees. We can for instance search for a sentence in which the main verb is an inflection of the verb ‘dragen’ (‘to wear’), with the noun ‘jurk’ (‘dress’) as part of the object. We formulate the patterns in the form of queries. To get a sense of how these queries operate, the process is visualized in Figure 6.1.

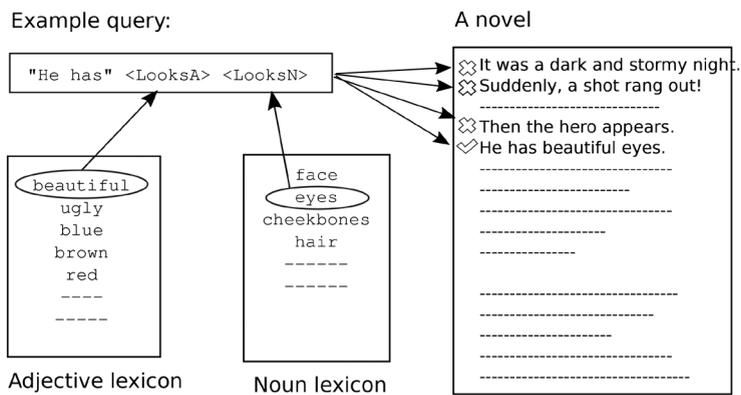


Figure 6.1: A visual explanation of how the extraction through queries works. Please note that the example query is not part of the actual set.

Since the output of Alpino consists of XML, the general-purpose query language XPath can be employed.

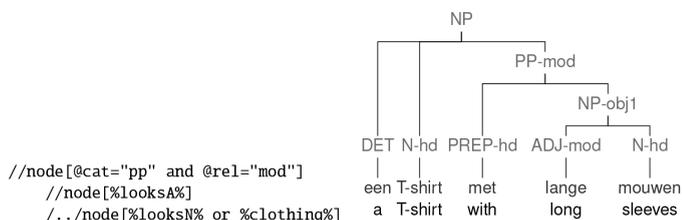


Figure 6.2: Example of an XPath query and a matching subtree. The initial node searched for is one is a modifying ( $@rel="mod"$ ) prepositional phrase ( $@cat="pp"$ ). A modifying clause is an optional clause that qualifies another constituent.

Although descriptions may figure in particular syntactic constructions, lexical information is needed to distinguish physical from other descriptions. To this end we construct word lists of nouns and adjectives used in physical descriptions. We construct a first version of the lexicon manually, and then expand it automatically by using the Dutch WordNet, Cornetto (Vossen et al., 2007). The word lists are rewritten as XPath macros that can be invoked from queries.<sup>6</sup> The macros contain nouns pertaining to appearance, clothing and people, as well as adjectives (see Table 6.1). The output of Alpino includes lemmas, i.e., the uninflected form of a word; the word lists therefore consist of lemmas as well, avoiding the need to deal with alternate word forms.

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6. The word lists are available at <http://www.corinakoolen.nl/blue-eyes>. (Last visit: 7 November 2017).

Name	# Words	Examples	Usage in corpus (%)
looksN	159	oog (eye), mond (mouth), lichaam (body), baard (beard)	54.4
looksA	321	mooi (beautiful), stevig (stocky), bruin (brown)	63.6
Clothing	52	jurk (dress), broek (pants), muts (hat)	71.2
Person	60	vrouw (woman), kind (child), jongedame (young lady)	73.3

Table 6.1: The word lists, the number of words in each list, some examples from each set, and the usage of the wordlist in the corpus. The usage is the percentage of word types in the word list that occurs one or more times in the corpus.

Additionally, we include information on verbs in the queries. This is partially informed by Kazantseva & Szpakowicz (2010), which describes a method to automatically extract ‘teasers’ from fiction. Teasers are summaries that do not give away the plot, but give some salient information to tempt someone to read the full story. They do this by extracting stative sentences, sentences that describe states of being rather than narrate actions or changes. These teasers include descriptions of characters’ physical appearance. Kazantseva & Szpakowicz (2010) locates stative sentences by extracting sentences with a main stative verb (for instance ‘to be’ rather than ‘to run’, which is an action verb). Sentences with a stative main verb are more likely to contain a description of physical appearance. Therefore we include stative verbs in the queries as well.

It is important to note that we have developed the queries based on the exploration of two novels that were set apart from the original corpus of thirty-two novels, and that we classified the test set of thirty novels after the development of the queries. Based on the information gained from the manual

classification of the explorative set of two novels, we wrote a set of thirteen XPath queries, which can be found in Appendix B.<sup>7</sup> One query is explained in more detail in Figure 6.2 in this section.

## **Extraction Method 2: Machine Learning**

In the second approach we use a machine learning algorithm to classify the sentences. Support Vector Machines (SVM) is an established, straightforward, and powerful approach to text categorization (Hearst et al., 1998; Steinwart & Christmann, 2008). We chose SVM over others because of its ability to deal with two crucial machine learning challenges, high dimensionality and overfitting. High dimensionality means that the learning method has to deal with many features, such that the data can in practice not be sufficient to cover all their interactions. As we use words as our features, the number of features is very large. The second reason for choosing SVM is that they are good at preventing overfitting, a condition in which the classifier is adapted so specifically to the given training data, that it cannot generalize to new data. Finally, exploratory tests with other classifiers showed that SVM works best for this task. We use this machine learning model to classify sentences as being a physical description or not. A simple bag-of-words (BOW) model is used to extract features from the sentences; i.e., a sentence is represented as a list of counts for the words it contains. Usually, text categorization is done on the document level. This means that each document is associated with a set of feature values and a class that is used for training or forms the target of predictions (Sebastiani, 2002). We adapt this approach to the task of classifying sentences. Each sentence is classified as either a description or not, in order to extract the set of descriptions in a text. The features selected as input for the classifiers are word frequencies for which we consider

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7. We use both generic and specific queries. The generic queries are called generic because they are not based on complex patterns including syntactic information, but rely (almost) solely on the lexicon. Specific queries use more detail, they were either based on a stative verb (in combination with words from the lexicon), or a syntactic construct that we find in the exploratory novels (again, combined with words from the lexicon). Some queries have an overlap, to test which level of specificity would perform best.

the sentences as documents and the novels as the collection of documents. Experiments are also performed with tf.idf, bigrams and part-of-speech features, but these did not improve performance. Ten-fold cross validation is performed on the set of sentences to get a fair estimate of the model's performance on unseen data.<sup>8</sup>

Note that on the one hand the machine learning approach has the disadvantage of operating only with lexical information, without part-of-speech and other syntactic information. On the other hand the machine learning approach has the potential of exploiting any item in the lexicon as feature, and can detect words that are either positive or negative cues, including terms with only an implicit connection that might be overlooked in a manual approach. It is therefore not obvious a priori which method should perform better.

### **Extraction Method 3: Hybrid approach**

As a final method, the result of the queries are also cast as features in the SVM-classifier. This means that for each of the sentences in the novel, thirteen extra features are taken into account: namely, for each query, whether it matches the sentence or not (regardless of whether this match is correct or not according to our set classified by hand). There is no special weight given to these extra features (just 0 or 1).

### **Random Baseline**

All three methods are compared to two random baselines, the first based on a Poisson distribution. This distribution is appropriate for rare events, such as physical descriptions in novels. The mean is set to produce roughly the same number of physical descriptions as in the manually classified sentences (1.6%). We also test a uniform distribution, where the chance of marking a sentence as containing a description of physical appearance is 50%.

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8. This means that the data set is divided into ten parts, and for each part a model is trained on the other nine parts. The resulting evaluations are combined into a single score.

	$F_1$ (%)	P (%)	R (%)
Poisson baseline	2	2	4
Uniform distribution	3	52	2
Lexical-syntactic queries	33	29	38
SVM classifier	28	32	27
Hybrid	33	45	26

Table 6.2: Performance on the thirty test set novels in f-measure ( $F_1$ ), precision (P) and recall (R) – unweighted evaluation.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on the f-measure score specifically (an overall score combining precision and recall), all methods outperform the baseline, but the queries and the hybrid model outperform the SVM classifier.

## 6.5 RESULTS

### General

The overall performance of the lexical-syntactic queries, the SVM classifier and the hybrid method are compared to the Poisson and uniform baseline in Table 6.2. For this precision, recall and f-measure are used. As the percentage of sentences containing a physical description is small (less than 2%), we choose an unweighted average for evaluation, where only the class of sentences containing a physical description is considered. Performance on the sentences that do not contain a description is always very high, because of the skewness of the classes. Therefore including the performance of this large class would unjustly inflate the outcome.<sup>10</sup>

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9. For an explanation of f-measure, precision and recall, see Jurafsky and Martin (2009), pp. 455-456.

10. Another possible weighting of the scores would be a macro evaluation. This averages the scores on both classes. For the class of sentences containing a physical description, we get an f-score of about 30%, whereas the sentences that do not contain a physical description score about 90% – caused by the fact that they are overrepresented in the corpus. The average of the two scores is then 60%. In this chapter, we only report the f-score for the sentences containing a physical description, as the macro evaluation unjustly inflates the outcome.

For the evaluation of the queries, the results of all queries are combined such that a match on any of the queries is sufficient to classify a sentence as containing a physical description.

We fine-tune several elements in order to gain better performance:

1. add queries to the existing ones;
2. add salient machine learning features, in the form of the corresponding words, to the lexicon;
3. use only the queries as features in the classification task;
4. join the output of the queries and the classifier, both by only considering sentences in which both methods were right, and by considering sentences where one of the methods was right.

None of these improve the overall outcome. We then test the effect of the size of the lexicon, by cutting the original lexicon in half. This causes the performance to drop by 5%. Enlarging the lexicon might therefore be the easiest way to improve performance.

In sum, none of the methods is successful enough for automated extraction of the sought-after sentences from unseen novels. Compared to standard tasks in Natural Language Processing such as tagging the parts of speech (POS) in a sentence, for which the accuracy readily exceeds 96%, the result may seem low, but recognizing physical descriptions requires more world knowledge, and the amount of training data is insignificant compared to the millions of words that POS taggers are customarily trained on. Both approaches do outperform the baselines and the lexical-syntactic queries outperform the SVM classifier. This is an unexpected result, which shows (a) that descriptions of physical appearance are hard to distinguish from other types of sentences based on

relatively easily available information, and (b) the importance of adding syntactic information in finding certain types of descriptions.

## Results by Genre

When we split the results for the two halves of the set, chick lit and literary novels, we can make some conclusions on their respective writing style. When we split the performance measures for the hybrid classifier (see Table 6.3), we find that overall performance for the literary novels is considerably worse than that for chick lit ( $F_1$ -score of 28% as opposed to 39%). By analyzing the most discriminative features from the classifier, we can get a better sense of where the difference originates.

	$F_1$ (%)	P (%)	R (%)
Chick lit	39	50	32
Literature	28	41	22
Combined	33	45	26

Table 6.3 Performance of the hybrid classifier: SVM classifier trained on words and queries as features, evaluated for each genre and all novels combined. A larger proportion of sentences from the chick lit novels are found than from the literary novels.

Looking at the top twenty features for the hybrid method as opposed to the SVM classifier on its own (see Table 6.4), we find that one of the queries becomes an important feature in classifying chick lit: ‘To look like’ with looksA or looksN (see Appendix B, query 8). No queries show up in the top twenty features of the literary novels. We also find that the queries appear to have some effect on the other discriminating features, but only slightly. From the features we also see that the literary half contains many words not as directly related to physical appearance as the chick lit features; in chick lit only one feature, ‘would’, is a (modal) verb. Also, all degrees of comparison of beautiful (‘mooie - mooier - mooiste’) appear as a discriminating feature for chick lit. These findings are an indication of the more varied descriptions in

literary novels. We must note however that one should always be careful in interpreting machine learning features; the weights are distributed over a large number of features, so the influence of individual features is small.

## 6.6 MISCLASSIFICATIONS

We take a sample from the misclassified sentences of both the queries and the SVM classifier, to interpret the issues in extraction, and to find out where the strengths of each of the methods lie. We report only the most salient misclassifications here. The queries render many false positives, leading to low precision. The most important category is the one represented by Example (6). These contain physical features, but do not describe a character's appearance.

(6) Ze wilde vlinders in haar buik, een arm die spontaan om haar schouders werd gelegd, ogen die zouden oplichten als zij in de deuropening verscheen. *She wanted butterflies in her stomach, an arm that was put around her shoulders spontaneously, eyes that would light up if she appeared on the doorstep.* (Hollander, 2010)

The queries do cover a reasonable proportion of the sentences containing a description of physical appearance, but the problem is that these queries are not specific enough; this will remain a problem for the automated extraction through these queries. As the SVM classifier also takes negative cues into account, it produces fewer false positives. However, it often misclassifies sentences that do not describe bodies or physical appearance, but attribute qualities to other objects, see Example (7).

(7) De mooie houten kasten bleken eruit te zijn gesloopt, de blauwe tegels waren overgeschilderd en overal blonk de opschepperige inbouwapparatuur je tegemoet.

Lit (BOW)	Lit (Hybr)	Chick (BOW)	Chick (Hybr)
chest hair	chest hair	ring	Ring
seemed	seemed	more beautiful	more beautiful
reached	reached	buttocks	buttocks
huge	huge	slender	slender
eyebrow hair	eyebrow hair	fuller	fuller
mole	mole	more feminine	more feminine
petite	petite	legs	legs
puberty	puberty	puny	puny
zit	zit	would	would
looks bad	looks bad	figure	figure
tall/large	tall/large	jawline	jawline
clean	clean	square	square
gorgeous	gorgeous	gorgeous <sup>11</sup>	gorgeous
remained	remained	faded <sup>12</sup>	faded
wears	wears	beautiful	beautiful
dresses (v)	dresses (v)	most beautiful	most beautiful
spanish	spanish	pockets (of pants)	pockets (of pants)
colourful	<i>neck</i>	embellished	embellished
curls	<i>rough</i>	hairs	<i>muscled</i>
hamster cheeks	<i>shoulders</i>	rhinestones	<i>query8</i>

Table 6.4: Top 20 of most discriminating features in the SVM classifier (directly translated into English, all features are single words in Dutch), both for the bag-of-words (BOW) approach and the hybrid (Hybr) approach, which also includes the queries as features. Differences are emphasized. Most important difference is the introduction of a query: ‘query8’ stands for the query ‘to look like’ with looksA or looksN (see Appendix B).

11. In a conjugated version: ‘prachtig-e’, which means it can only be an adjective with a neutral noun, whereas ‘prachtig’, one of the features for the literary half of the set, can be both an adjective with a masculine or feminine word, and an adverb.

12. The original word is ‘verschoten’, which is used most specifically for clothing.

*The beautiful wooden chests appeared to have been removed, the blue tiles were repainted and everywhere the swanky built-in appliances were shining obscenely.*  
(Dorrestein, 1998)

This sentence is marked as containing a physical description based on high weights for ‘mooie’ (‘beautiful’), ‘blauwe’ (‘blue’) and ‘eruit’. ‘Eruit’ is part of the verb phrase ‘eruit slopen’ (‘forcibly remove’), but is also part of the verb phrase ‘eruit zien als’ (‘to look like’), common in descriptions of physical appearance. Such false positives are mainly retrieved by the SVM classifier. This suggests that a machine learning approach for finding descriptive sentences in general would yield a higher performance.<sup>13</sup>

## 6.7 INTERPRETATION OF CLASSIFIED SENTENCES

We analyze the set of sentences from the thirty novels manually classified as ‘containing a description of physical appearance’ to deduce initial conclusions about physical appearance in both genres.

Contrary to expectation, there are more sentences containing a physical description in the literary novels than in the chick lit novels in the test set of thirty novels (143 versus 91, with resp. 2,497 and 1,438 word tokens). When we visualize the averages per novel, this difference appears to be significant (see Figure 6.3).

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13. In considering a more general applicability of the approaches, we also want to note that the queries are specific to the Dutch language and the Alpino treebank, whereas the SVM classifier only relies on tokenization and is therefore transferable to other languages.

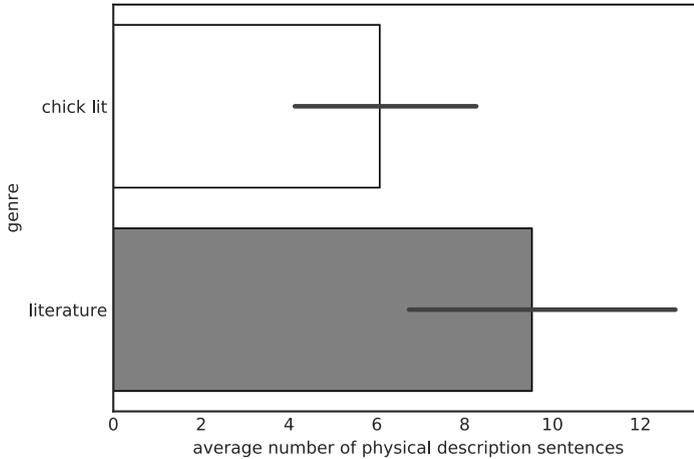


Figure 6.3: The average number of sentences classified as ‘containing a description of physical appearance’ per novel, split by genre. Unexpectedly, the literary novels contain more of such sentences in the first 500 sentences than chick lit novels do.

This means that the notion of supposed greater attention to physical appearance in chick lit as opposed to literary novels, cannot be confirmed; and it should be re-examined. Montoro (2002), who computationally compared chick lit novels to part of the BNC corpus already concluded that the assumed preoccupation with appearance and the body cannot be retraced linguistically in chick lit novels (pp. 94-97). Our research confirms this. Perhaps physical appearance is not necessarily a motif in literary novels, but this does not mean that it is less prevalent. It rather indicates that it might be employed in a different fashion.

We use AntConc’s keyword analysis to make a comparison between the sentences per genre (Anthony, 2004).<sup>14</sup> This keyword analysis shows which words in a corpus (one or more documents) stand out in comparison to a

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14. For a more elaborate explanation of AntConc and keyword analysis, see Section 3.5.

reference corpus, in other words, which words are most characteristic for one corpus as opposed to another corpus. Montoro (2012) observes that chick lit novels are characterized by being written in the first person or thought representation techniques (p. 203); this can be confirmed for this corpus as well. The words 'ik' ('I') and 'mijn' ('mine') are keywords from the chick lit set as opposed to the literary set where 'haar' ('her') and 'zij' ('she') are more indicative. An interesting detail is that about half of the literary novels has a male protagonist, but 'he' is a keyword for the chick lit set. This slightly nuances Montoro's conclusion that the male cannot be retraced as an important element in the text of chick lit novels (p. 90): where physicality is concerned, men are important. This also calls for closer examination, which we will do in the next chapter. Apart from the fact that men appear to be an important object in chick lit's description of physical appearance, it also indicates that women are a more important object in literary novels than men are.

We then remove stop words from the lists. When we look at the top twenty keywords for each genre as opposed to the other, we see that 'ogen' ('eyes') is the most important keyword for chick lit, versus 'droeg' ('wore') for literary novels. On closer examination we find that the eyes that are described in chick lit most often belong to the male love interest. Fifteen of the nineteen occurrences of 'ogen' describe the attractiveness of the desired man's eyes, in several different novels. No other word occurs nearly as often (the second most important word occurs seven times), which indicates that the description of the male protagonist's eyes is the most distinguishable formula in descriptions of physical appearance in chick lit. The word used most often in the literary sentences, 'gezicht' ('face'), occurs eighteen times, but in different contexts. The top list for literary novels contains nine nouns pertaining to looks (of which two are pieces of clothing), and eight adjectives (of which two are colors, two are inflections of 'groot' ('tall/large')); whereas the chick lit novels contain eleven adjectives (of which six are colors) and six nouns (no pieces of clothing). This indicates that literary novels have the use of nouns for body parts in common, and that these are lacking in chick lit, confirming Montoro's finding that anatomy is a negative marker for chick lit (p. 95). What we do see is that the adjectives by which appearance is described are more diverse in literature than in chick lit. Interestingly enough, no words

pertaining to weight can be found in the chick lit keywords; although these are identified in the machine learning approach as important features (see Section 6.5). We examine these findings further in the next chapter, where we perform a close reading of the sentences manually classified as containing a description of physical appearance.

## 6.8 CONCLUSION

We have attempted to extract sentences containing descriptions of a character's physical appearance from chick lit and literary novels, with a view of comparing both genres on the same textual plane – something which has not previously been done. It is a complex task, of which we have unraveled part of the workings. The automated extraction showed that manually constructed queries can perform better than a standard machine learning approach, even though it is not a fine-grained one. Both methods performed comparably but had different strengths. The queries generated more matches, including false positives, such as sentences describing physicality, but not appearance. The machine learning model also took negative cues into account leading to fewer false positives. Among its misclassifications were descriptions which were not concerned with physicality, suggesting that classifying descriptions in general might be a more fruitful endeavor, but also that more fine-grained features (which include more context and/or syntactic information) could help in extraction. Nonetheless, the automated extraction does not perform well enough to apply it to unseen text. We therefore perform a close interpretation of the sentences we have gathered in the manual classification process in the next chapter. As a first exploration, we have done a keyword analysis on these gathered sentences. This has shown a) that sentences that describe physical appearance are abundantly present in the literary novels, there are even more instances than in chick lit. This difference does not support the generally accepted notion that chick lit is more concerned with physical appearance than literary novels are; b) certain 'accepted' notions on chick lit versus literary novels cannot be confirmed with this analysis either: body parts are not present in the key word set of the chick lit novels,

nor is the topic of weight. The eyes of the male love interest, on the other hand are. These are fruitful first findings on which the analysis in the next chapter will be built.

# 7.

## COMPARING PATTERNS IN DESCRIPTIONS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

*I do not believe we have hitherto had objective standards by which to judge literary art, and the application of a feminist perspective will not mean adding ideology to a value-free discipline.*

(Robinson, 1971: p. 28)

In this final chapter, I give an alternative reading of a ‘feminine’ topic, that of attention to physical appearance. I connect all the elements discussed in Chapter 4, the gender of the author and the protagonist, but also the idea of the ‘woman’s novel’ and feminine textual style. With this, I show how fruitful it can be to read a contemporary embodiment of the ‘woman’s novel’, chick lit, alongside the literary novel, on the same interpretative level.

I analyze the sentences that I manually identified in the previous chapter as ‘sentences containing a description of physical appearance’ in the first couple of chapters of thirty originally Dutch literary and chick lit novels. I will explain the corpus and the sentence selection further in the next section. I make no use of computational analysis in this chapter, but I do perform my interpretation with a clear goal of finding patterns – repetitions of a certain depiction of characters over multiple novels.

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The genre of chick lit can hardly be bypassed in research of female authors, femininity and perceived literary quality (see Chapter 4). Chick lit, as the name suggests, is specifically targeted at women, written by women, with female protagonists and focalization (see for instance Montoro, 2002) . The term was coined by novelist Cris Mazza in an ironic context, but publishers picked it up and started using it as a non-ironic brand name (Ferris and Young, 2006: p. 3). Critique on the genre is infused by the fact that it sells so well (ibidem: p. 2). The Riddle corpus, which consists of bestsellers, supports this: 23 of the 401 novels are chick lit – fantasy, horror and science fiction together do not even reach 10 volumes (see Chapter 2). However, the genre of the literary novel in the corpus is bigger, showing that equating ‘popular’ with ‘bestselling’ is not necessarily correct (anymore).

Except for the writing style and the stereotypical heroine, the genre is criticized for the choice of subjects. One of these topics is the search for romantic (heterosexual) love, another excessive attention to physical appearance – especially the body – including a desire to wear fashion and struggles with weight (Ferris and Young, 2006: p. 11; Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006). These are seen as typical ‘feminine’ subjects, and they would not easily be accepted as a topic of a ‘serious’ literary novel (Montoro, 2002: pp. 118-119). Feminist have even railed against such address of femininity by women in their work, in an attempt to gain status in the literary world (ibidem).

However, the body is not an unimportant topic to write about, as Scott and Morgan (1993) argue:

*To construct some bodily feature or process, to describe it in a certain way or to lay social emphasis on some aspect of the body is, in some measure, to exercise control or constraint. This is most obvious, for example, in cases of the gendered body or the healthy body. Similarly, to regulate or to exercise control over the body or bodies is to see these bodies in a particular way and to privilege certain understandings or constructions as against others. (viii)*

Thus through descriptions, ultimately, a certain view of (gendered) bodies is privileged over others; and this affects how, in this case, readers view the world. Such mechanisms are not solely applicable to chick lit, as multiple analyses of cultural bodily representations in general, but also in literary works have shown (see for instance Bordo, 1993; Chernin, 1981; Palmer, 1989).

Therefore in this chapter, I focus on one of the so-called feminine or chick lit topics, protagonists' attention to physical appearance, to answer the questions:

***Is the subject of attention to physical appearance a 'feminine' topic? How is it represented not only in chick lit, but also in contemporary literary novels by male and female authors? Can we identify patterns within and across genre; what can we deduce from the differences and commonalities between and within genres? And which role does the gender of the author and protagonists play?***

The sentences I analyze were the gold standard that I used for my computational analysis in the previous chapter. This means I manually selected these from the first five hundred sentences of the thirty novels in the chick lit corpus, roughly the first two chapters; I chose to focus on the beginning of the novels, because I hoped these would contain the most descriptions of physical appearance (for a list of the novels, see Appendix A.3). This was based on the idea that important characters are often introduced in the first chapters. I selected all of the sentences that dealt mainly with physical appearance (for the exact selection criteria see Section 6.3), and used three models to attempt to automatically extract similar sentences from unseen novels. Because neither of the methods turned out to be robust enough, I decided to analyze the manually selected sentences on their own.

Thus, in this chapter, I look for patterns across these manually selected sentences – I explain more precisely what I mean by 'pattern' in Section 7.2. With this, I hope to be able to make an abstraction. The comparison of sentences across genre and author gender will hopefully give insight into how comparable female literary authors are to chick lit on the one hand and male literary authors on the other; and which patterns can be of importance

in judging literary quality. For instance, if a stereotypical pattern in chick lit is repeated in work by female authors (and not in work by male authors), this might be a reason for respondents to assign lower literary quality to such works by female literary authors.

Note that I do not discuss the perceived literary quality of the general writing style these authors apply. This is another topic, partially addressed by Jautze et al. (2013) and by previous chapters – obviously, there is a difference in the way the chick lit and literary novels have been written. Here however, I am mostly concerned with the content of these novels, the depiction of characters.

By identifying patterns in descriptions of physical appearance, in chick lit as well as literary novels by women and men, I nuance the assumed ‘feminine’ nature of the topic and show why assumptions about femaleness and maleness not only a) should be tested by analyzing the full texts of the novels themselves in multiple genres, but also b) need to be scrutinized within a humanistic theoretical framework. Too often in Natural Language Processing – and other disciplines – texts by female and male authors are split by gender, mined, and then conclusions are drawn without the researchers having carefully interpreted the meaning of what it is they have found, as discussed in Chapter 5. Software is never void of ideology, as humans are the ones who have written the programs, who execute them in a certain way, and who interpret the results (Posner, 2015; Kay et al., 2015).

## 7.2 CONCEPTS

### Characters

In this chapter by character I mean the representation of a human person in a novel.<sup>1</sup> The depiction of characters needs to be treated with care in a literary-theoretical analysis. Jannidis (2013) specifically distinguishes two groups of thought in how characters have been dealt with in literary criticism, with characters being seen as merely letters on a page versus treating them as persons. As Palmer (1989) notes: “Academic critics, influenced by deconstructive and psychoanalytic theory, challenge the humanist notion of a unified subjectivity. They warn us against regarding a text as a transparent medium reflecting authentic experience” (p. 7). Rimmon-Kenan (2002) also expresses a reservation in treating characters as such, but acknowledges that a “touch of personification” is necessary to avoid confusion (p. 155). I do not treat characters as if they are persons who exist outside of the novel, but I do personify the characters, because readers tend to identify with characters in novels as if they are people.

### The (male) gaze

When a character’s appearance is described, this is a break from narrative action, a pause as it were, to reflect on something that the focalizer in the novel sees. The concept of the gaze has been very influential in feminist critique to analyze such a type of seeing. It was introduced by Laura Mulvey in the context of contemporary cinema in her seminal paper “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, first published in *Screen* in 1975. Mulvey (1989) uses a psychoanalytic framework and applies Freud’s concept of scopophilia to describe how the male protagonist in a film looks at the female protagonist, and with him, how the audience looks at her. Scopophilia is an act of subjecting other people “to a controlling and curious gaze” (p. 16), taking them

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1. As opposed to the more common use of ‘character’ in Natural Language Processing where it means a single mark (i.e. a letter, a space, etc.).

as objects. Looking is then a source of (sexual) pleasure and the person looked upon a victim, a passive entity; the viewer/active person is the male and the object/passive person the female. There is a second element to this viewing however, a narcissistic aspect, the ego libido. When one watches a film, the ego is temporarily lost, which means that the viewer becomes one with the main protagonist of the film, also a male. The woman in the film thus merely functions as an icon “displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men” (p. 19). There are two ways of looking: voyeuristic, which has a sadistic aspect, and fetishized, where the woman is rendered harmless because the look “builds up the physical beauty of the object, turning it into something satisfying in itself” (Kaplan, 1983). Either results in pleasure. Mulvey states that this mechanism is not intrinsic to film, and indeed this notion of the male gaze has been applied to numerous other cultural artifacts, including literary fiction (i.e. Palmer, 1989).

In feminist critical analysis of literary fiction, the notion of the male gaze is applied by several theorists, which means that the idea of the female as visual object has been developed well – what female protagonists are and are not allowed to look like and/or be when scrutinized. I discuss some briefly, here. Russ (1973) notes that there are no plain women in literature, by which she means “[w]omen who have no relations with men” (p. 5). We find, as she has described, “not women, but images of women: modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on. They exist only in relation to the protagonist (who is male). (...) [A]t their worst they are gorgeous, Cloudcuckooland fantasies about what men want, or hate, or fear” (ibidem). Wolff (1972) concludes: “These are women, not as they are, but as men wished they were” (p. 218). Like Russ, Wolff notes they do not exist outside of the male protagonist’s presence: “The real focus is usually the man who is affected by the woman he describes” (p. 208).

Chernin (1981) argues something that appears at a first glance to be different, but in fact is quite in line with these ideas, in relation to the size that women are allowed to have. Largeness in women is seen as taking up space, demanding a presence for oneself. This is associated with feminism and claiming power, and is therefore seen as threatening by men:

*In this age of feminist assertion men are drawn to women of childish body and mind because there is something less disturbing about the vulnerability and helplessness of a small child – and something truly disturbing about the body and mind of a mature woman.* (p. 110)

The female body therefore needs to be small, a view that is common still nowadays, also among women. How this process works, of women adopting the male gaze, Palmer (1989) already describes: “It pressures the [women] into a narcissistic preoccupation with self-image and imposes indirect control on their behaviour” (p. 34). Palmer also notes that women “do achieve a degree of narcissistic pleasure” from knowing they are looked at (ibidem). But she also recognizes a downside of the look, namely anxiety: “they pay a heavy price for it in terms of control” (ibidem). Russ (1983) is more firm: “Women speaking of mirrors and prettiness make it all too clear that even for pretty women, mirrors are the foci of anxious, not gratified, narcissism. The woman who knows beyond a doubt that she is beautiful exists aplenty in male novelists’ imaginations; I have yet to find her in women’s books or women’s memoirs or in life” (p. 111-112).

Mabry (2006) argues that the choice of chick lit for the first person voice is actually a device that, apart from offering identification, “offers at least a temporary escape from the feeling of constantly being watched or controlled by a male-dominated society.”(p. 196) She bases this notion on Modleski’s argument that the third person perspective in chick lit’s predecessor, the romance novel, was “to reinforce the heroine’s position as the (often literal) object of a (primary male) gaze” (ibidem).

Notwithstanding the widespread and continued use of the concept of the male gaze, also in literary theory, there has been critique on Mulvey’s work, most notably the fact that it keeps Freud’s essentialist view on gender intact: there is only one type of viewer, the male heterosexual, and he is always the viewer, the active one, the woman always the object, the passive. Kaplan (1983) suggests that women can also take up the gaze, but shows that this merely switches the roles of the viewer and viewed, the man becomes passive and the woman active; it does not resolve the tension, which would be preferable in her view. She proposes a mutual gaze, like that of mother and child, as

a solution. Moore (1988) also analyzes the possibility of a female gaze and concludes that there is no female gaze that is a complete and total mirror of the male gaze, even though women can desire sexualized imagery of men – the manner of objectification is not equal to objectification of women by men. Possibilities for a female gaze are severely limited in the psychoanalytic framework Mulvey (1989) applies because of its premise of duality (Gamman and Marshment, 1988: 5-7). Apart from the fact that it does not allow an active female role in the presence of a male, it excludes non-white and non-heterosexual desire. Gamman and Marshment therefore aim to transform the concept to allow for the application of the gaze outside of the psychoanalytic framework. They propose a solution, warning that simply having a female main character does not suffice. Instead, a focus must be permitted ‘on female *activity* rather than on female *sexuality*’ (p. 25). This broadens the perspective of the gaze. It is now no longer limited to objectification, but allows for performing through looking. This is called “to subtly displace” the original male-female power relations (ibidem: p.16). I use this broader application of the gaze to analyze the descriptions of physical appearance in my set, although I connect my findings to the literary theory described in the previous paragraph. To transform it for literary analysis, additional steps need to be taken, as it is a different way of ‘looking’ than in cinema; I apply the narratological concept of focalization.

## **Focalization**

To apply the concept of the gaze, I make use of a narratological concept, focalization, as theorized by Rimmon-Kenan (2002). ‘Seeing’ in a novel is different from ‘seeing’ in film. There is an extra step, where the reader needs to imagine or visualize the words on the page. Moreover, there are layers of seeing: the reader reads what a narrator describes. The narrator is not necessarily the focalizer, although in this corpus, this often is the same character; this is the character through whose eyes the action is seen. The narrator not even needs to be a part of the fictional universe (ibidem: p.73). Hence, there are external focalizers (the narrator-focalizer), where the focalizer does not partake in the story and internal focalizers (the character-focalizer), where the focalizer is inside the action, although the first can sometimes be disguised as the second. Focalization has a subject (focalizer),

‘the agent whose perception orients the presentation’ and an object (focalized) ‘what the focalizer perceives’ (ibidem: 75). By analyzing how this focalizer describes the focalized, I can give an interpretation of how a certain character perceives another, although I need to be careful whether I am dealing with a narrator-focalizer or a character-focalizer.

In many of the novels the focalization shifts several times, see Appendix A.3. This occurs more often in the literary novels than in the chick lit novels, although a change of focalizer is not absent from these novels. Many of the descriptions I use, are focalized through the eyes of, or in very close proximity to, one of the characters (resp. the character-focalizer and narrator-focalizer), and therefore I can make use of the gender of the character in interpreting the look. I sometimes equate the narrator-focalizer with a character, because the line is very thin in the novels in this corpus, and in practice, it does not always make much difference if the focalizer is a narrator or a character; specifically when the narrator is a character who looks back on previous events. Moreover, whether or not a narrator is reliable, is not crucial for my analysis, it is more important which picture a focalizer in his or her mind has of the focalized. Hence, if there is an external narrator, I note this in my analysis, but in Appendix A.3, for ease of reading, I have chosen to put down the name(s) of the person the narrator-focalizer is describing. Also, for ease of reading, I equate character-focalizers with characters, so I can assign a gender to them.

In the chick lit half of the corpus, most of the focalization is done by a female protagonist, although there are exceptions, such as *Bouzouki Boogie*, where the perspective alternates between the two main characters Emily and Damian. In the literary half, most often the focalizer has the gender of the author, but there are more exceptions to this than in the chick lit part. Van Beijnum, a male author, has one first-person novel focalized from a male perspective and one from a female perspective in this corpus. Enquist, a female author, writes one novel from both a man and a woman’s perspective; Grunberg, a male author, has one novel from only a man’s perspective, but another with multiple protagonists of different genders.

With the application of focalization, I define the gaze as a form of looking (by a character-focalizer or narrator-focalizer) at another character or the

character-focalizer itself (the focalized), where the former assesses the latter's appearance with a specific purpose; this purpose can be anything from deciding if the looked-at character is a desired mate, to self-critique. I make a distinction between the male gaze and the female gaze when power relations need to be addressed. To indicate Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, where the focalized is objectified and passive, I use the term 'typical male gaze'.

## **Pattern**

In Bod (2013) a pattern is defined as: "a trend or a tendency that can range from the local to the global. It can consist of a regularity (often with exceptions) but also of a grammatical rule, or a historical trend such as the increase of the number of democratic states during the last decades" (p. 172). He argues that pattern finding is aided by digital humanities methods, but has always been present in the humanities. In this chapter, I give an example of a humanistic pattern search. I look for patterns across descriptions without computational tools. On the one hand it is a local endeavor (in a set of thirty Dutch novels), but one could argue is typical of a quite more global pattern, of women's and men's positions in patriarchal society. What I try to find are commonalities and differences in descriptions of physical appearance across three layers of interpretation, from the perspective of a 'feminine' topic:

- 1.** Author gender: female or male
  
- 2.** Genre: literary (associated with maleness) versus chick lit (associated with femaleness)
  
- 3.** Protagonists' gender: female or male

I take into account two layers of the act of looking through describing physical appearance:

**A.** The gender of the viewer and viewed: who looks and who is looked at? I group the sentences according to the gender of the viewer and viewed (see Table 7.1): a man viewing a woman, a woman viewing another woman or herself, a woman viewing a man, a man viewing another man or himself.<sup>2</sup> I restrict myself mostly to the main characters of the novels, the protagonists and antagonists, unless there are pressing reasons to describe minor characters, as is the case in the description of male enemies (who are not prospective lovers) in chick lit. I only split by author gender when obvious differences arise.

Man viewing	Woman – Section 7.3 Man – Section 7.6
Woman viewing	Man – Section 7.4 Women – Section 7.5

Table 7.1: A schematic overview of this chapter. For flow of the argument, the second couple, man viewing man, is dealt with at the end of this section.

**B.** What does the reader ‘see’ through the eyes of the focalizer?

- a. What is the physical appearance of the viewed?
- b. *How* is the viewed seen? With desire, with disgust, with affection, as an object or acting subject?

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2. All viewings but one are performed by heterosexual, cisgender men or women; as are all protagonists who are viewed. Therefore, a relative simple split was sufficient.

These questions I answer in the four sections on the patterns. I use the descriptions of physical appearance as an entry point into the novels themselves, including plot and more general characterization. I also quote the sentence which contains the description in its context, if it is necessary for interpretation. First, in sections 7.3-7.6, I describe and interpret the patterns, in the conclusion I compare the patterns across genre, protagonist gender and author gender.

## 7.3 MAN VIEWING WOMAN: THE DESTRUCTIVE NYMPH

### Literary novels

In *De Oesters van Nam Kee* by Kees van Beijnum, the male protagonist, Berry, is in a bar, looking to find a woman for the night.<sup>3</sup> Here I find a classic example of the male gaze, it is an erotic form of looking, of objectification, which pleases the onlooker and thereby the reader, through identification with the protagonist. Berry examines women's bodies, taxes them for possible sexual pleasure and comments:<sup>4</sup>

*Mirjam's skirt hugged her behind, which appeared to be a creation of a sculptor who had a disturbing sharp eye for filthiness.*<sup>5</sup> (van Beijnum, 2000)

Why he associates her behind with filthiness, is not made clear in the context, but the association with sex becomes clear in the description that follows:

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3. The references to the primary novels can be found in Appendix A.3; these include a translation of the Dutch titles and other descriptive information.

4. Please note that all the translations in this chapter are my own.

5. Original text: "Mirjams rokje spande om haar billen, die een creatie leken van een beeldhouwer met een verontrustend scherp oog voor viezigheid."

*So much drunkenness, so much mouth, so much provocation, in such a godforsaken tasty body....*<sup>6</sup> (ibidem)

Of another woman he states:

*I only now noticed how big she was, that does not always have to be a disadvantage.*<sup>7</sup> (ibidem)

This stresses the importance of slenderness for women. Berry appears to be accepting of her stoutness, but it is backhand praise. His assertion implies that stoutness is almost always a negative aspect. While appraising women's bodies – he describes six of them over the course of a few pages – he considers elements he likes and does not like, but he is prepared to 'allow' for transgressions of his standards, if this could lend him sex. He ends up having messy intercourse with Mirjam, who turns out to have her period at that time, and therefore pleasures him orally. She is described afterwards as "tired and sad. Like she could break at any time."<sup>8</sup> Berry takes advantage of her sadness, and is aware of it. In the novel he eventually falls in love with Thera, an exotic dancer, whose description stands in stark contrast with that of his potential sexual partners:

*Thera Bouwman. There she comes. On her black suede boots. Her eyebrows and eyelashes not subtly accentuated with mascara, her lips glistening with lipstick. With her hands in the pockets of her Gap sports coat she comes straight at me. She had a graceful walk, not exactly what you would call feminine, more willful, tough, she knew how one should walk on suede boots across the canal pavement. The men followed her with their eyes, she did not seem to notice, she was untouchable. No one would dare talk to her or bother her. Sometimes there would be someone who told her*

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6. Original text: "Zoveel dronkenschap , zoveel mond , zoveel uitdaging, in zo'n godvergeten lekker lichaam..."

7. Original text: "Het viel me nu pas op hoe fors ze was, dat hoefde niet altijd een nadeel te zijn."

8. Original text: "moe en triest. Of ze ieder moment kon breken."

*she looked good, sometimes there would be someone who whistled or called. But always from a distance. No one bothered her.*<sup>9</sup> (ibidem)

He is in awe of her, he freezes when he watches her walk up for the first time. The way he sees her cannot be qualified as a typical male gaze, he has no power over her when looking – but neither does she in this quote: there is no mention of her looking at him. She is implied to be attractive, as men follow her with their eyes and she is whistled at or called after, but she has made herself untouchable through her posture, and this is reflected in the description which is void of the lust Berry had for the women described earlier. From this quote we also learn Berry is a narrator-focalizer, as his description is retrospective: Berry, the focalizer, cannot know what her name is or that “there was sometimes someone who said she looked good” without being outside of the story as this is a recount of the first time he sees her. This distance probably colors her description. Even though she appears to be invincible, she is not completely flawless, as she turns out to be an epileptic. Thera becomes Berry’s girlfriend, but eventually leaves him for a former lover, leaving him devastated.

Another of the novels, *Lisa’s Adem* by Karel Glastra van Loon, delivers an example of the typical male gaze in the description of the female protagonist, Lisa. She is for the most part absent in the book, as she has disappeared, she has most likely been murdered.

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9. Original text: “Thera Bouman. Daar komt ze aan. Op haar zwarte suède laarsjes. Haar wenkbrauwen en wimpers niet kinderachtig aangezet met mascara, haar lippen glanzend van de lippenstift. Met haar handen in de zakken van haar Gap-trainingsjack komt ze recht op me af. Ze had een sierlijke loop, niet echt wat je noemt vrouwelijk, eigenzinnig eerder, stoer, ze wist hoe je op suède laarsjes over de gracht moest lopen. De mannen volgden haar met hun ogen, het leek haar niet op te vallen, ze was onaantastbaar. Niemand zou haar durven aanspreken of lastigvallen. Er was weleens iemand die zei dat ze er goed uitzag, er was weleens iemand die iets riep of floot. Maar altijd van een afstandje. Niemand viel haar lastig.”

*She was the most beautiful girl Talm had ever seen. He could watch her for hours. Every time he would discover new beauties. The way her hair was planted right above the ears, regular like a poplar forest. Her nose which did not become smaller but broader at the tip, which produced a small, almost perfectly rectangular square between her nostrils. An eyebrow hair that was different from the rest. A mole in her neck. That one long nail on her left ring finger. The delicate shadows on her bare ankles. The day could not be far that he would be allowed to see her full body. At night he dreamt she would pull up her shirt and that she would have huge white breasts with colossal nipples. He suddenly woke up, startled and did not dare go to sleep again. The next day he looked at her upper body, worried. The curves were reassuringly small.<sup>10</sup> (Glastra van Loon, 2001)*

Talm explicitly watches his girlfriend for visual pleasure, with delicacy and smallness forming a crucial element in his satisfaction. The fear of the large body, as described in Chernin (1981; see Section 7.2) is quite clearly echoed in this passage.

Talm does not just prefer a smaller woman, he uses words as “scared” and “worried” when he thinks about hypothetical largeness of Lisa’s body and is “reassured” by the actual modesty of her curves. Apart from that, words that resound delicacy and smallness are numerous in this passage: “small”, “regular”, “small eyebrow hair”, “delicate” are associated with “beauty” and “near perfection”. The reason for the importance of the smallness and delicacy is not explained. Lisa is not present when seen through this memory, as she

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10. Original text: Ze was het mooiste meisje dat Talm ooit had gezien. Hij kon uren naar haar kijken. Elke keer ontdekte hij nieuwe schoonheden. De manier waarop haar haar was ingeplant vlak boven de oren, regelmatig als een populierenbos. Haar neus die zich aan de punt niet versmalde maar verbreedde, waardoor zich tussen haar neusgaten een klein, bijna volmaakt rechthoekig vlakje bevond. Een wenkbrauwhaartje dat uit de pas liep. Een moedervlek in haar hals. Die ene lange nagel van haar linkerringvinger. De tere schaduwen op haar blote enkels. De dag kon niet ver meer zijn dat hij haar hele lichaam zou mogen zien. 's Nachts droomde hij dat ze haar truitje omhoogtrok en dat ze enorme witte borsten had met kolossale tepels. Hij schrok wakker en durfde daarna niet meer te gaan slapen. De volgende dag keek hij bezorgd naar haar bovenlichaam. De welvingen waren geruststellend klein.

has disappeared – she has most likely been murdered by her abusive stepfather – and hence she cannot reciprocate Talm’s gaze.

Grunberg’s Beck, unlike Talm, is not that explicit about his girlfriend’s appearance:

*Beck looks at his wife’s face, at her dark eyebrows, her skin – he is a man who loves skin, the spots, the granules, the flakes, the unwanted hairs, but also the softness, the warmth, the sweat, the pores that open in the heat.*<sup>11</sup> (Grunberg, 2003)

This appears detached and more equal. Beck proclaims to love skin, but not necessarily this skin. Their love is less fiery, more pragmatic and this can be seen through this description. The childishness as mentioned by Chernin is not absent, however, I find it in a later quote. The main quality Beck appreciates, is that she moves him. He connects it to innocence – although it is not quite clear what this means and how her moving him is connected to innocence, and being innocent is quite a childlike feature. Then the reader receives more snippets of information when he describes some more of her features, her “hamster cheeks and small nose”, and how her head is flat on the back from sleeping on her back as a baby – the innocence is echoed in this association with his girlfriend as a child, and with cheeks like a small animal, a hamster. The delicacy of de Vogel (the Bird, a nickname he gave her, she does not have a regular proper name in the novel) is hence not stressed as much in her appearance as in Lisa’s description, but subtly present nonetheless. Apart from that, she has different physical frailty, like Thera. She is diagnosed as deadly ill the beginning of the novel, and eventually dies.

In Glastra van Loon’s *De Passievrucht*, it is delicacy without childlikeness the male protagonist finds in the appearance of his love. This is reflected in the whiteness of Monika’s skin:

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11. Original text: “Beck kijkt naar het gezicht van zijn vrouw, naar haar donkere wenkbrauwen, haar huid - hij is een man die van huid houdt, de vlekken, de korrels, de schilfers, de ongewenste haren, maar ook de zachtheid, de warmte, het zweet, de poriën die zich openen in de hitte.”

*I found her body to be of a bewitching beauty, but that day I found out that she paid a high price for that beauty.*<sup>12</sup> (Glastra van Loon, 1999)

The frail quality presented by the whiteness is demonstrated when she attracts a horrible sunburn on their first outing to the beach, as she fails to mention her sensitivity to the sun to him. She does not want to ruin his pleasure in the trip by telling him she cannot be in the sun, and is willing to hurt herself in the process. The cause of this sensitivity, the lightness of her skin, is the only physical feature of Monika that Armin lovingly describes as very beautiful. This weakness stands in contrast with her strong will, and her treachery: she sleeps with Armin's father and conceives a child with him, which she never tells him. He only finds out after she dies and he fails to conceive with another woman.

Monika is the fourth love interest who has left or betrayed the main protagonist, and the third who dies or has died in the novel: Thera leaves Berry for a former lover, Lisa disappears without a trace, de Vogel decides to marry a refugee when she finds out she is terminally ill, even though Beck already thinks of her as his wife.

Delicacy is also part of the description of Vaslav's wife in Japin's *Vaslav*, albeit in a different sense:

*She used to dance, so her back is always straight as a line, her head proud on that long neck, every turn firm, energetic, like seen in an animal. Twenty-seven she is, three years younger than her husband. She has blond hair and a perfectly oval face. It resembles the special china that stands in the smoking room in the display case: that*

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12. Original text: "Ik vond haar witte lichaam van een betoverende schoonheid, maar die dag kwam ik erachter dat zij voor die schoonheid een hoge prijs betaalde."

*porcelain white skin, ornamented with that brittle light blue of her eyes.*<sup>13</sup> (Japin, 2010)

This is one of the male narrators, Peter, who is also a character in the story, describing Romola, the female protagonist. She is a young, elegant woman, with – again – very fair skin, blond hair and light blue eyes. Her face is compared to delicate tableware, to china. Even though she is energetic, her face has a frail quality, the color of her eyes is called “brittle”. This calls the description in *Lisa’s Adem* to mind, where the woman is also described with words related to frailty. In this case however, the woman’s face is compared to a breakable object, thereby diminishing the energy and strength in her body, which she displays as a dancer. The contrast between her strength and energy, the activeness as a dancer stands in stark contrast with the inanimacy and fragility of the china – which is usually only taken out of a cabinet for special occasions. Her strength is thus minimized through the eyes of the describer. She is portrayed in the novel as the woman who practically forced Vaslav into building a family with her, and who was not such a great talent as a ballet dancer. In other words, Peter does not respect her much.

The love that is glorified in *Vaslav*, is that between the title character and Sergeï, the man who discovered Vaslav’s talent. This novel is thus different from the others in this set, in that the female described is not of direct interest to the viewer, and thus cannot be exemplary of the male gaze. Rather, the description of her physical appearance appears to mirror the flaw in her character. Romola is a seductress, who has taken away Vaslav from his true love for her own gain. She is strong, willful, set on capturing Vaslav in a marriage, by having his child swiftly, but she also never gives up on him. This strength is reflected in her body. But she is also frail, not able to rescue the man she loves (he turns mad), nor is she able to really understand him, like the men in the novel can.

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13. Original text: “Zij heeft gedanst, dus haar rug is altijd kaarsrecht, haar hoofd fier op die lange hals, iedere wending zeker, energiek als bij een dier. Zevenentwintig is ze, drie jaar jonger dan haar man. Ze heeft blond haar en een perfect ovaal gezicht. Het heeft iets weg van het sèvresservies dat in de rookkamer in de vitrine staat: die porseleinwitte huid, versierd met dat broze lichtblauw van haar ogen.”

Thus, from the eight novels by male authors (see Appendix A.3), there arises quite a clear pattern. Two of the novels are focalized from a female perspective. These I discuss later; six have at least one male focalizer in the first five hundred lines. Five of them describe a single, young, delicate or frail, attractive female protagonist.

And there is not only a common thread in their physical appearance, but also in their character and actions. Four of the male protagonists describe a young woman who does not merely have delicate or childlike physical qualities, but who is either strong-willed, or a victim: Monika, de Vogel and Romola have a strong mind, and Lisa is a victim. Thera is the only one not described as frail – although she does turn out to have epilepsy. She is strong, an exotic dancer and unattainable to most men, but Berry is one of few who can have her, albeit for a short period of time. Even though most of these women cause destruction somehow or another, this only adds to their appeal. The drama originates from the women's actions, which wrong the main male character – or in *Vaslav's* case, the man the main character admires – either by conceiving a child with another man (Monika), choosing or marrying another man (Thera, de Vogel), taking him away from another man (Romola) or having slept with another man (Lisa). This resonated Russ's (1973) earlier quoted idea that there are no women in literature by male authors who do not have relations with men.

In sum, the women in these novels present stereotypes of a woman, but a stereotype which I have not exactly come across in the literature. Rather than a *femme fatale*, this woman is a Destructive Nymph: while she has a delicate quality about her appearance (and/or constitution), by her actions she causes destruction to the protagonist or he to himself.

Thus, this section shows that the male protagonists are invested in the physical appearance of the female protagonist. Not only can the descriptions of the female love interest be very elaborate, they are generally tied to the women's character: all of them couple (some) delicacy or childlikeness of appearance with a physical or mental frailty or defect, which softens or even cancels out the women's strong mind – most notably by dying. Attention to physical appearance is hence not just a subject exclusively reserved to female authors,

it is also wielded as a literary device by male authors, but in a slightly different fashion. To this distinction I return in Section 7.4.

## Chick lit

In the chick lit half of the corpus, none of the novels are fully written from a man's perspective, but there are two novels that are alternately narrated by a woman and a man, *Bouzoukie Boogie* and *Dans der Liefde*, both by Wilma Hollander. In *Bouzoukie Boogie*, Damian, the male protagonist, breathes sentiments very similar to the male protagonists just described, but (much) less subtle. He is a womanizer, with strong women surrounding him, bent on 'breaking' him, to change his mind about marriage. When Emily comes along, he is at ease for the first time, and at the end of the book they are married with two daughters. Emily is frail, delicate, red-haired, fair skinned, he compares her explicitly to a child:

*With her eyes closed she almost looked like a child, an innocent girl. So different from the worldly women he usually had at his arm.*<sup>14</sup> (Hollander, 2011)

He wants to protect her:

*He lightly put his hand on her shoulder blade to steer her while crossing the street and did not know why he did that. Normally he was not bothered by such masculine protective instincts. But with Emily it appeared to come naturally. Could it be caused by her frail constitution? She kind of looked like an elf in her merry flowered summer dress. And in the light of the setting sun her hair resembled spun gold. Red gold...*<sup>15</sup> (ibidem)

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14. Original text: "Met haar ogen dicht leek ze bijna een kind, een onschuldig meisje. Heel anders dan de wereldwijze vrouwen die hij meestal aan zijn arm had hangen."

15. Original text: Hij legde even losjes zijn hand op haar schouderblad om haar te sturen bij het oversteken en wist eigenlijk zelf niet waarom hij dat deed. Normaliter had hij geen last van dat soort mannelijke beschermersinstincten. Maar bij Emily leek het wel vanzelf te gaan. Zou het

The word 'frail' is used here to describe Emily and she is compared to a fairy. Again, this ethereal appearance stands in contrast to her character: she is strong-willed, has a mind of her own and does not let anyone tell her what to do:

*He would preferred to have had a more meek type. (...) This Emily Lensinck belonged, notwithstanding her frail and very feminine appearance, more to the 'sharp tongue' type.*<sup>16</sup> (ibidem)

But it is his insecurity that makes him regret her cleverness – he is afraid she will see right through his macho exterior. Their physical attraction overcomes all personal discord, he protects her from harm, comforts her on a few occasions when she is scared, and finally, when he talks about his past as a little boy, she succumbs to his charms. In other words, the stereotypical strong man that protects a frail woman is exploited maximally in this novel, a motif reminding us of romance novels (see for instance Radway, 1984).

In *Dans der Liefde*, the blond, slim and violet eyed Lucy falls in love with attractive, raven haired Nick. Again, Hollander has the male protagonist compare his love with a child, and he notices her innocence, at their first meeting, when they have hardly spoken. Both the heroines in Hollander's novels are seen through the male's eyes as child-like, and their slenderness and delicacy are stressed. Here I find a continuity with the male focalizers in the literary half of the corpus, but this time written by a female author. Hollander takes the physical stereotype that is also found in the literary novels, and exaggerates it to an grotesque image of the beautiful and delicate ideal (and in

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komen door haar frêle gestalte? Ze had wel iets weg van een elfje in haar vrolijk gebloemde zomerjurkje. En in het licht van de ondergaande zon leek haar haar wel van gesponnen goud. Rood goud...

16. Original text: "Hij had liever een wat meegaander type gehad. (...) Deze Emily Lensinck behoorde ondanks haar frêle en zeer vrouwelijke uiterlijk meer tot het 'haar-op-de-tanden'-type".

one case, strong-headed) woman in need of a man. Only it is not a Destructive Nymph, because the woman is not harmful to the male protagonist. In both novels, the women provide the men with a happy relationship. Another difference between these two chick lit novels and the literary novels that contain these beautiful and delicate stereotypes of women, is that the male protagonist is also a beacon of beauty. To this male stereotype I turn in the next section.

## 7.4 WOMAN VIEWING MAN: THE CARING ADONIS

### Chick lit

The most strong commonality in the marked sentences, as I have noted in Section 4.7, can be found in the female protagonist in chick lit describing the male love interest, more specifically his eyes. Generally, the male love interest is someone the heroine has friction with (*Bouzookie Boogie, Match*) or initially overlooked as a potential candidate in favor of an attractive but dangerous man, until this bad guy eventually cheats – or in the worst case, even tries to kill – the heroine (*Revanche in New York, Single en Sexy*). In other novels the primary goal of the woman is to find herself, to discover her priorities, which coincides with her finding a man (*Zoek het Maar uit, In Zeven Sloten, Luchtkussen, Cheesecake & Kilts, Status O.K.*). In most of the other novels, something non-readers might not expect about this genre, the relationship has – to some extent – already been established in the beginning of the novel, but it has to overcome obstacles (*Schikken of Stikken, Dans der Liefde, Trouw(en), Onder de Griekse Zon, Als een Zandkorrel in de Wind*). The importance of the relationship in the story differs. Sometimes it is central, but in others finding a man appears to be an afterthought. The best example of this afterthought mode is *Single en Sexy*, where the protagonist ends up with a man the reader has barely read about, but of whom we are ensured it is the perfect guy in the last paragraphs. No matter the weight of the romance story, all of the novels do end with a satisfactory heterosexual relationship.

The male love interests in these novels are young – although generally a bit older than the women in the literary novels, in their thirties rather than teens or twenties – and attractive. They are desired by the female protagonists, as the following quotes show:

**A.** I love it when his eyes sparkle and when he has a broad smile on his face. With that man I fell in love once. Those beautiful deep blue eyes, his dark hair. Yes, it is an odd combination, but my man is unique like that. A gorgeous muscular body, but not too muscular. When I see him like that, with those

twinkling eyes, I feel the butterflies coming up. Such a lucky duck I am to have such a man!<sup>17</sup> (Verwoert, 2009b)

**B.** I turn around and look straight in the always beaming, deep blue eyes of my co-worker Frank. He just turned thirty and is without a doubt the cutest hunk at the office. He is tall, slender, and his blond hair matches his blue eyes. Today he is wearing a black suit, with a white shirt underneath.<sup>18</sup> (Verwoert, 2009a)

**C.** Vincent was cute, a gorgeous man with shining blond hair and blue eyes, like deep lakes. She had been in love with him for months. She, the middle school jock, was smitten with THE hunk of high school. Of course, he did not know she existed.<sup>19</sup> (Verkerk, 2006)

**D.** On a bench at the rim of the Soest dunes two people sat close to one another. A tall, muscled man with clear blue eyes and a blond woman.<sup>20</sup> (Verkerk, 1994)

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17. Original text: "Heerlijk vind ik hem als zijn ogen sprankelen en als hij een brede lach op zijn gezicht heeft. Op deze man werd ik ooit verliefd. Die mooie diepblauwe ogen, zijn donkere haren. Ja, het is een vreemde combinatie, maar mijn vent is dan ook uniek. Een prachtig gespierd lichaam, maar ook weer niet te gespierd. Als ik hem dan zo zie met die twinkende ogen, voel ik de vlindertjes weer naar boven komen. Wat ben ik toch een geluksvogel met zo'n man!"

18. Original text: "Ik draai me om en kijk recht in de altijd stralende, diepblauwe ogen van mijn collega Frank. Hij is pas dertig geworden en is zonder twijfel het lekkerste ding van kantoor. Hij is lang, slank en zijn blonde haren kleuren prachtig bij zijn blauwe ogen. Vandaag draagt hij een zwart pak met daaronder een wit overhemd."

19. Original text: "Vincent was leuk, een prachtige man met glanzende blonde haren en blauwe ogen, als diepe meren. Ze was al maanden verliefd op hem geweest. Zij, de sportieve Havo 5 scholiere, was stapelgek op HET stuk uit V-6. Hij zag haar natuurlijk niet staan."

20. Original text: "Op het bankje aan de rand van de Soester duinen zaten twee mensen dicht bij elkaar. Een lange gespierde man met heldere blauwe ogen en een blonde vrouw."

The stage of the relationship is different, but the men have remarkable physical similarities. The descriptions are less complex and less varied than in the literary half of the set, but are a mirror of the female love interest seen through the eyes of the male protagonist: beautiful, and with stereotypical features. All of these men have deep or clear blue eyes. Several of the men are muscular – but in one instance, the phrase ‘but not too muscular’ is added, perhaps showing that the man is not too vain, or too overpowering – the context gives no resolution. And again, there is a repetition in behavior, but it is an inverse of the behavior of the Destructive Nymph. The men, except for Vincent, who impregnates Amber in *Bedrogen Liefde* and leaves her, are interested, emphatic, very much in love with the female protagonist and go out of their way to help or please her. Moreover, unlike the female love interest to the male literary protagonist, the female protagonist gets to keep her beau. They end up in a relationship. The Adonis in chick lit is the same and at the same time the complete opposite of the Destructive Nymph: just as beautiful, but good to the female main character, and we can inverse the quote by Wolff in the previous section to perfectly describe the male love interest: “These are *men*, not as they are, but as *women* wished they were.” This I call the Caring Adonis.

When a man is desired, but not necessarily Mr. Right, this is also reflected in his appearance, as we can see in *Status O.K.*, a novel about Femke, who is an arrogant and distanced medical intern wanting to become a surgeon, but through her experiences as a young doctor develops into a softer, emphatic person wanting to become a pediatrician. Before she finds her ideal man Bart, she first dates Lucas, in whom she sees a kindred spirit. He is tough, and only bent on becoming a surgeon:

*I watched him. His brown curls were cut short and he had molded them competently with quite the amount of hair gel. His cheeks were clean shaven. His brown eyes slid across the words in the medical chart.*<sup>21</sup> (Middelbeek, 2010)

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21. Original text: “Ik keek naar hem. Zijn bruine krullen waren kortgeknipt en hij had ze vakkundig in model gekneet met de nodige hoeveelheid gel. Zijn wangen waren gladgeschoren. Zijn bruine ogen gleden over de woorden in de status.”

His description shows a determinedness, but Femke does not really admire him or lust after him, as he is not a Caring Adonis.

All of the descriptions are examples of the female gaze, where the viewed person is desired, but not necessarily objectified, as I described in Section 5.1. The quotes show an admiration rather than an erotic objectification, or even a distanced mode of looking, as in the last quote.

In only one of the novels, the description of the male love interest is objectifying, *Dans der Liefde* by Wilma Hollander, whom I have shown to use very strong female stereotypes in the previous section. Incidentally, this novel uses a third-person voice:

*Lucy literally felt an electric shock go through her body when he took her hand. My goodness, he is really handsome, she thought breathlessly. That raven black hair, those deep green eyes... And that mouth! That mouth... Her eyes rested on his full, sensual, lower lip, and subconsciously she lightly touched her own suddenly dry lips with the tip of her tongue.*<sup>22</sup> (Hollander, 2010)

Lucy licking her lips when meeting her desired man shows a strong lust that is absent in the previous descriptions, but it is coupled with admiration rather than fear or awe. The female protagonists do lust after the men, they have erotic feelings for them and in most novels, they are described (albeit quite covertly) to have sex with them; like the male protagonists in the previous section sleep with their female love interest. In none of the descriptions however there is a need for ‘castration’, for the annihilation of a threat, or a minimization of power; hence it is not a mirroring of the typical male gaze, not even with the lust depicted in the last quote.

The difference between the types of gaze is best visible in the description

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22. Original text: “Lucy voelde letterlijk een elektrische schok door haar lichaam gaan toen hij haar hand pakte. Mijn hemel, hij is écht knap, dacht ze ademloos. Dat ravenzwarte haar, die diepgroene ogen... En die mond! Die mond... Haar ogen bleven rusten op zijn volle, sensuele onderlip, en onbewust streek ze met het puntje van haar tong over haar eigen plotseling droge lippen.”

of Frank in *Match*. Female protagonist Eline bumps into him and looks him 'straight in the eyes'. There is a mutual gaze: she looks, but he can look back. Overall, the men are generally present in the story space when the woman looks at them in these chick lit examples. This is clearly different from the literary novels, where many times the image of the woman is recollected from memory, not allowing the women to look back. Describing a person from memory, one could argue, is a literary device, a way of halting the action in a natural fashion; chick lit, with its less complex or elaborate fashion of description, does not want or is not able to use such mechanisms. However, as I show in the next section, female literary authors use more complex focalization than chick lit authors, just as male literary authors do, but they do apply a mutual gaze.

There is one other pattern to be found in the chick lit, in that of the male adversaries and antagonists, who are minor characters. These antagonists are generally unattractive, and their appearance is judged with vehemence, see the following examples:

**A.** Willem was a slouching loser with glasses from the stone age.<sup>23</sup>  
(Middelbeek, 2006)

**B.** 'Duke The Surplusse is an old jerk with a pot belly,' I said unparliamentarily.<sup>24</sup> (Verkerk, 2010)

**C.** That fat belly won't get any thinner, and a full head of hair will not suddenly appear on his bald head.<sup>25</sup> (Verwoert, 2009a)

**D.** Jan de Bok was most likely thirty centimeter shorter and looked very dainty in his ugly striped outfit standing next to his huge successor.<sup>26</sup> (Harrewijn, 2007)

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23. Original text: "Willem was een slungelige sukkel met een bril uit het jaar nul."

24. Original text: "Baron van Overwaarden is een ouwe zak met een hangbuik', zei ik onparlementair."

25. Original text: "Die dikke buik wordt er niet dunner van, en op zijn kale hoofd verschijnt echt niet spontaan een flinke haardos."

26. Original text: "Jan de Bok was zeker dertig centimeter kleiner en stond heel iel in zijn foute streepjescombinatie naast zijn enorme opvolger."

This is not necessarily a separate pattern. These examples stress that the attractive male body type is as particular as that of the desired women in literary novels: unattractive men here are either too tall, too short, too thin or too big.

### **Literary novels – female authors**

The female protagonists in the literary novels also look at men, but different from the chick lit protagonists. And compared to the male protagonists viewing women in the literary set, here are no traces of the tragic, sick or absent, beautiful love interest through the eyes of the female protagonist. The men they desire, if they desire at all, need not even be conventionally attractive. Felix in *Een Sterke Man*, for instance, is a small person with strange hair:<sup>27</sup>

*This had to be Felix. He did not even reach my chest. Moreover, he had the most awkward hair I had ever seen, it stood in tufts on his head.* <sup>28</sup> (Dorrestein, 1994)

Barbara realizes “with a shock” that she is attracted to him and that he is probably attractive to women in general – and he knows it. He immediately touches her and tries to seduce her. Another of Dorrestein’s characters, Gilles, in *Het Hemelse Gerecht* is a bit too heavy, but it does not look bad on him according to his lover Ange. Irthe, Ange’s sister, who is also his lover, disagrees however:

*He’s getting too fat, she thinks, we need to put him on a diet.* <sup>29</sup> (Dorrestein, 1991)

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27. Felix is not a protagonist, but it is one of the few examples of woman lusting after a man in the literary half of the novel and therefore I decided to include him.

28. Original text: “Dit moest Felix zijn. Hij reikte nog niet eens tot aan mijn borst. Bovendien had hij het meest merkwaaardige haar dat ik ooit had gezien, het stond in plukken van zijn hoofd af.”

29. Original text: “Hij wordt te dik, denkt ze, we moeten hem op dieet zetten.”

Again the importance of a lean body is affirmed (through backhand praise), which is a pattern found throughout all novels. Irthe's remark also shows that the women have a remarkable relationship with the man. Apart from the fact that they are both his lover, Ange and Irthe feel in charge of his life. In the end, when he decides to leave them, they look him up in the attic of their house and leave him to die when the place is set on fire. Dorrestein portrays two very different men in these novels. They are attractive to the female main characters, but not conventionally beautiful. One of them is very self-confident, and the other is not; one is active, the other passive.

Enquist has two novels in the set where women look at the men, but not with obvious lust or longing. In *Het Meesterstuk* Johan is no longer desired or wanted by Lisa, his ex-wife, hence the gaze is different, resulting in a description without overt emotion or interest, and without saying much about his general appearance. The end of their marriage was caused by the death of their young daughter. She looks at him through a photograph:

*A picture of Johan in half profile: sharp nose, unnaturally closed off mouth, eyes of someone who thinks about himself intensely at the moment of recording. Shoulders in a dark suit, which looks good on him.*<sup>30</sup> (Enquist, 1994)

In *De Thuiskomst*, Elizabeth Cook is in love with James, but she sees him only through his act of studying her:

*He examined. He looked. He observed from up really close, so close that she could see every separate hair of his heavy eyebrows, the small red veins on his tight cheeks and the shimmering teeth behind his small lips.*<sup>31</sup> (Enquist, 2005)

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30. Original text: "Een foto van Johan in half profiel: scherpe neus, onnatuurlijk dichtgehouden mond, ogen van iemand die intensief aan zichzelf denkt op het moment van opname. Schouderpartij in donker pak, wat hem goed staat."

31. Original text: "Hij onderzocht. Hij keek. Hij observeerde van zeer dichtbij, zo dichtbij dat ze elk afzonderlijk haartje van zijn zware wenkbrauwen kon zien, de kleine rode bloedvaatjes op zijn strakke wangen en de glimmende tanden achter zijn smalle lippen."

Elizabeth does not actually describe him, the reader cannot visualize him, she only sees elements of his face up close. James is always absent, as he is sailing, while she tries to raise their children who are conceived during his short periods at home – all of them die before she does. She has an affair, which she eventually ends. Dorrestein and Enquist both have other novels in the set where no lovers are described (old, prospective or otherwise). Ellen in *Een Hart van Steen* describes her angelic little brother who gets maimed by boiling water in the beginning of the novel, Suzan in *De Verdovers* does not even describe any important character. Finally, in de Moor's *De Verdrunkene*, there is the first example of an unequivocally attractive man, who echoes the Adonis in chick lit:

*Suddenly in doubt she stood before the wall with the ringing phone, then grabbed the horn and heard the voice of someone she knew well, and whom she pictured immediately, but for the first time like this: tall, handsome, blond, he has a firm face with an intriguing, sensible nose.*<sup>32</sup> (De Moor, 2005)

*De Verdrunkene* deals with the lives of two sisters, Armanda and Lidy, of whom the latter dies in the Dutch 1953 flood. Armanda is the focalizer of this quote. She describes Sjoerd, the man Lidy will marry and a man she has herself kissed once, but never paid much attention to. She has just learned that Lidy is carrying his child and her gaze changes: she now sees him through her sister's eyes, as a desirable, attractive man. A while after Lidy dies, Armanda marries him, too, she takes over her sister's life in a way. This is foreshadowed in this description, when she first sees Sjoerd through her sister's eyes.

In sum, in the first five hundred lines of the seven novels by female authors in the literary half, all of the focalized men are seen through a female

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32. Original text: "Weifelend ineens bleef ze voor de muur met het rinkelende toestel staan, greep toen de hoorn en hoorde de stem van iemand die ze goed kende, die ze dus ook meteen voor zich zag, maar nu voor het eerst zo: lang, knap, blond, hij heeft een stevig gezicht met een intrigerende, verstandige neus."

protagonist's eyes. Five of these have male love interests in these novels, one of whom is a minor character (Felix in *Een Sterke Man*). One man has the appearance of an Adonis, two do not – they are not conventionally attractive – two others are barely described. Unlike the importance of the heterosexual romantic relationship in the male-focalized and the chick lit novels, there are other relationships important in these novels, mainly familial relationships (parent-child, siblings); incidentally, these family members are the ones who die more often than male love interests in these novels.<sup>33</sup> I do not find a clear pattern in these novels, nor can I easily tie them to one of the earlier patterns.

### **Literary novels – male authors**

Male authors who write from a female perspective are rare in this set, but there are two examples. In *De Ordening* protagonist Stella briefly describes her friend Emiel, who is a black man – one of very few non-white characters in this set of novels, but also a minor character. Of Andreas, her love, she describes only his coat. The lover in this novel is mostly not present at the time of narration, and has disappeared, the device I described earlier in the male-focalized novels, although he returns. Most of the description of a man in the beginning of this novel pertain to a minor character, but Stella spends so much time looking at him, that he somehow must be of importance:

*He was a big, strong man, who breathed an animal-like strength. His eyes, small in a square face, were as blue and clear as ice. (...) He wore a thin, dark red shirt, of which the top three buttons were open in summer. The flesh of his face was rough. Muscles ran down his jaws. With those clear blue eyes of his, he looked at me in a friendly and genuine confidence. I was a bit afraid of him and pushed my chair backwards*

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33. These familial relationships are an interesting point for further research. The descriptions of physical appearance here actually seem to direct me to an even larger possible pattern, where the heterosexual relationship is more crucial in the male-authored literary novels and the female chick lit novels, whereas other relationships matter more in female-authored literary novels. This idea is not new, and not undocumented of course, but it would take me too far from the original topic to discuss this here.

*somewhat. He turned around to the bar and signaled with his hand.*<sup>34</sup> (van Beijnum, 2008)

She is “a bit afraid of him”, and she has no real attraction to him. Nonetheless, not much later, she ends up sleeping with him. She does not enjoy it either, as it turns out she is trying to punish herself through a habit of sleeping with men she is not particularly attracted to or interested in.

In *Huid en Haar* Lea describes Roland, the man she is sleeping with. She is a scholar specialized in Höss, a camp commander, and reflects on herself as “attracted to Aryan types”:

*Lea is attracted to Aryan types, blond hair, fair skin. There were exceptions in her life, but not many. Roland Oberstein looks relatively aryan. Blond hair, fair skin, blue eyes.*<sup>35</sup> (Grunberg, 2010)

She is attracted to him, but not specifically because of his Aryan features, we learn later; he is also typified as “relatively Aryan”, even though he appears to fit the picture perfectly with his blond hair and blue eyes. Lea has been looking for a man to have an affair with – she is married with children – and Roland is her first good opportunity.

The only two descriptions of men from a female perspective by a male author have negative associations – with fear and punishment; this is also the reason I am hesitant to classify Roland as an Adonis. Even though Lea’s choice of “Aryan” as a reference might be partially involuntary because of her specialism,

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34. Original text: “Hij was een grote, sterke man die een dierlijke kracht uitstraalde. Zijn ogen, klein in een vierkant gezicht, waren zo blauw en helder als ijs. (...) Hij droeg een dun donkerrood hemd waarvan de bovenste drie knoopjes op z’n zomers openstonden. Het vlees van zijn gezicht was ruw. Spieren liepen over zijn kaken naar beneden. Met die helderblauwe ogen van hem keek hij me vriendelijk en ongespeeld zelfverzekerd aan. Ik was een beetje bang van hem en schoof mijn stoel iets achteruit. Hij draaide zich om naar de bar en gaf een teken met zijn hand.”

35. Original text: “Lea valt op arische types, blond haar, blanke huid. Er waren uitzonderingen in haar leven, maar niet veel. Roland Oberstein ziet er betrekkelijk arisch uit. Blond haar, blanke huid, blauwe ogen.”

there is a reservation from her part, as expressed by the adverb “relatively”. Since there are only two examples though, I do not classify this as a pattern.

Thus, the female gaze is present with female protagonists written through female literary authors, but there are subtle differences: the desired men vary more in appearance, although there is one example of an Adonis, but this attraction is caused by Armanda looking through her sister’s eyes, not her own and hence the gaze is somewhat different – it is also not a direct gaze. There are fewer descriptions of male love interests. The two male authors who use female focalizers do not apply a typical female gaze either, there is attraction mingled with a negative emotion; hesitation or even fear. Overall, there is no typical male protagonist or love interest, no typical characteristics or story line; the only pattern I see is that of the more distanced viewing, that we see in Enquist, de Moor and Grunberg, even though the men are prospective or former lovers. There is not much emotional meaning attached to seeing the men’s features, or lust. Only in Dorrestein’s novels the men are specifically lusted after through the gaze. This might be partially caused by the different role of the relationship in these plots. In the male-authored literary novels the drama is instigated by the actions of the women, and the heterosexual relationship is the core of the story – this is seldom the case in these novels. Perhaps this is why the attraction to the male protagonist is less important to establish.

Instead of the female protagonist in the literary novels, it is the female protagonist in chick lit who resembles the male protagonist in the literary half more. In fact, the pattern mirrors what happens in the literary set. Where the male literary protagonists gaze at the desired, attractive female love interest, the female chick lit protagonist gazes at the desired, attractive male love interest.

## 7.5 WOMAN VIEWING WOMAN: THE GAZE-UPON-HERSELF

### Chick lit

What comes most to the fore in the marked sentences for the chick lit novels, apart from the stereotypical male love interest, is that the protagonists often scrutinize their own appearance, and are very critical – the women are not being watched, but turn the gaze on themselves. The protagonist is described as wearing shabby clothes or looking slouchy, by herself or through the eyes of others. Interestingly enough, I identified ‘to wear’ as a keyword for the literary set. The word choices for (wearing) clothes could be more varied in chick lit, which would prevent such words from showing up in the keyword analysis. In *Luchtkussen* by Astrid Harrewijn, the main character describes her clothing as such:

*[‘]The only thing I know is second hand and out of fashion. Look at what I’m wearing! I stood before her, wide-legged, in my purple silk blouse, with a red beaded necklace on top and a brown one that I made myself with coffee beans, black jeans and my yellow leather boots. I wildly took off my blouse and showed her, with horror, my yellowish department store bra with completely decayed little roses. ‘This thing is five years old! And do you know what I am wearing underneath my brandless pair of pants? Well? A bright orange thong with stretched-out elastic. I have to press my buttocks together to make sure it does not slip from my bum! And there is only a little bit of fabric left around the holes in my socks,’ I added in despair.*<sup>36</sup> (Harrewijn, 2009)

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36. Original text: “[‘]Het enige waar ik verstand van heb is tweedehands uit de mode. Kijk dan wat ik aanheb!’ Wijdbeens ging ik voor haar staan in mijn paarse zijden blouse, met daarop een rode kralenketting en een bruine, die ik zelf gemaakt had van koffiebonen, zwarte jeans en mijn gele leren laarzen. Ik trok woest mijn blouse uit en liet haar vol afschuw mijn gelige Hema-beha met totaal verlepte roosjes zien. ‘Dit ding is al vijf jaar oud! En weet je wat ik onder mijn zwarte merkloze broek draag? Nou? Een knaloranje string met uitgelubberd elastiek. Ik moet mijn billen samenknijpen om te zorgen dat hij niet van mijn kont afglijdt! En er zit nog een heel klein stukje stof rond de gaten van mijn sokken,’ riep ik er vertwijfeld achteraan.”

Even though Lieke (single mom of a teenage daughter who suddenly needs to look for work when a man squanders her inheritance) stresses the lack of brand of her clothes, fashion is not the main point of interest for the women in this set of chick lit. They mainly are afraid of looking shabby. This fear appears in the marked sentences of so many of the novels, that this can be identified as a subpattern in the chick lit novels, as the next examples show. These are a selection of the total sentences containing such descriptions.

**A.** My gaze fell onto my run-down sneakers and slid almost automatically to my frayed and badly faded jeans, that had been blue in a previous life.<sup>37</sup> (Verkerk, 2010)

**B.** You should have seen me in that much too wide T-shirt with stains on it, the stretched-out pair of sports pants and those horrible dog slippers underneath.<sup>38</sup> (Verwoert, 2010)

**C.** (...) instead of my easy, worn-down basketball shoes.<sup>39</sup> (van Gastel, 2011)

**D.** Her look slid derogatorily over Emily's shapeless T-shirt and faded jeans.<sup>40</sup> (Hollander, 2011)

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37. Original text: "Mijn blik viel op mijn versleten gympen en gleden als vanzelf door naar mijn gerafelde en flink verschoten jeans, die in een vorig leven blauw geweest was."

38. Original text: "Je had me moeten zien met dat veel te wijde T-shirt met vlekken erin, die uitgelubberde trainingsbroek en van die afgrijselijke hondenslofften eronder."

39. Original text: "(...) in plaats van mijn gemakkelijke, afgetrapte basketbalschoenen."

40. Original text: "Haar blik gleed geringschattend over Emily's vormeloze T-shirt en vale spijkerbroek."

In the final quote, Emily does not reflect on herself, but sees herself through the eyes of her boss, the mean (and ugly) Laetitia. The apparent slouchiness of these women is sometimes linked to being overweight, again, for example, in *Luchtkussen*:

*I immediately thought about the saddle bags on my upper legs, the dimples in my arms and my sagging breasts. Now I came to think of it, my whole body was a collapsed pudding.*<sup>41</sup> (Harrewijn, 2009)

The female protagonist scrutinizing her own body – possibly combined with comparing herself to another woman – is in fact a more general pattern in chick lit; it is distinctly not limited to her clothing, as we see in *Trouw(en)*:

*She has beautiful female curves. My legs are really a bit too dainty.*<sup>42</sup> (Verwoert, 2009b)

In *Trouw(en)*, the protagonist fears her boyfriend is in love with another woman. She is a bit scrawny, the other woman is slender but curvy. In *Bedrogen Liefde*, the protagonist has had twins, and her body has not returned to its slender self afterward the delivery, which makes her sigh that she is no longer that beautiful anymore – she was aspiring to become a model before getting unwantedly pregnant at her prom:

*And no matter how hard she tried, doing sit-ups and other abdominal exercises, the love handles stayed put.*<sup>43</sup> (Verkerk, 2006)

Fear of not looking sufficiently beautiful or slender comes repeatedly to the fore in these novels, but the most important pattern is an anxiety of being

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41. Original text: “Ik moest onmiddellijk denken aan de fietstassen op mijn bovenbenen, de putjes in mijn armen en mijn slappe borsten. Nu ik er zo eens over nadacht, was mijn hele lichaam eigenlijk een in elkaar gezakte pudding.”

42. Original text: “Ze heeft mooie vrouwelijke rondingen. Mijn benen zijn eigenlijk iets te iel.”

43. Original text: “En hoe ze ook haar best deed met sit-ups en andere buikspieroefeningen, de vetrollen bleven gewoon zitten.”

badly groomed or dressed. Rather than elaborate on and interpret this fear here, I continue with the literary novels, as the pattern is further developed there; and with that, gives better insight into the mechanisms at play.

## Literary

In the literary half we also see examples of a female protagonist scrutinizing herself, for instance in Dorrestein's *Het Hemelse Gerecht*.

*In the mirror she notices that she could have dried her hair a bit better. But the lilac dress was a good thought, it made her even slimmer and taller than she already is: almost as tall as Gilles, her nose touches his chin.*<sup>44</sup> (Dorrestein, 1991)

The perspective is that of Irthe, one of the main characters. She looks at herself in the mirror and notes that the lilac dress makes her appear more slender, and that is seen as a benefit to the protagonist. A little earlier in the novel she decides on wearing that dress that night, because she always receives compliments while wearing it. Irthe reflects on her personal appearance, with the expectation of being seen, and does that a number of times in the beginning of the novel. Ange and Irthe, sisters who own and run a restaurant, have an almost symbiotic relationship. Ange describes her sister as such:

*She wears her hair in a loose knot, that accentuates her round face – it is a strange sight, it is decidedly not handsome, but still, it has a certain something, and the lilac dress shows off her long, supple limbs in a pleasant way.*<sup>45</sup> (ibidem)

She reaches the same conclusion about the dress as Irthe does, and she notices that her sister is not handsome. And she also looks at herself:

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44. Original text: "In de spiegel ziet ze dat ze haar haren wel wat beter had mogen drogen. Maar de lila jurk was een goede gedachte, hij maakt haar nog slanker en langer dan ze al is: ze is bijna even groot als Gilles, haar neus raakt zijn kin."

45. Original text: "Ze draagt het haar in een losse wrong, die haar bolle gezicht accentueert - het is een eigenaardig gezicht, het is beslist niet knap, maar toch heeft het iets, en de lila jurk doet haar lange, soepele ledematen op prettige wijze uitkomen."

*Ange's gaze slides to her own face in the mirror. I do have good bones, she thinks, those bony faces usually age in a very nice way.*<sup>46</sup> (ibidem)

Ange reflects on her becoming older, she is fairly satisfied with how she is aging, and in this, compares herself to other people with “bony” faces. In sum, both sisters are very aware of their own and each other’s appearance, and how they look in the eyes of others. In *De Verdrongene*, again, two sisters are the protagonists. The focalizer is a narrator-focalizer, but I have classified it here, since the women are the protagonists of the novel:

*They resembled each other. Everyone thought so. They were tall girls with narrow strong shoulders that they held bent forward somewhat, which gave them a worried look that in reality made no sense. And should they have turned around, in this instant, then the simultaneous portrait would have been totally puzzling: dark hair, almost auburn black, that disappeared sleekly behind those shoulders, left the fine ears free and with straight cut bangs removed the forehead completely from sight.*<sup>47</sup>  
(De Moor, 2005)

The “everyone thought so” again indicates that the women are seen through the eyes of others. They are aware of their resemblance as well, as they joke in the same chapter that the one might be mistaken for the other. When Lidy gets pregnant, her sister wonders at her changing body and this inspires a conversation about their appearance:

*‘Those dresses with the shirred front looked horrible on me!’ ‘Oh, quit it.’ ‘Much too high of a forehead for a child.’ ‘True, yes. I had that, too.’ ‘It looked bad on me.’ ‘Nonsense,’ muttered Lidy by way of refutation without much interest, but Armanda*

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46. Original text: “Anges blik glijdt naar haar eigen spiegelbeeld. Ik heb natuurlijk wel goede botten, denkt ze, die benige gezichten worden meestal op een heel aardige manier oud.”

47. Original text: “Ze leken op elkaar. Iedereen vond het. Ze waren grote meisjes met smalle sterke schouders die ze een beetje naar voren gebogen hielden, wat hun iets zorgelijks gaf dat in werkelijkheid nergens op sloeg. En hadden ze zich omgedraaid, op dit moment, dan zou het simultane portret helemaal hebben gefraspeerd: donker haar, tegen kastanjezwart aan, dat sluik achter die schouders verdween, de fijne oortjes vrijliet en het voorhoofd met een recht afgeknipte pony helemaal aan het zicht onttrok.”

*remained adamant that most people feel true tenderness for themselves. But she did not. And that's why it was not so bad to have an older sister, who, at the moment, with a body that was so much larger than hers, was so complacent sitting there across from her, that it was simply contagious.*<sup>48</sup> (ibidem)

Lidy's pregnancy lends her, and even her sister by proxy, some form of shield to the critical view the girls normally have towards themselves; they even criticize their appearance as children, both think they had too high foreheads as a child. The making explicit of the awareness of being seen is an important difference between the sentences in the literary half and the chick lit half. Note that here, smallness too, is of importance, albeit more subtly – none of the protagonists, in any of the novels, are free from the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1981).

In Grunbergs *Huid en Haar* we find another woman who reflects on being seen by others:

*Lea has thick, brown hair. Every now and then she removes a grey hair with a pair of nail clippers. Other than that, she is skinny and looks unhappy. People often say she looks unhappy, even though she is unaware of it. (...) Still, she would like to appear different.*<sup>49</sup> (Grunberg, 2010)

This part of her appearance is tied to a feeling. One of two male authors who focalizes a woman decides his protagonist to be aware of her showing a feeling, rather than simply her appearance, a subtle difference from most of

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48. Original text: "Die jurken met die gesmokte voorpandjes stonden me toch ook voor geen cént!' 'Ach hou op.' 'Veel te hoog voorhoofd voor een kind.' 'Klopt, ja. Had ik ook.' 'Mij stond het niet.' 'Onzin,' pruttelde Lidy zonder veel interesse tegen, maar Armanda bleef op haar stuk staan dat de meeste mensen een echte tederheid voor zichzelf voelen. Maar zij niet. En dat het daarom zo gek nog niet was, helemaal niet zo gek, om een oudere zuster te hebben die, op dit ogenblik, met een lichaam aanzienlijk omvangrijker dan het hare, wel zó zelfgenoegzaam tegenover haar zat dat het gewoonweg aanstekelijk was."

49. Original text: "Lea heeft dik, bruin haar. Af en toe verwijderd ze een grijs haartje met een nagelschaar. Verder is ze tenger en ze kijkt ongelukkig. Mensen zeggen vaak dat ze ongelukkig kijkt, terwijl ze zich van geen kwaad bewust is. (...) Toch zou ze anders willen overkomen."

the female literary authors. Otherwise, it is quite similar. Lea grooms herself and again, we encounter the idea of a woman who has a sense of being seen by a non-descript group: Lea uses the word 'people'. It is not thus simply the awareness of being seen, it is an abstract notion of a group viewing the woman, also reflected in the word choice of 'everyone' in *De Verdronekene* and the general compliments Irthe recalls when she sees herself in the mirror in the lilac dress. These women look at themselves because they know themselves to be looked at, which echoes Palmer (1989), as described in Section 7.2. Only Irthe relishes her appearance however (the narcissistic aspect), the others are anxious about what they look like, just like in the chick lit.

In *Het Meesterstuk*, there is, like in *De Verdronekene*, an omniscient narrator, who looks at Lisa, but I have again classified it here because the chapter is seen through Lisa's eyes. The mentioning of her menstrual cycle is personal, the narrator is very close to Lisa's skin.

*Lisa is wearing expensive jeans and an even more expensive cream white sweater. At the last moment, she switched her sneakers for blue boots. She is a beautiful woman and remains so when the years pass by. She dresses well but unremarkably. Lisa is forty-five and menstruates about two or three times a year now.*<sup>50</sup> (Enquist, 1994)

Her dress is described, like in the chick lit novels, but unlike the chick lit, and like *Het Hemelse Gerecht*, it is approved of. Her clothes are simple, but expensive. In this case it is not quite clear if she approves it herself, or if this is done by the narrator. Lisa is conscious of her dress, since she has decided to put on different shoes to go out. The pattern of the female grooming herself is continued in this novel. Another subpattern that starts to arise, is that most women in this half of the literary set are older than the women in the male-focalized set. Lisa is forty-five, Lea plucks out grey hairs (and is a mother), Ange comments on her ageing face.

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50. Original text: "Lisa draagt een dure spijkerbroek en een nog duurdere roomwitte trui. Op het laatste moment heeft zij haar gym schoenen gewisseld voor blauwe laarsjes. Zij is een mooie vrouw en blijft dat met het verstrijken van haar jaren. Zij kleedt zich goed maar onopvallend. Lisa is vijfenveertig en menstreeft een keer of drie per jaar."

In *Een Sterke Man*, Barbara's description of herself deviates from the other descriptions in this section. Instead of relating herself to the (abstract) view of others, she relates herself to the man she is attracted to (see Section 5.3):

*With a shock I realized I found him attractive. I am just one meter and 65 centimeters and weigh less than fifty kilo's. I do not often come across a man that I can crush in my arms and squish under my weight.*<sup>51</sup> (Dorrestein, 1994)

The description lends the protagonist a strength to her body that is not assigned to any other character in the literary set, even though it is a tiny body – which is, again, typical.

From these examples it is evident, that I have found the typical perceived 'femininity' in attention to physical appearance: that of women towards themselves, as I identified at the beginning of this chapter. Rather than a clear-cut self-indulgence into fashion and a fretting about weight though, the chick lit and especially the literary authors show that there are complex patterns going on of seeing and being seen. The women are seen, look at themselves and are critical of how they look, except for Barbara in *Een Sterke Man*. Rather than a narcissistic pleasure in what they look like (Palmer 1989; Section 7.2), the women fret about their appearance (Russ 1973; also Section 7.2). The literary novels give a hint to which process lies behind the self-absorption: the quotes show that the women viewed are aware of being seen by an indefinite group, by 'people', 'they', or that their appearance has been commented upon by multiple people in the past.

Dress is crucial with the chick lit protagonists, although they are apparently not good at it, and the literary female protagonists where dress is mentioned, are well-groomed. Mabry (2006) is thus not completely right in her idea that the first-person view in chick lit novels lets the protagonists temporarily

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51. "Met een schok besepte ik dat ik hem aantrekkelijk vond. Ik ben net één meter zestig lang en weeg minder dan vijftig kilo. Ik kom niet vaak een man tegen die ik in mijn armen kan pletten en onder mijn gewicht kan vermorzelen."

escape the gaze (p.196) – they have internalized its use. Because it is not a character-stereotype as the first two, but a process, I give it a more general name: the Gaze-upon-herself. Although not all female protagonists scrutinize themselves (or are described by a narrator) elaborately, there are only a few cases, in the chick lit as well as the literary set, where mentioning of or relating to the female protagonist's physical appearance is entirely absent (i.e. *Status O.K.* and *De Verdovers*, perhaps not incidentally both about women in a medical profession).

## 7.6 MAN VIEWING MAN: NO PATTERN

To conclude, the men who view men (or themselves). In the male focalized part of the set, male reflecting on their own appearance are rare, and less elaborate than women doing the same. Because there are so few of these descriptions, I cannot really identify a pattern, although there is a hint of one, as I will now show.

Beck in *De Asielzoeker* about himself, when he notices a mirror:

*What do people see when they see him? Then he remembers that people do not see him. They do not have a reason to see him. Not that he does not have remarkable features, according to the police a pair of glasses is a remarkable feature, but nothing about him is remarkable enough to really see him.*<sup>52</sup> (Grunberg, 2003)

He does not really judge himself, he states this matter-of-factly, perhaps with some sense of pride – from the context it is apparent that he has made

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52. Original text: "Wat zien mensen als ze hem zien? Dan herinnert hij zich weer dat mensen hem niet zien. Ze hebben geen reden hem te zien. Niet dat hij geen opvallende kenmerken heeft, volgens de politie is een bril al een opvallend kenmerk, maar niets aan hem is opvallend genoeg om hem echt te zien."

a conscious effort to be no one. The description says nothing about his appearance, he is a man without characteristics, or at least tries hard to be. He wants to be unseen. He also applies the gaze to himself of a non-descript group of others like the female protagonists in the previous section, but with the crucial difference that he wants to be and manages to be invisible (in his view).

Lemmy in *De Grote Wereld* is conscious of himself being a little person, as he describes himself as a baby, when family and friends come to visit to meet him:

*At first, Lemmy thought he was big. The people who came to meet him as a baby talked about nothing else! 'He is so big!' As soon as they saw him, their mouths fell open. (...) His extraordinary size was all that interested them. The first years of his life there appeared to be no other topic of conversation. He did not know better than that he was huge. His parents and their friends had to climb onto the tea table to be able to look into his crib. How could he know that when they marveled over his length, they actually meant that it was equal to almost all baby's and that it surprised them because his father and mother, like them, were dwarves.<sup>53</sup> (Japin, 2006)*

The visitors try to assess his length when he is still a baby and a toddler. He is seen and judged, it is a hopeful judging, that he will become of 'normal' length ("He will be as tall as his grandmother!"). He is judged for what he will become in the future.

Both self-reflections are specifically established through the protagonist using the eyes of others, which appears to be similar to the female focalizers seeing themselves. This way of looking is different from the chick lit novels, where all gazes are direct and without explicit aid of others' gaze. There are some

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53. Original text: "Aanvankelijk dacht Lemmy dat hij groot was. De mensen die op kraamvisite kwamen hadden het nergens anders over! 'Wat is hij groot!' Zodra ze hem zagen vielen hun monden open. (...) Zijn uitzonderlijke omvang was het enige wat hen interesseerde. De eerste jaren van zijn leven leek er geen ander onderwerp van gesprek. Hij wist niet beter of hij was enorm. Zijn ouders en hun vrienden moesten op de theetafel klimmen om in zijn wieg te kunnen kijken. Hoe kon hij weten dat zij wanneer ze zich over zijn lengte verbaasden, eigenlijk bedoelden dat die gelijk was aan die van vrijwel alle baby's en dat het hen alleen verraste omdat zijn vader en zijn moeder, net als zichzelf, dwergen waren?"

differences between the male and female focalized set however: Beck is not actually seen. And Lemmy's size is commented upon by a specific group, family and friends visiting him after his birth when he is a baby, and his parents. This is unlike the female characters described earlier, who see themselves through the eyes of an non-descript group of people, who are not actually present (anymore).

There are also very few instances of male focalizers describing other men, none of the men describe another male protagonist. I have found two descriptions, of characters that are not too minor – they recur in the novels. Armin in *De Passievrucht* describes his teenage son Bo, to search for signs that his son is not his biological son:

*He does not get his chin, that sticks out a bit which makes it look like his lower jaw is put on wrong, from me. His eyes do have Monika's color, but not my shape, like everyone says who knew Monika. That his left foot is half a size smaller than the right one, just like mine – coincidence!*<sup>54</sup> (Glastra van Loon, 1999)

He is, like Lemmy, scrutinized for physical signs of something else. In this case, not his physical future, but his parentage. The description hence serves the purpose of supporting the plot and showing Armin's confusion and sadness over the 'loss' of his son, and not to assess a character's attractiveness. In *De Oesters van Nam Kee* Berry describes his friend Gerrie.

*Gerrie Grolsch's parents were so good that their son was the fattest junkie of all of Amsterdam and surroundings. He had been using heroin for nine years and still weighed about a hundred kilo's. And because he was bingeing and boozing at Eddie's*

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54. Original text: "Hij heeft zijn kin, die iets naar voren steekt waardoor het lijkt alsof zijn onderkaak verkeerd gemonteerd is, niet van mij. Zijn ogen hebben wel de kleur van die van Monika, maar niet de vorm van de mijne, zoals iedereen zegt die Monika heeft gekend. Dat zijn linkervoet een halve maat kleiner is dan de rechter, net als bij mij-toeval!"

*all day long, he only got bigger. He wore clean, expensive clothes, his hair was always clean, for his last birthday his parents gave him a Harley.*<sup>55</sup> (van Beijnum, 2000)

This description establishes Gerrie's character through the eyes of Berry, there is a certain awe, but also a hint of disgust ("binging and boozing"). Gerrie is Berry's friend, but Berry does not really like him; nor does he really like his other friends. It helps establish Berry as a loner.

The female authors rarely have male focalizers. Enquist has in one novel, as well as Dorrestein. Hollander has two novels with male focalizers. In the first few chapters however, if they are focalizers at all (Dorrestein has no male focalizers in the first chapters), they do not reflect on themselves or on other men.

In other words, men rarely describe others or themselves in these novels in the first couple of chapters. There are thus no apparent patterns to be found, although there is a hint of one: men applying the gaze of others to judge themselves, like the women do. Only they are either not seen, or not judged for attractiveness. One could say the actual pattern is the meta-pattern of the almost-absence itself; and a total absence with the male focalizers through the eyes of the female authors. I have decided not to distil a pattern from absence in the end, because I have not marked the complete novels. Perhaps the male protagonists' appearance would form a pattern when I would also look at later chapters.

To see if men are indeed looked upon less in these first five hundred lines, I have counted how many times a person of each gender is viewed in each genre, see Table 7.2.

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55. Original text: "De ouders van Gerrie Grolsch waren zo goed dat hun zoon de vetste junk van Amsterdam en omstreken was. Hij gebruikte al negen jaar heroïne en woog toch tegen de honderd kilo. En omdat hij de hele dag bij Eddie zat te schransen en te zuipen werd hij alleen maar zwaarder. Hij droeg schone, dure kleren, zijn haar was altijd gewassen, voor zijn laatste verjaardag had hij een Harley van zijn ouders gekregen."

	<b>Literary</b>	<b>Chick lit</b>	<b>Total</b>
Woman	87 (61.3%)	45 (48.9%)	132 (56.4%)
Man	50 (35.2%)	45 (48.9%)	95 (40.6%)
Other	5 (3.5%)	2 (2.2%)	7 (3.0%)
Total	142 (60.7%)	92 (39.3%)	234 (100%)

Table 7.2: Gender of the character being viewed in a marked sentence, split per genre. The ‘other’ category contains sentences where a man as well as a woman was described, and the sentences where a group of people without indication of gender is described.

There is indeed a big difference in the number of descriptions on male and female characters in literary novels (see Section 4.7): little over 60% described are women, 35% are men. In the chick lit half there are exactly the same amount of sentences that describe men as there are sentences about women’s appearance. So when Morgan (1993), in one of the few analyses of the significance of male bodies in feminist theory, states that ‘descriptions of women in popular fiction tend to be more embodied than descriptions of men’ (p. 69), he is not necessarily right. In this case, the genre seen as more popular, chick lit, the men are embodied, and relatively more often than in the literary novels.<sup>56</sup>

In sum: there are no clear patterns in the descriptions of male characters either through male or female eyes, or male or female authors in the literary part of the classified set, as there are too few descriptions to be able to base a pattern on.

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56. I have of course not counted how often men and women are described without reference to their bodies; that would be necessary to say more about the overall veracity of this statement.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

I start with two notes. First, in all of the novels exclusively heterosexual, white relationships are used as main story lines, except for *Vaslav*, where a male homosexual relationship is also part of the plot, albeit not in the first chapters.<sup>57</sup> Plus, the fact that the main characters in *De Grote Wereld* are little people; both of these novels are written by a single author, Arthur Japin. This says something about the Dutch literary production in general. There appears to be little awareness of interest in diversification of characters, neither by the chick lit, nor the literary authors; when they do exist in the novels, these are minor characters. This is affirmed by the Dutch project *De Personagebank*, where a number of researchers have counted the gender, age, profession, skin colour, etc. of characters in novels nominated for the *Libris Literatuur Prijs* in 2013, and found an overall young, white, male, highly educated set of protagonists (van der Deijl et al., 2016).

Second, I am aware that the sentences are a selection of the total number of sentences in the novel. However, since they are all from the same part of the novel, this consistency helps with its generalizability. Moreover, the relatively large number of novels in which these patterns appear, and the relative ease with which these patterns can be linked to existing theory, show that there is a distinct value to this approach.

Now, I return to my initial questions:

***Can we identify patterns of descriptions of physical appearance within and across the genres? What can we deduce from the differences and commonalities between and within genres?***

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57. In reading the chick lit novels, I have come across one sub-plot of a minor character, Fenna, discovering herself to be gay. This seems positive, especially as the novel treats the character's homosexuality with respect and the characters have a positive attitude towards Fenna discovering her true sexuality, but the author then takes specific care in distancing her protagonist from similar feelings, casting Fenna as the proverbial Other.

In searching for patterns within and across genre, the gender of the characters, and the gender of the authors, I have found four (or actually three) larger patterns in the physical descriptions of characters as marked for my classification experiment:

**1.** Men describing women in literary novels and two novels by Wilma Hollander: the Destructive Nymph

The female protagonists are described through the eyes of the male protagonist with the connotation of smallness, delicacy and/or even childlikeness; although they are almost all strong-minded. Plus, they are beautiful. The male gaze is distinctively one-sided: the women do not reciprocate the gaze, they are unaware of being seen. In this sense, there is an objectification, the typical male gaze as described by Mulvey. This is the case in most of the literary novels seen through a male focalizer, and two novels by chick lit author Wilma Hollander. She uses the stereotype of the delicate female as applied in the literary novels and enlarges it in an almost grotesque fashion. Note that she does not deviate from the male literary authors: the stereotypical appearance of her protagonists is similar to that in the literary novels, but described in a (much) less subtle fashion.

**2.** Women describing men in chick lit and one novel by de Moor: the Caring Adonis

The chick lit women look at the male protagonist with desire and admiration. The men are lean, muscled (but not too much) and often have blonde hair and blue eyes. They are the perfect men, also in their behaviour. The gaze is mutual, there are no power inequalities: the men are allowed to look back. They are good to the protagonist, want them, and will go out of their way to please them. This is also the case in two of the literary novels, *De Oesters van Nam Kee* and *De Asielzoeker*, but the male protagonists in those novels end up destroyed by their lovers.

**3.** Women describing themselves in both genres: the Gaze-upon-herself  
What is evident from both the chick lit and the literary novels, is that the female protagonists mostly look at themselves, rather than at others, or when they do look at another, they compare themselves to them; or talk about appearance with them. This is a clear pattern in both genres. They do not merely look at themselves or among other women, though, they are keenly aware of non-descript others who view them, and, as appears from the quotes, comment on their appearance to them (whether these are male or female is not clear). Therefore I do not typify this pattern as narcissistic. Narcissus revels in his own appearance, where the women in these novels see themselves through others' eyes and are anxious about how they look. They are not stereotypical in physical nature – although, again, apparently all of them are slender – hence I give the pattern or a more general name to reflect the process-like nature: the Gaze-upon-herself.

**4.** Men describing themselves: No pattern

This actually is not a pattern, but could be seen as a meta-pattern, although I am hesitant to classify it as such, as I have not analyzed the full novels: it is almost impossible to find descriptions from the perspective of a male focalizer about a male protagonist or himself in this set of sentences. There are two descriptions within the set of male protagonists looking at themselves, and in one, the protagonist prides himself with being non-descript, another is a little person commenting on how people visiting him after his birth express hope of him being 'normal'. There are an additional two descriptions of non-minor characters, but they have no apparent commonalities. Hence I cannot distil a pattern.

Based on these patterns, I answer my remaining questions:

***Is the subject of attention to physical appearance a 'feminine' topic? How is it represented not only in chick lit, but also in contemporary literary novels by male and female authors? And which role does the gender of the author and protagonists play?***

I start with the last question: contrary to what one might expect, the gender of the author is mainly indicative for the gender of the protagonist, but it is not necessarily indicative of the way of looking. Because there are too few exceptions to the rule that the gender of the author is the gender of the protagonist, I cannot draw general conclusions, but a female author writing from a male perspective can objectify a woman (Hollander) as well as a male author can describe a woman who is critical of her appearance (Grunberg). However, since female authors write mostly from a female perspective in this corpus and male authors from a male perspective, there is a difference in the male-authored and female-authored novels in this set.

The femininity of the topic of 'attention to physical appearance' can be captured as such: when we look across the genres and protagonist gender, we see that physical appearance is 'feminine' in the sense that women are the ones who are looked at. Literary authors do concern themselves with physical appearance, the male as well as the female literary authors, as is evident from the number of descriptions – which is higher in the literary set than in the chick lit set. The difference is that the male protagonists do not look at themselves, but look at women. These women are all idealized images of what a woman should look like, and the women in the female-focalized part of the literary novels, in turn, look at themselves – and only this act is seen as the 'typical' feminine type of attention to physical appearance; it is performed by women. The female protagonists spend time on their clothes, and know what they look like in them. They are keenly aware of their appearance and of how they are viewed by others. The female focalizers also spend more time comparing themselves to, and talking about their appearance with other women, whom they have familial relationships with – most notably siblings. As a result, the literary authors, male and female, spend the largest part of the sentences describing women.

Chick lit authors also have self-aware female protagonists, who, like the female protagonists viewing themselves in the literary novels, are concerned with what they look like. They do not deviate from the literary authors, rather they reduce the complexity of this self-reflectiveness: it is condensed into a fear of looking shabby, not being slender, being badly dressed or being seen ungroomed. The stress on the attentiveness is also not as much as one might

imagine when seeing the cover of a chick lit novel, there are fewer sentences on the topic than in the literary novels. Attentiveness to physical appearance is rarely an important motif in a number of the chick lit novels. It is often non-existent or very small (*Status O.K.*, *Single en Sexy*, *Cheesecake & Kilts*, *Match*, *Dans der Liefde*, *Onder de Griekse Zon*, *Als een Zandkorrel in de Wind*), sometimes a bit larger (*Luchtkussen*, *Bouzoukie Boogie*), but never the main plot line – this is the struggle of the protagonist of getting her life in order: finding the perfect job, mostly, and actively or accidentally, finding Mr. Right.

The attention for the appearance of this Mr. Right is the most distinctive feature of the chick lit novels, and here the female chick lit protagonist mirrors the male literary protagonist. The female protagonists look at their prospective love interest, which is also a person of the opposite sex. There is also a stereotypical nature about this love interest. They also explicitly desire the person they will form a relationship with; just like the male literary protagonists. The difference is that in this genre, all ends well. The protagonist always gets the very attractive but (sometimes covertly) sensitive man, who is, in behavior, the opposite of the Destructive Nymph. There is no equivalent pattern in the female literary protagonists looking at men, although there are a few attractive men. The female gaze in these novels is also different from the male gaze in the literary novels: the women are equal to the men they look at, the men are allowed to look back.

To finish the comparison, there is one commonality, a persistent pattern in this set of novels which crosses genre: not being slender is seen as an unattractive physical feature, unless it is excused for by the protagonist through backhand praise. Before starting my analysis, I expected the notions of (female) beauty in literary novels to be more varied, including more body diversity, but this turned out false. I have not gone too deeply into this, except for by discussing Chernin (1981), but this could be a direction for future research.

In sum, by using a larger number of novels than is usual in literary interpretation, and laying bare patterns that are usually not looked at in literary novels (at least not at this scale and across genre), I have shown that assumptions about the feminine nature of attention to physical appearance

are too easily made. Yes, the women in these novels do look at themselves. The female literary protagonists show elegantly and distinctively which mechanisms lie behind the perhaps simply-represented fears of the chick lit protagonist; by showing the reader how the women they write about see themselves. These women envision or remember the eyes and even comments of others. These women have learned to see themselves through all-present, non-descript eyes; they have learned to apply the (male) gaze to themselves. Chick lit produces protagonists who have done the same, but do not make this process explicit. In other words, chick lit cannot be seen as completely separate from literary production. Nor can the novels of the female authors be separated from those of the male authors. In other words, the patterns I have described are not even completely separate from one another. Chick lit and literary novels are part of a continuum. Chick lit shows a simplification and sometimes an enlargement of ideas and processes also present in literary works, and mirrors other aspects. They are all part of a larger fictional universe where the men see women and the women see themselves – only the one type of looking is deemed as more literary. Except in the chick lit, where the woman is expected to look at the men as well.

This is all not very new, as the feminist theory I quote has shown. What is new, is that I show this process to still be the case in (fairly) recent Dutch literary novels. The second addition is that I also examine the male body in these novels. The focus in feminist theory is too often solely on the female body, keeping the dichotomy male-mind/female-body intact. The final novelty is that I am the first to compare stereotypes in literary and chick lit novels on the same level. The male literary authors are as stereotypical in their choice of heroine as chick lit authors in their choice of hero. Just like the men in literature hope for a beautiful woman, and gaze at them, the women hope for and gaze at a beautiful man. The biggest difference is that they get him, whereas the beautiful woman in the literary works has a (not yet statistically established) significant chance of dying. Which is more literary, of course.

# 8.

## CONCLUSION

*[Y]ou can't talk about the maker behind the book because then you are practicing 'victimization' and 'group thinking' and ignoring 'literary quality', and in the meantime there is a group of individuals that is consistently discussed half as much in the book pages and who take the pen to the page there half as often, too. What do these individuals have in common? Nothing but that they are women.<sup>1</sup>*

(Lezeres Des Vaderlands, 2017)

The examination of the position of female and male authors in the Dutch literary field (Chapters 2 and 3) shows that female authors are still nowhere near equality to male authors. The simplest measure, the percentage of winners of the four most prestigious and well-known literary prizes makes that clear: since 2007, female authors have not surpassed the 30% mark, and, contrary to common perception, there has been no obvious progress since the conception of these awards. And people of color rarely win them at all. In 2017, all of those four prizes just mentioned were awarded to white men.<sup>2</sup> The gender gap is not only related to social capital, in the form of prestige, it also appears to lead to a difference in economic capital: these prizes come with high monetary rewards.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Original text: “[J]e mag het niet over de maker achter het boek hebben want dan doe je aan ‘slachtofferdenken’ en ‘groepsdenken’ en negeren van ‘literaire kwaliteit’, en ondertussen is er een groep individuen die consequent twee keer zo weinig besproken wordt in de boekenbijlagen en ook twee keer zo weinig zelf de pen ter hand neemt in die bijlagen. Wat hebben die individuen gemeen? Niets anders dan dat ze vrouwen zijn.”

2. The Fintro Literatuurprijs has been cancelled as of 2018.

3. Winners of the ECI Literatuurprijs receive €50,000 for instance.

In the 400 bestsellers, there are also much fewer works by Dutch female literary authors, than works by Dutch male literary authors and Dutch female popular authors. Without trying to lay blame, I conclude that the gender gap sustains itself on all levels in the literary field. The whole of the literary field – publishers, critics up to and including foremostly female consumers – perpetuates the situation where Dutch female literary authors are seen as producing literature of lower literary value. The difference is not caused by a lack of literary production; said female authors produce hundreds of literary novels per year (see Section 2.1). Nor is it caused by the idea that women cannot write, since the general reader does not appear to believe that being female hinders an author from writing a literary text, as our survey indicated (see Section 3.6).

The lack of recognition however, is not yet ‘proof’ enough that the situation deserves attention. Ultimately, any discussion of the scarcity of female authors at the top of the Dutch literary field ends with the ‘literary quality’ argument, as the anonymous author of the blog *Lezeres des Vaderlands* attests to in the quote above. Her remark is a response to Dutch male literary author Arnon Grunberg, who repeatedly argues that we can only perceive literature from the individual’s standpoint, that ‘we’ is a fiction and everyone should strive to get past it (Grunberg, 2015). In other words, literary quality should come first, and gender, ethnicity, etc. second. With this conclusion I do not argue here. Even though literary quality is no more than a socially constructed, and hence temporally and geographically situated consensus, it is conceivable to me as a literary scholar that contemporary lovers of literature search for aesthetic pleasure or want to be challenged, as I do, too. I for instance prefer the description of dress in example (1) over (2) because the metaphor in (1) is fresh and interesting, whereas the style in (2) is quite simple and unimaginative:

**1.** *On the internet she found a picture of a school of guppy’s with outrageous ball gowns, so it seemed. Bodies of mohair and silk and glass, with cheetah prints and gold,*

*fins like boa's, tails of thin paper, tails like expensive paint brushes. No image could connect the notions of fish and festivity better, Monique thought.*<sup>4</sup> (Verbeke, 2009)

**2.** *Her eyes rest on a black, leather skirt. She puts it on. She doesn't like her buttocks. She doesn't understand why she ever bought this skirt.* (Harrewijn, 2007)<sup>5</sup>

However, what critics like Grunberg fail to see, is that the Dutch literary field does not actually put literary quality first. The National Reader Survey (2013) gives insight into the workings of the perception of literary quality. In this survey The Riddle of Literary Quality project asked respondents to rate bestselling and often library-loaned novels on a scale of literary quality, and to provide a motivation for one of their ratings. The results show that genre, in fact, can precede or replace judgments of the actual text (see Chapter 3). If a novel is perceived to be a thriller or a chick lit novel, it can automatically be excluded from a high rating, without further explication even being necessary.

Genre is not the only element that can influence textual judgments of literary quality. The second is what I call the gendered lens, the appraisal of works affected by perceived 'genderedness' of the text; generally but not exclusively connected to the gender of the author. If the genre, topic, plot and/or style of a novel can be associated with femaleness, this has long been adequate to serve as dismissal in and of itself, as identified in literary-historical research (see Chapter 4). Perhaps contrary to expectation, associations with femaleness or femininity are still fathomable as a marker for low literary quality of a text, as the respondents of the Survey show (ibidem). The 'women's novel' has not lost its compelling nature as a yard stick to hold other novels against. It is the lowest possible qualification, as is also indicated by the fact that respondents in the survey assign the lowest average literary ratings to chick lit novels, an

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4. Original text: "Op het internet vond ze een foto van een school guppy's met uitzinnige baljurken, zo leek het. Lijfjes van mohair en zijde en glas, met cheetahprints en goud, vinnen als boa's, staarten van dun papier, staarten als dure verfkwesten. Geen beeld kon de noties vis en feestelijkheid beter verbinden, vond Monique."

5. Original text: "Haar oog blijft rusten op een zwarte, leren rok. Ze trekt hem aan. Haar billen bevallen haar niet. Ze begrijp niet hoe ze deze rok ooit heeft kunnen kopen."

example of such ‘women’s novel’.

But, the reader might interject, chick lit novels *are* of low quality. The plot is always similar, the style is simple and uninteresting. I argue that the gendered perception of the genre is more important than the style of the genre itself. First, the same critique could easily be applied to the highly formulaic Baantjer detective novels by Simon de Waal in our corpus, but these are not part of the bottom ten of average score on literary quality in the Survey, which consists only of ‘women’s novels’. But more importantly: nor are such detectives described as typical ‘men’s novels’. Spy novels or thrillers could be seen as the ‘masculine’ equivalent of ‘feminine’ genre novels, seeing the association of the genre with male authors in the respondents’ comments. When it comes to average ratings however, thrillers are situated between romantic novels and literary novels; in other words, there is a gendered genre hierarchy.

By way of a second argument against the innate low quality of chick lit, I have to confess to a lie. Example (2) in fact, is not from a chick lit novel. I extracted both quotes from my corpus of literary award nominees, it comes from Grunberg’s *Onze Oom* (2008). Grunberg is one of the most renowned male Dutch literary authors, but his grammatical style is decidedly chick lit-like (see also Jautze et al., 2013). I repeat the quote here:

*Her eyes rest on a black, leather skirt. She puts it on. She doesn’t like her buttocks. She doesn’t understand why she ever bought this skirt.* (Grunberg, 2008)

Do you perceive it differently now? Of course, this is a clever rhetorical trick, I removed just enough of the context to have it pass as chick lit. Should you have been given the full novel without its cover, this surely would not have happened. This is true, but nevertheless it shows how prior perceptions can alter the way one reads the same text, even on a micro-level. With the final chapters I established this idea more firmly, that gendered perception indeed is key. I have done this through an analysis of quite a number of novels. First through a bottom-up analysis, starting with the full texts (Chapter 5), and then a top-down analysis, starting with a single topic (Chapters 6-7).

That author gender as a supposed text factor should be handled with much

more care, and that female authors' works cannot be grouped based on gender alone – as is still done in the Dutch media – is shown in Chapter 5. When I computationally analyze the Riddle of Literary Quality corpus, it is quite easy to separate female from male authors.<sup>6</sup>

With almost 83% accuracy, a machine learning classifier can predict author gender based on the text of the novels. Upon scrutiny, a large part of this prediction is based on differences in genre and original language (as a considerable part of the corpus is works translated into Dutch): when I test the same model on a corpus of novels that were nominated for the AKO or Libris Literatuur Prijs, a sizeable part of the 'gender' differences disappears; and most of the differences that remain are caused by the fact that male authors are classified very well, whereas the classification of female authors is no better than chance.

Also, when I examine the remaining differences through additional visualizations, I see that gender still is not the all-encompassing factor it might appear to be at first sight. A topic such as 'settling down', although a marker for female authors, is in fact more present in male-authored novels than a 'military' topic is, even though that topic is a marker for male authors; it shows that it matters from which angle I look at the results. I also identify venues for further research. A topic such as the 'body' is not exclusive to female authors. In fact, quite a number of male authors apply the topic more than the average female author does; this is the subject of the final two chapters. The second finding is a possible intermediate step between 'author gender' and 'writing style': a preference for dialogue over narrative, which can be found in half of the texts by female authors. Only when I assume that being female *causes* the authors to have a preference to write dialogue, can I ascribe the textual differences to gender.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Even though I use the first person singular in the summary of chapters 5 and 6 for sake of readability, note that these chapters are collaborative endeavors.

7. Note that the myth that women talk more than men has been debunked more than once, see for instance Holmes (1995), and hence it cannot be used as an argument for the 'femininity' of dialogue.

Incidentally, these are all authors who were classified correctly by the machine learning algorithm, perhaps because the Riddle corpus, on which the model was trained, contains overall more dialogue in novels by female authors. This distinction between dialogue and narrative might be a fruitful path for further research into the appraisal of literary quality, regardless of author gender. This computational approach thus results in a new hypothesis pertaining to literary quality.

Perhaps some might have hoped for ‘final’ answers on the differences between female and male authors, because I apply computational methods. However, what I show is that computers are wielded by human researchers, and that selection of data and interpretation of results is a human endeavor. The choices made by the researcher(s) determine how the relationship between gender and text is reported, and ultimately, they might make a difference in how gender is perceived.

In the final two chapters, rather than look at the full texts of the novels, I select a topic that is generally seen as ‘feminine’, that of characters’ attention to physical appearance, and compare it over a corpus of literary novels and chick lit. In an attempt to computationally locate sentences containing a description of physical appearance, I find that the style of chick lit is less varied than that of literary novels, and, more surprisingly, that *literary* authors are the ones who dedicate the most sentences to characters’ physical appearance. The automated methods for locating descriptions of physical appearance turn out to not be robust enough to apply to unseen novels. Therefore I shift my attention to the sentences I manually selected as my gold standard in this chapter. In Chapter 7, through a manual analysis of these sentences, I find, again, that author gender is connected to, but not solely responsible for differences between the texts where it concerns this topic. Against my expectations, of the literary authors, male ones spend the most sentences describing a character’s physical appearance.

Applying a slightly adapted version of the concept of the ‘gaze’ (Mulvey, 1989) I then search for patterns in descriptions of characters’ physical appearance – that is to say, recurring types of descriptions. These patterns turn out to be most strongly connected to *protagonist* gender and not to author gender. When

I connect descriptions of physical appearance to the larger plot, I identify two stereotypical patterns, which means that characters with similarities in appearance and of similar personality can be found across multiple novels. Both are heteronormative patterns, and one of them, perhaps surprisingly, is found in literary novels:

1. the Caring Adonis: (mostly) found in chick lit, he is a beautiful man with a good heart, as seen from the female protagonists' perspective; and
2. the Destructive Nymph: found (mainly) in literary novels, she is a beautiful woman with some form of physical delicacy, but with a deceptive nature; she is seen from the male protagonist's perspective.

Male authors describe physical appearance more, because they examine the physical features of women through male protagonists' eyes. Female protagonists in all novels have in common that they look at themselves, through the eyes of internalized, indiscriminate others. In other words, when I focus on more than one novel, and take a larger context into account, including novels by male authors and 'popular' novels, I get quite a different view on a topic that is traditionally seen as 'female'. I identify patterns which cross genre and author gender, and show how a 'feminine' topic such as attention to physical appearance can be read quite differently, and interpreted differently.

To sum up: I show not only that the literary field at large – from the general reader to the award jury – contributes to the back-benching of the female author, but that the assumptions on female authorship can quite effectively be challenged. My analyses, both with and without the use of computational analysis, show that perceived femaleness or femininity of text are not an automatic consequence of the author's gender, but that other processes are at play, which need to be considered more carefully by all the actors in the field. Subconscious biases about the importance of gender differences in writing style have a bigger influence than some literary critics might like to believe. Taking a different perspective, putting on a different pair of glasses as it

were, is key. It could allow us to ‘read beyond the female’. In other words, it can result in an appraisal of literary quality that does justice to authors of all genders; which means that it is connected to, but not solely dependent on gender – be it author gender, or perceived genderedness of the text.

## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

*Feminism isn't about making women stronger, women are already strong, it's about changing the way the world perceives that strength.*  
(Anderson, 2013)

This thesis has, quite obviously, an idealistic goal. In this final part, I would like to spend some words on this, as this idealism will most likely also frame my future work. I do not believe it is possible to separate academic work from the person who performs it, to be ‘objective’ in the positivist sense. No matter how repeatable certain methods are, in the end, interpretation and contextualization of results make knowledge. They depend on the researcher. Moreover, repeatability in academia functions mostly as hypothetical construct – I do not believe many academics would be willing to put their time into getting funding for repetition of prior research, unless they are fairly certain this might result in a paradigm shift in their field. Rather than do away with objectivity altogether however, I turn to Harding (2015). She puts forward a different logic of scientific research, and argues that academic objectivity and diversity are very well suited to support each other, she calls this the “mutual support claim” (p. 150). In fact, it is even stronger than that:

*[M]ultiple and conflicted subjectivities offer possibilities for progressive transformation that are less available to the unified, perfectly coherent, and autonomous subjects (should any actually exist) to which we have all been supposed to aspire. Progressive social transformations require that our selves be recognized by us as dynamic, containing forces from the past and new possibilities for the future, and as being capable of thoughtful response to changing circumstances. (ibidem: p. 164)*

In other words, being an academic means being able to see how one is situated in the world, what has contributed in the past to our way of making

knowledge and try to imagine how we can apply our critical thought to make positive changes in these practices. To me this means that we need to learn to value ways of thinking that have long been rejected because of their lack of ‘objectivity’, which of course, have been associated – for one – with femininity.

Two aspects of gendered appraisal of literary quality deserve further attention: lower literary prestige of female authors and the importance of perceived genderedness of text. Although I have given ample evidence of the existence of both, the workings are not fully clear yet. Therefore, additional research is in the making. A survey to find out if perceived genderedness of text causes lower literary quality judgments is should be finished early 2018. In it, we ask respondents to rate the chances of a novel being highly literary based on information on the plot, with either female or male protagonists.

Then there is the computational aspect. For practical purposes, I have binarized gender, but this does no justice to what gender really is. I have attempted to show this in Chapter 5, but the method remains awkward, because I apply a binary distinction to show that we, in fact, should not; this, in a way, echoes Hélène Cixous who tries to get past the binary distinction of female-male, but in the end coins a term which can be misused to reaffirm differences (see Olson, 2015). In order to implement Harding’s (2015) ideas in computational research, the MEALS framework by Elizabeth Losh, Jacqueline Wernimont and others is useful.<sup>8</sup> Technology is often seen as objective, ephemeral and neutral, but in fact it is Material, Embodied, solicits Affect, requires Labor, is Situated, promotes certain values and assumes tacit knowledge practices. In future, with the MEALS framework in mind, I hope to work with others to find how we can compute texts and make visualizations to show more truly the spectrum that gender, ethnicity, social class, and other factors are. I want to become better at what I advocate with this thesis: that the ‘groups’ Grunberg denounces need to be taken into account in order to be heard, but cannot and should not be reduced to their label. Computational

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8. There is, to my best knowledge, no official documentation on the MEALS framework, but for educational purposes a slide circulates, see: <https://twitter.com/clboyles/status/871783575250546688>. (Last visit: 24 August 2017).

analysis is powerful, it has a sense of trueness and objectivity to the wider public, and precisely because of this (albeit incorrect) belief, I believe we should therefore apply it as ethically as we can. In order to do that though, existing tools need to be replaced; and the people who wield them should not just be the ones who used to. TBC

# APPENDIX A: CORPORA<sup>1</sup>

## A.1 THE RIDDLE OF LITERARY QUALITY CORPUS

The Riddle of Literary Quality corpus was compiled by the project The Riddle of Literary Quality. It contains 401 fictional Dutch-language novels (translated into Dutch and originally published in Dutch), published between 2007-2012. They were the novels that were most often sold by bookstores and loaned from libraries in the period 2009-2012, based on lists provided by Culturele Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek (CPNB) and Dutch libraries.

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1. Although I use American spelling for the titles in my thesis (all capitals except for function words), I follow the Dutch spelling in the tables of the three corpora (only one capital at the beginning, except for names).

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>First print</b>	<b>English title</b> (if available as translation)
Abdolah, Kader	De koning	2011	The King
Abdolah, Kader	De kraai	2011	
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	De bedrijfsterrorist	2011	
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	Dossier 64	2011	
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	De fazantenmoordenaars	2010	The Absent One: A Department Q Novel (US)
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	De noodkreet in de fles	2010	A Conspiracy of Faith (Department Q) (US)
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	De vrouw in de kooi	2010	The Keeper of Lost Causes (US)
Adler-Olsen, Jussi	Het Washingtondecreet	2012	
Allende, Isabel	Het eiland onder de zee	2010	Island Beneath the Sea
Allende, Isabel	Het negende schrift van Maya	2011	Maya's Notebook
Amirrezvani, Anita	Dochter van Isfahan	2007	The Blood Of Flowers
Ammaniti, Niccolò	Jij en ik	2010	Me And You
Ammaniti, Niccolò	Laat het feest beginnen	2010	Let the Games Begin
Ammaniti, Niccolò	Het laatste oudejaar van de mensheid	2007	
Ammaniti, Niccolò	Zo God het wil	2007	As God Commands
Appel, René	Van twee kanten	2010	
Appel, René	Weerzin	2008	
Auel, Jean Marie	Het lied van de grotten	2011	The Land of Painted Caves: Earth's Children
Austin, Lynn	Eindelijk thuis	2008	Until We Reach Home
Avallone, Silvia	Staal	2010	
Baantjer, Appie / Waal, Simon de	Een dief in de nacht	2010	
Baantjer, Appie /	Een lijk in de kast	2010	

Waal, Simon de			
Baantjer, Appie / Waal, Simon de	Een mes in de rug	2012	
Baantjer, Appie / Waal, Simon de	Een rat in de val	2011	
Baantjer, Appie / Waal, Simon de	Een schot in de roos	2011	
Bakker, Gerbrand	De omweg	2010	
Baldacci, David	Die zomer	2011	One Summer
Baldacci, David	Familieverraad	2009	First Family
Baldacci, David	Geniaal geheim	2007	Simple Genius
Baldacci, David	In het geheim	2009	True Blue
Baldacci, David	Niets dan de waarheid	2008	The Whole Truth
Baldacci, David	Onschuldig	2012	The Innocent
Baldacci, David	De provocatie	2011	Zero Day
Baldacci, David	Rechteloos	2010	Hell's Corner
Baldacci, David	De rechtvaardigen	2008	Divine Justice
Baldacci, David	Verlos ons van het kwaad	2010	Deliver Us From Evil
Baldacci, David	De zesde man	2011	The Sixth Man
Barnes, Julian	Alsof het voorbij is	2011	The Sense of an Ending
Barr, Emily	Klasgenoten	2007	Out Of My Depth
Beijnum, Kees van	Een soort familie	2010	
Berg, Greetje van den	Ergens achteraan	2009	
Bernlef, J.	Geleende levens	2010	
Bernlef, J.	De een zijn dood	2011	
Bezaz, Naima El	Vinexvrouwen	2010	
Binchy, Maeve	En toen kwam Frankie	2011	Minding Frankie
Binchy, Maeve	Hart & Ziel	2009	Heart and Soul
Binet, Laurent	HhhH	2010	HhhH
Blake, Sarah	De laatste brief	2010	The Postmistress
Blum, Jenna	Het Familieportret	2010	Those Who Save Us
Blum, Jenna	In tweestrijd	2011	The Stormchasers

Boyne, John	Het winterpaleis	2011	The House Of Special Purpose
Brijs, Stefan	Post voor mevrouw Bromley	2011	
Brokken, Jan	Baltische zielen	2010	
Brown, Janelle	Alles wat wij wilden was alles	2008	All We Ever Wanted Was Everything
Brown, Dan	Het Verloren Symbool	2009	The Lost Symbol
Burgers-Drost, Julia	Tussen hart en verstand	2008	
Bushnell, Candace	1 Fifth Avenue	2008	One Fifth Avenue
Buwalda, Peter	Bonita Avenue	2010	Bonita Avenue
Campert, Remco	Dagboek van een poes	2007	
Carré, John le	Ons soort verrader	2010	Our Kind Of Traitor
Casey, Jane	Spoorloos	2010	The Missing
Child, Lee	61 Uur	2010	61 Hours
Child, Lee	De affaire	2011	The Affair
Child, Lee	Tegenspel	2010	Worth Dying For
Clancy, Tom	In het vizier	2012	Locked On
Clancy, Tom / Telp, Peter	De ogen van de vijand	2011	Against All Enemies
Clancy, Tom	Op leven en dood	2010	Dead or Alive
Cleave, Chris	Kleine Bij	2009	The Other Hand
Coben, Harlan	Blijf dichtbij	2012	Stay Close
Coben, Harlan	Levenslijn	2011	Live Wire
Coben, Harlan	Verloren	2009	Long Lost
Coben, Harlan	Verzoeking	2010	Caught
Coelho, Paulo	Aleph	2011	Aleph
Coelho, Paulo	De beschermengel	2010	
Collins, Suzanne	De hongerspelen	2010	The Hunger Games
Collins, Suzanne	Spotgaaï	2010	Mockingjay
Collins, Suzanne	Vlammen	2011	Catching Fire
Cornwell, Patricia	Mortuarium	2010	Port Mortuary

Cornwell, Patricia	Rood waas	2011	Red Mist
Cornwell, Patricia	De Scarpetta factor	2010	The Scarpetta Factor
Cronin, Justin	De oversteek	2010	The Passage
Cussler, Clive / Brul, Jack Du	Dodenschip	2011	Plague Ship
Cussler, Clive / Cussler, Dirk	Duivelsadem	2010	Arctic Drift
Cussler, Clive	Medusa	2010	Medusa
Cussler, Clive / Cussler, Dirk	Wassende maan	2011	Crescent Dawn
Dewulf, Bernard	Kleine dagen	2010	
Dijkshoorn, Nico	Nooit ziek geweest	2012	
Dijkzeul, Lieneke	Gouden bergen	2010	
Dijkzeul, Lieneke	Koude lente	2007	
Dijkzeul, Lieneke	Verloren zoon	2011	
Dis, Adriaan van	Tikkop	2010	
Donoghue, Emma	Kamer	2010	Room
Dorrestein, Renate	De leesclub	2010	
Dorrestein, Renate	De stiefmoeder	2011	
Dorrestein, Renate	De zondagmiddagauto	2012	
Duenas, Maria	Het geluid van de nacht	2012	
Durlacher, Jessica	De held	2010	
Eco, Umberto	Begraafplaats van Praag	2011	The Prague Cemetery
Eggers, Dave	Wat is de wat	2007	What is the What
Enquist, Anna	De verdoovers	2011	
Enter, Stephan	Grip	2011	
Evans, Nicholas	De vergeving	2010	The Brave
Falcones, Ildefonso	De hand van Fatima	2010	
Fallon, J.	Op de man af	2007	Getting Rid of Matthew

Fforde, Katie	Trouwplannen	2010	Wedding Season
Fielding, Joy	Roerloos	2009	Still Life
Follett, Ken	Val der titanen	2010	Fall of Giants
Folsom, Allan	Dag van ontmaskering	2009	The Hadrian Memorandum
Forbes, Elena	Sterf met mij	2010	Die With Me
Forsyth, Frederick	De cobra	2010	The Cobra
Fragoso, Margaux	Tijger, tijger	2011	Tiger, tiger
Franck, Julia	De middagvrouw	2008	
Franzen, Jonathan	De correcties	2010	The Corrections
Franzen, Jonathan	Vrijheid	2010	Freedom
French, Nicci	Blauwe maandag	2011	Blue Monday
French, Nicci	Dinsdag is voorbij	2012	Tuesday's Gone
French, Nicci	Medeplichtig	2009	Complicit
French, Nicci	Tot het voorbij is	2007	Until It's Over
French, Nicci	Wat te doen als iemand sterft	2008	What to Do When Someone Dies
Galen, Alex van	Süskind	2012	
Gastel, Chantal van	Geknipt voor jou	2010	
Gastel, Chantal van	Zwaar verliefd!	2008	
George, Elizabeth	Een duister vermoeden	2012	Believing the Lie
George, Elizabeth	Lichaam van de dood	2010	This Body of Death
Gerrard, Nicci	Het weerzien	2008	The Middle Place
Gerritsen, Tess	Het aandenken	2009	The Keepsake
Gerritsen, Tess	Koud hart	2008	The Bone Garden
Gerritsen, Tess	De Mefisto Club	2007	The Mephisto Club
Gerritsen, Tess	Sneeuwval	2010	Ice Cold
Gerritsen, Tess	Het stille meisje	2011	The Silent Girl
Gerritsen, Tess	Verdwijn	2007	Vanish
Gilbert, Elizabeth	Eten, bidden, beminnen	2009	Eat, Pray, Love
Gilbert, Elizabeth	Toewijding	2010	Committed

Giordano, Paolo	De eenzaamheid van de priemgetallen	2009	The Solitude of Prime Numbers
Giphart, Ronald	Ijsland	2010	
Giphart, Ronald	Zeven jaar goede seks	2011	
Grisham, John	De aanklacht	2008	The Appeal
Grisham, John	De bekentenis	2010	The Confession
Grisham, John	Het proces	2011	The Litigators
Grisham, John	De wettelozen	2010	Ford County
Groningen, Merel van	Misleid	2008	
Grunberg, Arnon	Huid en haar	2010	
Grunberg, Arnon	De man zonder ziekte	2012	
Grunberg, Arnon	Selmonosky's droom	2011-2009	
Gudenkauf, Heather	In stilte gehuld	2010	The Weight of Silence
Hannah, Sophie	Kleine meid	2007	Little Face
Hannah, Sophie	Moederziel	2009	The Point of Rescue
Harbach, Chad	De kunst van het veldspel	2011	The Art of Fielding
Hart, Maarten 't	Verlovingstijd	2009	
Hayder, Mo	Diep	2010	Gone
Hayder, Mo	Huid	2009	Skin
Hayder, Mo	Rot	2011	Hanging Hill
Haynes, Elizabeth	Waarheen je ook vlucht	2011	Into the Darkest Corner
Heijden, A.F.Th van der	Tonio	2011	
Hill, Lawrence	Het negerboek	2011	The Book of Negroes
Hoag, Tami	Dieper dan de doden	2011	Deeper than the Dead
Hodgkinson, Amanda	Britannia Road 22	2012	22 Britannia Road
Hollander, Loes den	Broeïnest	2008	
Hollander, Loes den	Driftleven	2009	
Hollander, Loes den	Dwaalspoor	2008	

Hollander, Loes den	Glansrol	2011	
Hollander, Loes den	De kat op zolder	2010	
Hollander, Loes den	Krachtmeting	2010	
Hollander, Loes den	Naaktportret	2007	
Hollander, Loes den	Het scherventapijt	2010	
Hollander, Loes den	Troostkind	2012	
Hollander, Loes den	Uitglijder	2011	
Hollander, Loes den	Vluchtgedrag	2010	
Hollander, Loes den	Wisselgeld	2010	
Hollander, Loes den	Zielsverwanten	2011	
Hosseini, Khaled	Duizend schitterende zonnen	2007	A Thousand Splendid Suns
Houellebecq, Michel	De kaart en het gebied	2011	
Indriðason, Arnaldur	Doodskap	2011	
Indriðason, Arnaldur	Onderstroom	2010	
Irving, John	In een mens	2012	In One Person
Irving, John	De laatste nacht in Twisted River	2010	Last Night in Twisted River
Jackson, Lisa	De zevende doodzonde	2007	Shiver
James, Erica	De kleine dingen	2009	It's the Little Things
James, Erica	Schaduwleven	2008	Tell it to the Skies
James, E.L.	Vijftig tinten donkerder	2012	Fifty Shades Darker
James, E.L.	Vijftig tinten grijs	2012	Fifty Shades of Grey
James, E.L.	Vijftig tinten vrij	2012	Fifty Shades Freed
James, Erica	Zussen voor altijd	2008	Love and Devotion
Jansen, Suzanna	De pronkspiegel	2010	
Janssen, Roel	De tiende vrouw	2007	
Japin, Arthur	Dooi	2012	
Japin, Arthur	De overgave	2007	
Japin, Arthur	Vaslav	2010	

Jonasson, Jonas	De 100-jarige man die uit het raam klom en verdween	2011	The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared
Kelly, Cathy	Eens in je leven	2010	Once in a lifetime
Kepler, Lars	Contract	2011	
Kepler, Lars	Getuige	2012	
Kepler, Lars	Hypnose	2010	The Hypnotist
King, Stephen	1963/11	2011	11/22/63
King, Stephen	Aardedonker, zonder sterren	2010	Full Dark, No Stars
King, Stephen	Eenmalige zonde	2011	Blockade Billy
King, Stephen	Gevangen	2009	Under the Dome
Kingsbury, Karen	Laatste dans	2008	A Time to Dance
Kingsbury, Karen	Nooit te laat	2009	Redemption
Kinsella, Sophie	Ken je me nog?	2009	Remember me?
Kinsella, Sophie	Mag ik je nummer even?	2012	I've Got Your Number
Kinsella, Sophie	Mini Shopaholic	2010	Mini Shopaholic
Kinsella, Sophie	Shopaholic & Baby	2009	Shopaholic and Baby
Kinsella, Sophie	Wat spook jij uit?	2009	Twenties Girl
Kluun	Haantjes	2010	
Koch, Herman	Het diner	2009	The Dinner
Koch, Herman	Zomerhuis met zwembad	2011	Summerhouse with Swimming Pool
Kooten, Kees van	De verrekijsker	2013	
Koryta, Michael	Begraven	2008	A Welcome Grave
Krauss, Nicole	Het grote huis	2010	Great House
Kroonenberg, Yvonne	De familieblues	2011	
Kwast, Ernest van der	Mama Tandoori	2010	
Läckberg, Camilla	Engeleneiland	2012	The Angel Maker's Wife
Läckberg, Camilla	Ijsprinses	2008	Ice Princess

Läckberg, Camilla	Oorlogskind	2009	The Hidden Child
Läckberg, Camilla	Predikant	2007	The Preacher
Läckberg, Camilla	Sneeuwstorm en amandelgeur	2010	The Scent of Almonds
Läckberg, Camilla	Steenhouwer	2008	The Stonecutter
Läckberg, Camilla	Vuurtorenwachter	2011	The Lost Boy
Läckberg, Camilla	Zeemeermin	2010	The Drowning
Läckberg, Camilla	Zusje	2008	The Gallows Bird
Lanoye, Tom	Heldere hemel	2012	
Lanoye, Tom	Sprakeloos	2009	
Lapidus, Jens	Bloedlink	2010	
Lapidus, Jens	Snel geld	2009	Easy Money
Lapidus, Jens	Val dood	2011	
Larsson, Stieg	Gerechtigheid	2008	The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest
Larsson, Stieg	Mannen die vrouwen haten	2008	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo
Larsson, Stieg	De vrouw die met vuur speelde	2008	The Girl Who Played with Fire
Launspach, Rik	1953	2009	
Lavender, Will	Het verborgen raadsel	2008	Obedience
Lehane, Dennis	Gone Baby Gone	2008	Gone, baby, gone
Lewinsky, Charles	Het lot van de familie Meijer	2007	
Lewinsky, Charles	De verborgen geschiedenis van Courtillon	2010	
Lindell, Unni	Honingval	2008	
Loo, Tessa de	De grote moeder	2012	
Ludlum, Robert / Mills, Kyle	Het Ares akkoord	2012	The Ares Decision
Luiten, Hetty	Je blijft altijd welkom	2009	

Macdowell, Heather / Macdowell, Rose	Diner voor 2	2008	Turning Tables
Mak, Geert	Reizen zonder John	2012	
Mankell, Henning	De Chinees	2008	The Man from Beijing
Mankell, Henning	De Daisy Sisters	2009	Daisy Sisters
Mankell, Henning	De gekwelde man	2010	The Troubled Man
Mankell, Henning	De geschiedenis van een gevallen engel	2011	
Mankell, Henning	Kennedy's brein	2007	Kennedy's Brain
Mansell, Jill	Drie is te veel	2011	Two's Company
Mansell, Jill	Eenmaal andermaal verliefd / druk 5	2009	Rumour Has It
Mansell, Jill	Scherven brengen geluk	2008	An Offer You Can't Refuse
Mansell, Jill	De smaak te pakken	2011	To the Moon and Back
Mansell, Jill	Versier me dan	2010	Take a Chance on Me
Mansell, Jill	Vlinders voor altijd	2012	A Walk in the Park
Marlantes, Karl	Matterhorn	2011	Matterhorn
Mastras, George	Tranen over Kashmir	2009	Fidali's Way
McCoy, Sarah	De bakkersdochter	2012	The Baker's Daughter
McFadyen, Cody	Tijd om te sterven	2010	Abandoned
McNab, Andy	Onbreekbare eenheid	2010	Seven Troop
McNab, Andy	Oorlogswond	2011	Exit Wound
Meer, Vonne van der	De vrouw met de sleutel	2011	
Meer, Vonne van der	Het zingen, het water, de peen	2009	
Meyer, Deon	13 uur	2012	
Middelbeek, Mariette	Single en sexy	2009	
Middelbeek, Mariette	Turbulentie	2009	
Mitchell, David	De niet verhoorde gebeden van Jacob de Zoet	2010	The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet
Moelands, Kim	Weerloos	2010	
Montefiore, Santa	De affaire	2010	The Affair

Montefiore, Santa	Fairfield park	2012	The Summer House
Montefiore, Santa	In de schaduw van het Palazzo	2009	The Italian Matchmaker
Montefiore, Santa	Villa magdalena	2011	The House by the Sea
Moor, Marente de	De Nederlandse maagd	2010	
Moor, Margriet de	De schilder en het meisje	2010	
Mortier, Erwin	Gestmeld liedboek	2011	
Mortier, Erwin	Godenslaap	2008	
Mosby, Steve	50/50 Moorden	2008	The 50/50 Killer
Murakami, Haruki	1q84	2010	1Q84
Murakami, Haruki	Norwegian Wood	2007	Norwegian Wood
Neill, Fiona	Vriendschap, liefde en andere stommiteiten	2009	Friends, Lovers and Other Indiscretions
Nesbø, Jo	Het pantserhart	2010	
Nesbø, Jo	De schim	2011	
Nesbø, Jo	De sneeuwman	2009	
Nesbø, Jo	De verlosser	2008	
Nesser, Håkan	De man zonder hond	2012	
Newman, Ruth	Schaduwkant	2010	The Company of Shadows
Newman, Ruth	Vleugels	2008	Twisted Wing
Noort, Saskia	Afgunst	2007	
Noort, Saskia	De eetclub	2008	The Dinner Club
Noort, Saskia	Koorts	2011	Fever
Noort, Saskia	De verbouwing	2009	
Paolini, Christopher	Erfenis	2011	Inheritance
Patterson, James	De affaire	2008	The Quickie
Patterson, James / Ledwige, Michael	Hitte	2012	Now you see her
Patterson, James / Marklund, Liza	Partnerruil	2010	The Postcard Killers

Pauw, Marion	Daglicht	2008	
Pauw, Marion	Drift	2008	
Pauw, Marion	Jetset	2010	
Pauw, Marion	Villa Serena	2008	
Pauw, Marion	Zondaarskind	2009	
Peetz, Monika	De dinsdagvrouwen	2011	
Pick, Alison	Donderdagskind	2011	Far to Go
Picoult, Jodi	Negentien minuten	2008	Nineteen Minutes
Proper, Emile / Eynden, Sabine van den	Gooische vrouwen	2008	
Ravelli	De Vliegenvanger	2011	
Rendell, Ruth	De dief - Kattenkruid!	2010	The Thief
Rijn, Linda van	Blue Curacao	2012	
Rijn, Linda van	Last Minute	2010	
Roberts, Nora	Eerbetoon	2009	Tribute
Robotham, Michael	Gebroken	2008	Shatter
Rose, Karen	Moord voor mij	2010	Kill For Me
Rosenboom, Thomas	Mechanica	2010	
Rosenboom, Thomas	Zoete mond	2009	
Rosenfeldt, Hjorth	Wat verborgen is	2011	
Rosnay, Tatiana de	Het appartement	2012	
Rosnay, Tatiana de	Die laatste zomer	2009	A Secret Kept
Rosnay, Tatiana de	Haar naam was Sarah	2007	Sarah's Key
Rosnay, Tatiana de	Het huis waar jij van hield	2011	The House I Loved
Rosnay, Tatiana de	Kwetsbaar	2010	Moka
Rowling, J.K.	Harry Potter en de Relieken van de Dood	2007	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows
Royen, Heleen van	De manentester	2009	
Royen, Heleen van	Sabine	2012	
Ruiz Zafón, Carlos	De gevangene van de hemel	2012	The Prisoner of Heaven

Ruiz Zafón, Carlos	De schaduw van de wind	2008	The Shadow of the Wind
Ruiz Zafón, Carlos	Het spel van de engel	2009	The Angel's Game
Sambeek, Ciel van	Bloed zaad en tranen	2010	
Sambeek, Ciel van	Koninginnenrit	2008	
Sansom, Christopher John	Winter in Madrid	2007	Winter in Madrid
Scholten, Jaap	Kameraad Baron	2010	
Sedaris, David	Van je familie moet je het hebben	2010	
Shah, Hannah	De dochter van de iman	2009	The Imam's Daughter
Siebelink, Jan	Het lichaam van Clara	2010	
Siebelink, Jan	Oscar	2011	
Slaughter, Karin	Genadeloos	2012	Criminal
Slaughter, Karin	Genesis	2009	Genesis
Slaughter, Karin	Gevallen	2011	Fallen
Slaughter, Karin	Onaantastbaar	2007	Skin Privilege
Slaughter, Karin	Ongezien	2010	The Unremarkable Heart
Slaughter, Karin	Verbroken	2010	Broken
Slaughter, Karin	Versplinterd	2008	Fractured
Slee, Carry	Bangkok Boy / druk 3	2009	
Slee, Carry	Fatale liefde	2010	
Smeets, Mart	De afrekening	2010	
Smeets, Mart	Een koud kunstje	2011	
Smit, Susan	Vloed	2010	
Smith, Wilbur	Op volle zee	2011	Those in Peril
Spijker, Rita	Tussen zussen	2007	
Springer, F.	Quadriga	2010	
Steel, Danielle	Door dik en dun	2011	Big Girl
Steel, Danielle	De weg van het hart	2010	Matters of the Heart
Stevens, Chevy	Vermist	2010	Still Missing
Stockett, Kathryn	Een keukenmeidenroman	2010	The Help

Sundstøl, Vidar	Land van dromen	2010	
Terlouw, Jan / Terlouw, Sanne	Hellehonden	2011	
Tex, Charles den	Spijt	2009	
Tex, Charles den	Wachtwoord	2010	
Theorin, Johan	Schemeruur	2008	
Thomése, P.F.	De weldoener	2010	
Treur, Franca	Dorsvloer vol confetti	2009	
Trussoni, Danielle	Het uur van de engelen	2010	Angelology
Verhoef, Esther	Alles te verliezen	2008	
Verhoef, Esther	Close-up	2007	
Verhoef, Esther	Déjà- vu	2010	
Verhoef, Esther	Erken mij	2009	
Verhoef, Esther	Tegenlicht	2012	
Verhulst, Dimitri	De laatste liefde van mijn moeder	2010	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Après-ski	2009	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Bella Italia	2011	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Bon Bini beach	2012	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Cruise	2009	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Noorderlicht	2012	
Vermeer, Suzanne	De suite	2010	
Vermeer, Suzanne	De vlucht	2007	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Zomertijd	2008	
Vermeer, Suzanne	Zwarte piste	2011	
Visser, Judith	Stuk	2008	
Vlugt, Simone van der	Blauw water	2008	
Vlugt, Simone van der	Herfstlied	2009	
Vlugt, Simone van der	In mijn dromen	2011	
Vlugt, Simone van der	Jacoba, Dochter van	2009	

	Holland		
Vlugt, Simone van der	Het laatste offer	2007	
Vlugt, Simone van der	Op klaarlichte dag	2010	
Vlugt, Simone van der	Rode sneeuw in december	2012	
Voskuijl, Anouschka	Dorp	2011	
Voskuil, J.J.	De buurman	2012	
Vuijsje, Robert	Alleen maar foute mensen	2012	
Vuijsje, Robert	Alleen maar nette mensen	2008	
Wageningen, Gerda van	In de schemering	2008	
Watson, S.J.	Voor ik ga slapen	2011	Before I Go to Sleep
Weiner, Jennifer	Sommige meisjes	2009	Certain Girls
Weisberger, Lauren	Champagne in Chateau Marmont	2010	Last Night At Chateau Marmont
Weisberger, Lauren	Chanel Chic	2008	Chanel Chic
Wickham, Madeleine	De cocktailclub	2010	Cocktails for Three
Wickham, Madeleine	De vraagprijs	2012	A Desirable Residence
Wickham, Madeleine	Zoete tranen	2009	The Gatecrasher
Wickham, Madeleine	Het zwemfeestje	2011	Swimming Pool Sunday
Wieringa, Tommy	Caesarion	2009	
Wieringa, Tommy	Portret van een heer	2011	
Winter, Leon de	Recht op terugkeer	2008	
Winter, Leon de	VSV of daden van onbaatzuchtigheid	2012	
Wisse, Clemens	De jonge boerin van Madezicht	2009	
Worthy, James	James Worthy	2011	
Yalom, Irvin D.	Het raadsel Spinoza	2012	The Spinoza Problem
Zwaan, Josha	Parnassia	2010	
Zwagerman, Joost	Duel	2010	

## A.2 NOMINEES CORPUS

The Nominees corpus is a corpus of fifty fiction novels (although some tend toward non-fiction) that were nominated for either the AKO Literatuurprijs (shortlist; the longlists are not readily available) or the Libris Literatuur Prijs (longlist) in the publication period of the novels of the Riddle corpus (2007-2012). Novels that were already part of the Riddle corpus were excluded.

I have attempted to control for a number of factors, but the relative small number of female nominees prevented a perfect division: author gender (24 female, 25 male, 1 transgender male), number of winners of the prize (3 male, 2 female), the number of Dutch and Flemish authors per gender (21 female Dutch authors, 3 female Flemish/ 22 male Dutch authors, 3 male Flemish authors, 1 Dutch transgender male).

Author last name	Author first name	Year of nomin.	Title	Nominated for (winners in bold)
Bossenbroek	Martin	2013	De Boerenoorlog	AKO
Brouwers	Jeroen	2011	Bittere bloemen	Libris + AKO
Brouwers	Jeroen	2008	Datumloze dagen	Libris
De Jong	Oek	2013	Pier en ocean	Libris
Delpeut	Peter	2008	Het vergeten seizoen	Libris
Enquist	Anna	2009	Contrapunt	Libris
Februari	Marjolijn	2008	De literaire kring	Libris
Franke	Herman	2009	Zoek op liefde	Libris
Fresco	Louise O.	2008	De utopisten	Libris
Gerritsen	Esther	2013	Dorst	Libris
Gerritsen	Esther	2011	Superduif	Libris
Godijn	Wouter	2008	De dood van een auteur die een beetje op Wouter Godijn lijkt	Libris
Goemans	Anne-Gine	2012	Glijvlucht	Libris
Goemans	Anne-Gine	2008	Ziekzoekers	Libris

Goldschmidt	Saskia	2013	De hormoonfabriek	Libris
Grunberg	Arnon	2009	Onze oom	Libris
Haveman	Mariëtte	2011	De vrouwenvanger	Libris
Hemmerechts	Kristien	2008	In het land van Dutroux	Libris
Hermesen	Joke	2009	De liefde dus	Libris
Jongstra	Atte	2008	De avonturen van Henry II Fix	Libris
Kessels	Marie	2010	Ruw	Libris
Lieske	Tomas	2008	Dünya	AKO
Meijnsing	Doeschka	2008	Over de liefde	Libris + <b>AKO</b>
Möring	Marcel	2012	Louteringsberg	Libris
Mutsaers	Charlotte	2009	Koetsier Herfst	Libris
Noordervliet	Nelleke	2009	Snijpunt	Libris
Noordervliet	Nelleke	2013	Vrij man	Libris
Noordervliet	Nelleke	2010	Zonder noorden komt niemand thuis	Libris
Peeters	Koen	2008	Grote Europese Roman	Libris
Provoost	Anne	2008	In de zon kijken	Libris
t Hart	Kees	2013	Hotel Vertigo	Libris
Terrin	Peter	2012	Post mortem	<b>AKO</b>
Trujillo	Carolina	2009	De terugkeer van Lupe García	AKO
van Aalten	Thomas	2012	De schuldigen	Libris
van Brederode	Désanne	2010	Door mijn schuld	Libris
van der Heijden	A.F.Th.	2007	Het schervengericht	Libris + <b>AKO</b>
van der Werf	Gerwin	2012	Wild	Libris
van Essen	Rob	2013	Alles komt goed	Libris
van Heest	Detlev	2011	De verzopen katten en de Hollander	Libris
van Keulen	Mensje	2010	Een goed verhaal	Libris
van Keulen	Mensje	2012	Liefde heeft geen hersens	Libris+AKO

van Leeuwen	Joke	2009	Alles nieuw	Libris + AKO
van Leeuwen	Joke	2013	Feest van het begin	<b>AKO</b>
van Mersbergen	Jan	2012	Naar de overkant van de nacht	Libris
van Straten	Henk	2012	Salvador	Libris
Verbeke	Annelies	2010	Vissen redden	Libris
Vlaminck	Erik	2012	Brandlucht	Libris
Weijts	Christiaan	2010	De etaleur	Libris
Weijts	Christiaan	2009	Via Cappello 23	AKO
Wieringa	Tommy	2013	Dit zijn de namen	Libris



## A.3 CHICK LIT CORPUS

This corpus was compiled in the early stage of *The Riddle of Literary Quality*, when the full corpus was not yet available. It was first used in Jautze et al. (2013), to show the difference in basic sentence structure in chick lit and literary novels. Factors controlled for are genre (16 chick lit, 16 literary; see Section 6.2 for a full explanation of the selection criteria) and author gender, with the note that as there are no Dutch male chick lit authors that we know of, the authors are solely female in that genre. The novels were all originally published between 1991 and 2011, which was a result of availability. Please note that translations of titles are solely meant to get a sense of the Dutch title for non-Dutch readers, and they are all my own. I have added a description of the plot of each novel, because it is relevant to my analysis in Chapter 7.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Perspective</b>
Van Gastel, Chantal	Zoek het maar uit <i>(Figure it out)</i>	2011	First person
Harrewijn, Astrid	In zeven sloten <i>(Out of harm's way)</i>	2007	First person
Harrewijn, Astrid	Luchtkussen <i>(Air kisses)</i>	2009	First person
Hollander, Wilma	Bouzouki Boogie <i>(Bouzouki Boogie)</i>	2011	Third person
Hollander, Wilma	Dans der liefde <i>(Dance of love)</i>	2010	Third person
Hollander, Wilma	Onder de Griekse zon <i>(Under the Greek sun)</i>	2008	Third person
Middelbeek, Mariëtte	Revanche in New York <i>(Payback in New York)</i>	2006	Third person
Middelbeek, Mariëtte	Single en sexy <i>(Single and sexy)</i>	2009	First person
Middelbeek, Mariëtte	Status O.K. <i>(Status Okay)</i>	2010	First person
Verkerk, Anita	Als een zandkorrel in de wind <i>(Like a grain of sand in the wind)</i>	1994	Third person
Verkerk, Anita	Bedrogen liefde <i>(Betrayed love)</i>	2006	Third person
Verkerk, Anita	Cheesecake & kilts <i>(Cheesecake &amp; kilts)</i>	2010	First person
Verwoert, Rianne	Match <i>(Match)</i>	2009a	First person
Verwoert, Rianne	Trouw(en) <i>(Loyalty and marriage)</i>	2009b	
Verwoert, Rianne	Schikken of stikken <i>(Take it or leave it)</i>	2010	First person

<b>Focalisor(s)</b>	<b>Plot</b>
Ella (f), Anna (m) (Ella's grandmother)	After a robbery in the store she works in, Ella reconsiders her life and discovers her grandmother's history in the process.
Christel van der Zwaag (f)	Christel quits her commercial job to find happiness in a small Frisian village.
Lieke van der Steen (f)	Single mom Lieke finds herself a new life when forced to take a job.
Emily (f), Damian (m)	Emily, a reporter, is forced to discover a Roma tribe with a photographer she dislikes, but ends up marrying him.
Lucy de Ruiter (f), Nick (m)	Lucy falls in love with Nick and travels to Ireland for him.
Martine Waalwijk (f)	Four women gather on a Greek island for a marriage, but end up having to trace the abducted fiancé.
Isabelle van Brunswijk (f), Martijn (m), Anna (f)	Isabelle falls in love with Rich, only to find him cheating on her. She gets revenge and finds a new love.
Charlotte (f)	Charlotte gets swindled and rents herself as a date to pay back her debt, but this lands her in trouble.
Femke van Wetering (f)	Diary of an arrogant intern who finds her heart, the right job and man after her brother almost dies.
Marja (f) (mostly), Robbie (m), Mother (f)	Vicious mother tries to keep two lovers apart, unsuccessfully.
Amber (f)	Teenager Amber has a baby with Vincent, who disappears. He comes back to marry her.
Robien (f)	Robien goes on a trip with friends, gets lost and ends up in danger in what appears to be a haunted castle.
Eline (f)	Eline starts a dating service with a friend and ends up finding love herself.
Marieke (f)	Marieke thinks her fiancé is cheating on her, but it turns out to be a mean trick of a jealous friend of her fiancé.
Mandy (f)	Two college students in a relationship that has its ups and downs.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Perspective</b>
van Beijnum, Kees (m)	De oesters van Nam Kee <i>(The oysters of Nam Kee)</i>	2000	First
van Beijnum, Kees (m)	De ordening <i>(The organization)</i>	1998	First
Dorrestein, Renate (f)	Een sterke man <i>(A strong man)</i>	1994	First
Dorrestein, Renate (f)	Een hart van steen <i>(A heart of stone)</i>	1998	First
Dorrestein, Renate (f)	Het hemelse gerecht <i>(The heavenly dish)</i>	1991	Third
Enquist, Anna (f)	De thuiskomst <i>(The homecoming)</i>	2005	Third
Enquist, Anna (f)	De verdovers <i>(The anesthetizers)</i>	2011	Third
Enquist, Anna (f)	Het meesterstuk <i>(The masterpiece)</i>	1994	Third
Glastra van Loon, Karel (m)	De Passievrucht <i>(The passion fruit)</i>	1999	First
Glastra van Loon, Karel (m)	Lisa's adem <i>(Lisa's breath)</i>	2001	Third
Grunberg, Arnon (m)	De asielzoeker <i>(The asylum seeker)</i>	2003	Third
Grunberg, Arnon (m)	Huid en haar <i>(Literally: Skin and hair, more accurately: To the bone)</i>	2010	Third
Japin, Arthur (m)	De grote wereld <i>(The big world)</i>	2006	Third

<b>Focalisor(s)</b>	<b>Plot</b>
Berry (m)	Berry reminisces from a France prison his love for Thera, a stripper.
Stella Verstarre (f)	Stella researches an old woman's WWII past and develops a somewhat strange relationship with her grandson.
Barbara Vrijman (f), Helen Ryan (f), Katie Kerrigan (f), Belle O'Shaugenessy (f)	An artist's enclave in an Irish castle, ending in the host's murder.
Ellen van Bommel (f), Frits (m), Margje (f)	Mother murders family during a postpartum depression.
Irthe (f), Ange (f), (Henri (m), Dixie (f))	Two sisters who run a restaurant and share a man end up wrecking many lives.
Elizabeth Cook (f)	The life of Elizabeth Cook, wife of James.
Drik (m), Suzan (f)	Patient of psychiatrist Drik ruins Driks family by having relations with Driks sister and niece.
Lisa (f), Johan (m), Oscar (m), Alma (f), Ellen (f)	Modern version of Don Giovanni, with the death of daughter Saar as a focus.
Armin (m)	Armin tries to find the real father of his son, years after his wife has died.
Lisa (f), Sophie (f), Talm (m)	Lisa disappears, Talm tries to reconstruct her death and finds her stepfather guilty.
Beck (m)	Beck's girlfriend becomes sick and quickly marries an illegal immigrant to make him legal. Beck does nothing.
Roland (m), Sylvie (f), Violet (f), Lea (f), Jason (m), Gwendolyne (f), mevrouw Obersteiner (f)	In a complex web of power and cheating, stoic Roland ends up an unhappy man.
Lemmy (m)	About a small person who does not realize he lives in a fake world and escapes.

Japin, Arthur (m)	Vaslav ( <i>Vaslav</i> )	2010	Third
De Moor, Margriet (f)	De Verdronkene ( <i>The drowned</i> )	2005	Third

## APPENDIX B: LEXICAL-SYNTACTIC QUERIES

The queries below were written to attempt to extract sentences that contain a description of a character's physical appearance. They are formatted in XPath, to allow them to be used on XML parse trees generated by Dutch-language parser Alpino. For further explanation, see Section 6.4.

### Generic lexical queries

1. LooksA next to looksN or clothing:  
`//node[%looksA%]/../node[%looksN% or %clothing%]`
2. LooksN followed by looksN:  
`//node[%looksN%]/following::node[%looksN%]`
3. NP with looksA next to looksN:  
`//node[@cat="np"]/node[%looksA%]/../node[%looksN%]`
4. NP-object with looksA next to looksN:  
`//node[@cat="np" and @rel="obj1"]/node[%looksA%]/../node[%looksN%]`

### Specific queries containing stative verbs

5. 'To have on' with clothing as object:  
`//node[@sense="heb aan"]/../node[@rel="obj1"]/../../node[%clothing%]`
6. 'To wear' with clothing as object:  
`//node[@root="draag"]/../node[@rel="obj1"]/../../node[%clothing%]`
7. 'To look at or in' with looksA and looksN or clothing:  
`//node[@root="kijk"]/../../node[ @root="naar" or @root="in" and @pos="prep"]/../../node[%looksA%]/../../node[%looksN% or %clothing%]`

Peter (m), Sergei (m), Romola (f)	Dramatization of famous ballet dancer Vaslav and his reason to quit dancing.
Lidy (f), Armanda (f)	The lives of two sisters, one of whom dies during the Dutch 1953 big flood.

8. 'To look like' with looksA or looksN:

```
//node[@sense="er-zie uit"]/..//node[%looksA% or %looksN%]
```

9. 'To have' with looksA next to looksN:

```
//node[@sense="heb"]/..//node[%looksA%]/../node[%looksN%]
```

10. LooksN as subject, 'are' as main verb, predicate containing looksA:

```
//node[@rel="su"]/node[%looksN%]/../node[@rel="hd" and @root="ben"]  
/..//node[@rel="predc" and %looksA%]
```

### Other specific queries

11. 'Hair' as subject:

```
//node[@rel="su"]/node[@root="haar" and @pos="noun"]
```

12. Person with underneath the word 'with' and looksN:

```
//node[%person%]/..//node[@word="met"]/..//node[%looksN%]
```

13. Modifying PP with looksA next to looksN or clothing:

```
//node[@cat="pp" and @rel="mod"]/..//node[%looksA%]/../node[%looksN% or  
%clothing%]
```

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# LEZEN VOORBIJ HET VROUWELIJKE: DE RELATIE TUSSEN PERCEPTIE VAN AUTEURSGENDER EN LITERAIRE KWALITEIT

## SAMENVATTING

*'Mannen, wees gewaarschuwd, vrouwelijke schrijvers rukken op!'*  
(De Coster, 2014)

Al jaren wordt in de Nederlandse landelijke kranten de opmars van 'de vrouwelijke auteur' bezongen. Ze verkoopt goed, wordt graag gelezen, en het zal, zo redeneren sommigen, niet lang meer duren voor de vrouw de literaire wereld in Nederland overneemt. Tegelijkertijd ontstaan tegengeluiden, zoals de blog *De Lezeres des Vaderlands* (2016-2017), die al tellend aantoont dat in elk geval het percentage recensies in Nederlandse en Vlaamse periodieken nog lang niet in het voordeel van de vrouwelijke auteur uitvalt. Echter, zo redeneren critici, dat tellen zegt niets, het moet niet om auteursgender, maar om de Literaire Kwaliteit gaan (zie bijvoorbeeld Grunberg, 2015); daarmee suggererend dat vrouwen nu eenmaal niet genoeg materiaal van hoge kwaliteit produceren. Dit 'ultieme' argument is niet zo eenvoudig te ontmantelen, aangezien er nu eenmaal verschillen tussen vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs zijn. En om nu te beargumenteren dat de meetlat van literaire kwaliteit niet in orde is, daarmee wordt niet bereikt wat vele vrouwelijke auteurs voor ogen hebben: een gelijke positie aan die van mannelijke auteurs.

In dit proefschrift ontrafel ik daarom de relatie tussen het (vrouwelijke) gender van de auteur en de toekenning van literaire waarde aan een werk,

vanaf twee kanten: 1) het prestige van vrouwelijke versus mannelijke auteurs en de perceptie van hun werk; 2) de teksten van de romans zelf. Dit doe ik in de context van het *digital humanities*-project *The Riddle of Literary Quality* van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie voor de Wetenschappen (KNAW). Het project heeft voor ogen correlaties te vinden tussen tekstkenmerken en beoordelingen van literaire kwaliteit. Dit doet het met behulp van computationele analyses van romans aan de ene hand, en door lezers toegekende scores van literaire kwaliteit aan de andere hand. Deze scores werden verzameld in *Het Nationale Lezersonderzoek* (2013). Respondenten werd gevraagd een beoordeling van literaire en algemene kwaliteit te geven – op een schaal van 1 tot 7 – aan romans die zij gelezen hadden van een lijst van 401 recente (gepubliceerd tussen 2007-2012), Nederlandstalige (vertaald en oorspronkelijk werk) fictionele romans voor young adults en volwassenen, die in de periode 2009-2012 het best verkocht waren in boekhandels en het vaakst geleend waren uit bibliotheken (zie Appendix A.1 voor de volledige lijst). Van deze scores maak ik gebruik in mijn proefschrift, maar ik leg zelf geen verbanden tussen de scores en de teksten van de romans, daarvoor verwijs ik naar van Cranenburgh (2016). Mijn nadruk ligt op de perceptie van vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs enerzijds, en de relatie tussen hun werken anderzijds.

Allereerst het beeld en de positie van auteurs. In hoofdstuk 2 laat ik zien dat vrouwelijke auteurs aanwezig zijn in Nederland, dat ze honderden literaire romans per jaar produceren, maar dat ze desalniettemin niet meedoen aan de literaire top – het percentage vrouwen dat een literaire prijs wint in Nederland ligt ver onder de vijftig procent.<sup>1</sup> Er is sprake van een afvalrace, waar bij elke stap omhoog op de literaire ladder meer vrouwen verdwijnen. Als besluit van dit hoofdstuk laat ik zien waarom het idee dat het nú op het punt staat te veranderen hoogstwaarschijnlijk onjuist is, en een riskante gedachte, omdat

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1. Als ik refereer aan een 'literaire roman', bedoel ik een roman die door de uitgever de NUR-code '301 Literaire roman, novelle' of '302 Vertaalde literaire roman, novelle' heeft gekregen. Ik oordeel niet over de daadwerkelijke literaire kwaliteit, noch refereer ik aan het oordeel van de lezers. Als ik wel refereer aan de scores op literaire kwaliteit, dan vermeld ik dat expliciet.

het leidt tot vergenoegzaamheid: waarom zou men actie ondernemen als het toch allemaal op het punt staat anders te worden?

In hoofdstuk 3 bespreek ik de resultaten van het Nationale Lezersonderzoek (NLO), en laat ik zien wat voor een positie de Nederlandstalig schrijvende vrouwelijke auteur inneemt in dat onderzoek. Dit geeft een meer volledig beeld van het literaire veld. In hoofdstuk 2 keek ik naar de elite, de smaakmakers, in hoofdstuk 3 naar het algehele lezerspubliek.<sup>2</sup> De lijst die de respondenten aangeboden werd, is, zoals gezegd, samengesteld op basis van populariteit van de romans, en ik kan dus ook bekijken hoe goed gekocht en geleend oorspronkelijk Nederlandstalige *literaire* romans door vrouwen zijn. Daar is het droevig mee gesteld, hoewel ongeveer de helft van de romans in de lijst door vrouwen geschreven is. Ondanks de herhaaldelijk verklaarde opmars van de vrouwelijke literaire auteur in Nederland, moeten zij hun mannelijke collega's én vrouwelijke vertaalde collega's voor laten gaan in verkoop- en leencijfers. Als ik dan naar de scores kijk die respondenten de romans door vrouwelijke auteurs toekennen, is het dan ook niet vreemd dat die laag zijn. Vrouwelijke auteurs zijn oververtegenwoordigd in het genre van romantische fictie, dat onder aan de lijst prijkt. Spannende romans in de lijst zijn even vaak door vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs geschreven. Qua literaire kwaliteit is er weinig verschil volgens de respondenten, maar de spannende romans door vrouwen zijn volgens hen wel minder goed.

Ook leesgedrag is aan gender gebonden: vrouwelijke respondenten lezen zowel mannelijke als vrouwelijke auteurs, met een lichte voorkeur voor de eerste; mannen lezen voornamelijk mannelijke auteurs. De mannen die dan toch vrouwelijke auteurs lezen, geven wel hogere scores aan hun werken dan vrouwelijke respondenten doen; vrouwen zijn strenger voor hun seksegenoten dan de mannelijke respondenten. Het idee dat meer vrouwelijke beoordelaars betere kansen voor vrouwelijke auteurs oplevert, is dus waarschijnlijk onjuist. Respondenten werd ook gevraagd een motivatie te geven voor hun waardering van een boek. Daar zijn opnieuw verschillen

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2. De elite maakte overigens ook deel uit van dit algehele lezerspubliek. In de motivaties die respondenten mochten overleggen, werd door een enkeling aangegeven dat hij of zij recensent is.

in te vinden tussen vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs – zelfs als ik alleen de vrouwelijke respondenten isoleer: de eerste worden op inhoud beoordeeld, de tweede op structurele en formele kenmerken. Mogelijk is vertaling hierbij een storende factor (literaire romans door vrouwen zijn vaker vertaalde romans in het corpus), maar een nadere analyse van de motivaties van beoordelingen van oorspronkelijk Nederlandstalig werk laat zien dat er wel degelijk subtiele verschillen zijn. Al deze resultaten laten zien dat ook in de ogen van algemene lezers vrouwelijke auteurs een andere positie innemen dan mannelijke auteurs.

Het lastige aan het NLO is dat vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs niet evenredig verdeeld zijn over de genres, noch over de verdeling vertaald/onvertaald binnen die genres. Er zijn bijvoorbeeld meer literaire romans door mannelijke auteurs dan door vrouwelijke auteurs, en dan binnen die vrouwelijke auteurs zijn er ook nog vrij weinig oorspronkelijk Nederlandstalige werken. Dit betekent dat ik gender niet eenvoudig kan isoleren als bepalende factor in beoordelingen: mogelijk spelen genre en vertaald of onvertaald ook een rol. Dit is in principe de kracht van het onderzoek, want het laat zien welke factoren in het spel zijn bij de achterstelling van vrouwelijke auteurs, en hoe ze op elkaar inwerken. Toch bleef de vraag van het belang van gender *sec* liggen. Daarom deed ik met het projectteam van The Riddle vervolgonderzoek, waarbij teksten gemanipuleerd werden om te zien of het Nederlandse publiek gelooft dat vrouwelijke auteurs minder goed literaire fictie kunnen schrijven (zie Sectie 3.6). We splitsten respondenten in drie groepen, en boden hen allemaal dezelfde literaire tekst aan van 250 woorden. In de begeleidende tekst werd het gender van de auteur gesuggereerd: groep 1 werd gezegd een man te lezen, groep 2 een vrouw, groep 3 kreeg geen informatie over het gender van de auteur. Daarna mocht de respondent een score op literaire kwaliteit geven, op een schaal van 1 tot 7. Tegen de verwachting in, werd de vrouwelijke auteur niet minder slecht beoordeeld, ongeacht gender van de respondent. Wel meende groep 3 desgevraagd buitenproportioneel vaak dat de auteur van het stuk een man was. (Literair) auteurschap wordt dus blijkbaar wel met mannelijkheid geassocieerd. Een belangrijk punt is hier dat de tekst geïsoleerd gepresenteerd werd, en de auteur werd neergezet als een debutant. Respondenten hadden dus geen idee van het prestige van de auteur. Dit is een ingang voor vervolgonderzoek.

Deel I van dit proefschrift laat dus zien dat vrouwelijke auteurs in de 21e eeuw niet op gelijke voet meedoen in het literaire veld, dat dat voor het gehele veld geldt (van het koopgedrag van consumenten tot en met het toekennen van literaire prijzen door juries), en dat er bovendien geen enkele aanwijzing is dat dit op het punt staat te veranderen. Een oorzaak is moeilijk aan te wijzen, omdat alle lagen in het veld, van de lezer tot de literaire jury, de huidige situatie in stand houden, het is een vicieuze cirkel. Een schuldige aanwijzen is dan ook niet mijn doel, ik laat slechts zien hoe de huidige situatie is. Mijn doel is het veld door middel van inzicht een klein stapje richting verandering te sturen, en dat hoop ik met name met het tweede deel van mijn proefschrift te bewerkstelligen. De criticus kan op basis van het eerste deel immers nog steeds tegenwerpen dat er geen verandering mogelijk of nodig is, het ligt aan de vrouwelijke auteur zelf, zij schrijft werken van te lage literaire kwaliteit en is daarom niet gelijkwaardig aan de mannelijke auteur. We moeten het dus niet hebben over de vrouwen, maar over wat zij schrijven. Bij dezen.

In het tweede deel van mijn proefschrift kijk ik naar de teksten van verscheidene auteurs. Niet alleen naar vrouwelijke auteurs, niet alleen naar literaire werken, maar naar de teksten van alle werken in het Riddle-corpus (de lijst van het Nationale Lezersonderzoek; zie Appendix A.1), aangevuld met twee andere groepen teksten; hier kom ik later op terug. De analyses worden deels met behulp van de computer en deels 'handmatig' gedaan. Mijn vraag is hier: hoe sterk kunnen we de teksten van de romans eigenlijk aan het gender van de auteur koppelen? Eerst zet ik in hoofdstuk 4 een kader op, gebaseerd op literair-feministisch onderzoek, aangevuld met antwoorden uit het Nationale Lezersonderzoek. Dit laat zien hoe vrouwelijk gender van de auteur in eerdere tijden gekoppeld werd aan de teksten die zij schreef, en op welke manier dat nu nog gebeurt. De stijl van een roman door een vrouw, in de vorm van sentiment ('emotioneel'), woordkeuze en onderwerpen, werd volgens historici als van Boven (1992) en Vogel (2001) gezien als vrouwelijk, en daarmee als minder literair. Dergelijke 'vrouwelijkheid' van tekst wordt door respondenten uit het NLO nog steeds geassocieerd met 'minder literair'. Ook komt het enigszins verrassende resultaat uit het NLO dat ideeën over 'vrouwenboeken' anno 2013 onder lezers nog steeds niet uit de tijd zijn, wat weer benadrukt dat dit tweede deel van mijn proefschrift dus geenszins overbodig is.

In hoofdstuk 5 doe ik verslag van onderzoek samen met Andreas van Cranenburgh (Koolen en van Cranenburgh, 2017b). Wij onderzoeken door middel van Natural Language Processing (NLP), dus computationele analyses van teksten, in hoeverre gender van de auteur gelinkt kan worden aan de teksten die zij schrijft. In de praktijk, als men tekstuele verschillen onderzoekt door middel van de computer, wordt vaak niet goed genoeg gekeken naar de samenstelling van het corpus van teksten. Fictie wordt bijvoorbeeld als één genre gezien en subgenres worden genegeerd. Van de verschillen die men dan vindt, wordt dan te gemakkelijk aangenomen dat die *veroorzaakt* worden door auteursgender, terwijl er mogelijk storende factoren zijn. Om dit aan te tonen, doen wij computationele analyses van het Riddle-corpus, dat meerdere genres van fictie bevat. We kijken naar onderwerp, sentiment en algehele stijl. Als we dan naar de verschillen tussen vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs kijken, lijken die groot. Daarna doen we dezelfde analyses nogmaals, maar nu met een corpus van romans die allen genomineerd waren voor de AKO- en/of de Libris Literatuur Prijs (zie Appendix A.2). De ‘genderverschillen’ blijken in de set van genomineerde teksten een stuk kleiner. Dit laat zien hoe groot het belang van genre eigenlijk is. De verschillen die wel overblijven, zien er bovendien ineens heel anders uit als we de resultaten visualiseren – een door de computer gevonden onderwerp dat we identificeerden als ‘gezinsleven’, en dat vervolgens door de computer aangemerkt werd als prominent verschil tussen vrouwelijke en mannelijke auteurs, blijkt dan evengoed in bijna alle romans door mannelijk auteurs voor te komen. Het is dus maar net hoe je naar de data kijkt. Er zijn tot slot aanwijzingen in het onderzoek dat het verschil tussen hoeveelheid dialoog en narratief belangrijker is dan het verschil tussen genders – wat in mijn ogen ook interessanter is vanuit het oogpunt van literaire analyse. Met andere woorden: computeronderzoek behoeft net zo goed interpretatie, en deze interpretatie wordt in Natural Language Processing en in *digital humanities* te gemakkelijk ingezet om verschillen tussen genders te vergroten en te benadrukken, terwijl de overlap ook vaak groot is. Gender is niet een vanzelfsprekende verklarende factor en vrouwelijke auteurs zijn geen andere soort.

In hoofdstuk 5 deed ik met mijn collega ‘bottom-up’ analyse, we analyseerden de volledige teksten van de werken zonder heel precieze vooropgezette focus. In de laatste twee hoofdstukken vertrek ik van de andere kant en

doe ik ‘top-down’ onderzoek, dus vanuit een specifiek onderwerp. Een onderwerp dat ik in hoofdstuk 4 al identificeerde als een onderwerp dat vaak ‘vrouwelijk’ gevonden wordt, namelijk dat van aandacht voor het uiterlijk. Ik gebruik voor deze analyse een set van uitsluitend oorspronkelijk Nederlandstalige ‘chicklit’ en literaire werken, die eerder gebruikt werd in Jautze et al. (2013), zie Appendix A.3. In hoofdstuk 6 beschrijf ik het proces van automatische extractie van zinnen die als onderwerp ‘een beschrijving van uiterlijke kenmerken van een personage’ hebben. Door middel van enkele computationele analyses probeer ik dergelijke zinnen te lokaliseren, maar dit blijkt complexer dan gehoopt. De eerste methode baseert zich op *queries*, een soort van mallen voor zinnen, die ik met de hand geschreven heb (zie Appendix B), de tweede is een vorm van *machine learning*, waarbij de computer probeert te leren welke zinnen een dergelijke beschrijving bevatten, op basis van door mij aangemerkte zinnen die over uiterlijke beschrijving gaan. Beide methoden hebben hun sterke kanten – de queries zijn goed in het vinden van zinnen die over het lichaam gaan, de machine learning weet goed beschrijvingen te vinden – maar noch apart, noch samen bereiken ze een hoog genoeg percentage accuraatheid om ze in te zetten op ongeziene romans. Er zijn wel bijkomende resultaten: de chicklitromans blijken minder gevarieerd qua taalgebruik dan de literaire romans. Het tweede resultaat is verrassender. De zinnen die ik heb gebruikt om de computer te laten leren welke zinnen over uiterlijke beschrijving gaan, die ik handmatig heb gelokaliseerd in de eerste hoofdstukken van de dertig romans die ik onderzoek, laten zien dat in de literaire romans meer aandacht wordt besteed aan het uiterlijk van personages dan in de chicklitromans. Daarom gebruik ik deze zinnen voor het onderzoek in het volgende hoofdstuk.

In hoofdstuk 7 analyseer ik een set van meer dan 200 zinnen met een uiterlijke beschrijving, uit de eerste hoofdstukken van de chicklit- en literaire romans van hoofdstuk 6. Op basis van het begrip van de ‘gaze’ – grofweg het met lustgevoelens bekijken van een personage – identificeer ik (met een ‘handmatige’ analyse) patronen in het ‘kijkgedrag’ van personages in de romans. Met andere woorden: wie kijkt naar wie en hoe? Ik probeer patronen hierin te ontdekken, terugkerende types van beschrijvingen. Dit laat zien dat, opnieuw, het gender van de auteur van belang is, maar niet cruciaal. Belangrijker is het gender van de hoofdpersonages, die evenwel meestal gelijk

zijn aan auteursgender in dit corpus.<sup>3</sup> Doordat ik op dezelfde manier naar twee genres kijk, dat van de literaire roman en chicklit, wordt duidelijk dat stereotype beschrijvingen niet alleen in de chicklit te vinden zijn, maar ook in de literaire romans. In chicklit vind ik, door de blik van het vrouwelijke hoofdpersonage, de Liefhebbende Adonis, de mooie man met (vaak) blauwe ogen die het vrouwelijke hoofdpersonage in de watten legt. In literaire romans heb ik een spiegel en een antithese gevonden, vanuit het perspectief van het mannelijke hoofdpersonage: de Destructieve Nimf, een aantrekkelijke vrouw met iets delicaats of breekbaars aan haar uiterlijk of lichaam, die het mannelijk hoofdpersonage zowel verleidt als uiteindelijk verraadt. De gemene deler bij vrouwelijke personages over beide genres is het beoordelen van het eigen uiterlijk, met ongedefinieerde 'anderen' in gedachten als beoordelaars.

Met andere woorden: mannelijke en vrouwelijke personages kijken naar de vrouwelijke personages in allebei de genres. Alleen in de chicklitromans kijkt het vrouwelijke personage ook consequent naar een mannelijke potentiële geliefde, dat gebeurt minder vaak in de literaire romans in het corpus. Naar mannen wordt in de literaire romans nauwelijks gekeken in de onderzochte hoofdstukken. Opvallend is dat de mannelijke literaire auteur, door de ogen van het mannelijke hoofdpersonage, de meeste zinnen besteedt aan het beschrijven van uiterlijk; alleen niet dat van het mannelijke personage zelf. Beschrijving van uiterlijk is 'vrouwelijk' in de zin dat vrouwen altijd het onderwerp van de beschrijving zijn in literaire romans, niet dat het door vrouwelijke auteurs beschreven wordt. Bovendien worden in chicklit ook de mannen beschreven, dus ook in die zin is het onderwerp niet exclusief vrouwelijk. Noch is het sterk gelinkt aan de 'vrouwenroman' in de vorm van chicklit, in de literaire romans wordt zelfs meer over uiterlijk geschreven. Dit laat zien hoe belangrijk het perspectief is waarmee men het idee van 'vrouwelijkheid' van de tekst analyseert.

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3. In het corpus dat ik in hoofdstuk 5 gebruikte, dat van genomineerden voor de AKO- en de Libris Literatuur Prijs in de periode 2007-2012 was dit niet het geval. Daar bleek vooral de connectie mannelijke auteur – mannelijk hoofdpersonage zeer sterk. Vrouwelijke auteurs gebruikten hoofdpersonages van meerdere genders.

Met dit tweede deel van mijn proefschrift laat ik zien dat het vooral om perceptie gaat. Vrouwelijke auteurs zijn geen andere soort, zij schrijven, net als mannelijke auteurs, in de stijl van het genre dat zij beoefenen. Uiteraard zijn er accentverschillen, vrouwen en mannen groeien nu eenmaal anders op, maar gender is niet de veroorzaker van alle verschillen. De nadruk ligt hier zowel op 'veroorzaker' als 'alle'. Het werk van een auteur is niet minder literair, *omdat* de auteur een vrouw is. Bovendien wordt vaak een idee van vrouwelijkheid in teksten gelegd van vrouwelijke auteurs, waar allereerst al niet wordt uitgelegd waarom 'vrouwelijk' gelijk staat aan 'laag literair' – en kwalijker wat mij betreft, dat 'mannelijk' dat niet is – maar die bovendien vrij eenvoudig om te keren blijkt, als men ook de teksten van andere romans betreft in de analyse. Met andere woorden, laten we het inderdaad eens over literaire kwaliteit gaan hebben, maar dan zonder de woorden 'vrouwelijke auteur', 'emotioneel' of 'vrouwenboek' te bezigen, want die concepten hebben veel minder inhoud dan hun veelvuldig gebruik suggereert. Laten we, zoals mijn titel suggereert, gaan 'lezen voorbij het vrouwelijke'.

# READING BEYOND THE FEMALE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTION OF AUTHOR GENDER AND LITERARY QUALITY

## SUMMARY

*'Men, be warned, female writers are on the rise!'*<sup>1</sup>

(De Coster, 2014, my translation)

For some years now, the rise of 'the female author' is sung in Dutch national newspapers. She sells well, is read often and it will not be long, some speculate, before women take over the Dutch literary field. On the other hand there are those who claim the opposite, like Dutch blog *Lezeres des Vaderlands* (2016) does. It shows by means of counting that at least the percentage of reviews in Dutch and Flemish periodicals in no way reflects such favouring of female authors. However, some critics argue, these counts do not matter because the discussion should not be centered around gender, but around Literary Quality (i.e. Grunberg, 2015); thereby suggesting that women simply do not produce enough material of high quality. This 'ultimate' argument is not easy to dismantle, since differences between female and male authors do exist. And to argue that the measuring stick is faulty, that of literary quality, will not result in the situation that many female authors desire: an equal position to that of male authors.

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1. Original text: 'Mannen, wees gewaarschuwd, vrouwelijke schrijvers rukken op!' <https://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/-mannen-wees-gewaarschuwd-vrouwelijke-schrijvers-rukken-op~a3577912/>

That is why in this thesis I unravel the relationship between the author's (female) gender and the assignment of literary quality to a work, from two sides: 1) the prestige of female versus male authors and the perception of their work; 2) the texts of the novels themselves. This I do in the context of digital humanities project *The Riddle of Literary Quality*, funded by the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie voor de Wetenschappen (KNAW; Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). The project aims to find correlations between textual characteristics and judgments of literary quality. It uses computational analyses of novels on the one hand and ratings of literary quality assigned by readers to those novels on the other. These ratings were collected in *Het Nationale Lezersonderzoek* (NLO; National Reader Survey). Respondents were asked to supply a rating of literary and of overall quality – on a scale of 1 to 7 – to novels they had read of a list of 401 recent (published between 2007-2012), Dutch-language (translated and originally Dutch work) fictional novels for young adults and adults, who were most often bought from book stores and most often loaned from libraries in the period of 2009-2012 (see Appendix A.1 for the full list of titles). I use these ratings in my thesis, but I do not connect them to the texts of the novels. For this, I refer to van Cranenburgh (2016). My stress is on the perception of female and male authors on the one hand, and the relationship between their novels on the other.

First the image and position of authors. In Chapter 2 I show that female authors are present in the Netherlands, that they produce hundreds of literary novels per year, but that they are not equally present at the literary top.<sup>2</sup> The percentage of female authors that wins a literary prize in the Netherlands is decidedly below fifty percent. There is a 'leaky pipeline', where with each step up the literary ladder more women disappear. In the final part of this chapter I show that the idea that this situation is just about to change is most

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2. When I refer to a 'literary novel', I mean a novel that has been assigned a specific code by the publisher. In the Netherlands, there is a uniform system called NUR (Nederlandstalige Uniforme Rubrieksindeling, roughly translatable as 'Dutch-language Uniform Classification'). Literary novels are those that have been assigned either the code '301 Literary novel, novella' or '302 Translated literary novel, novella'. I do not judge the literary quality of those novels, nor do I refer to the readers' judgments in the NLO. When I do refer to the ratings of literary quality, I will state this explicitly.

likely incorrect and might even be risky, because it leads to complacency: why would anyone take action when it is about to change anyway?

In Chapter 3 I discuss the results of the National Reader Survey. I show which position the (white) female author takes who writes Dutch-language prose. This gives a more complete view of the literary field. In Chapter 2 I consider the elite, the gatekeepers, in Chapter 3 I examine the larger reading audience.<sup>3</sup> The list offered to respondents is, as I stated earlier, based on the novels' popularity, which means I also have a rough estimate of how often originally Dutch *literary* novels by women have been bought and borrowed. This does not result in good news, either, even though half of the novels in the corpus has been written by female authors. Despite the repeated declared rise of the female literary author in the Netherlands, her male colleagues and her translated female colleagues have the upper hand in the literary genre. When I then consider the ratings that respondents give to works by female authors, it is not strange that they are low. Female authors are overrepresented in the genre of romantic fiction, which holds the overall lowest average ratings. Female and male authors take an equal part in the suspense genre. According to the respondents, there is little difference in literary quality of these novels, but the suspense novels by female authors are less good.

Reading behavior is also tied to gender: female respondents report having read male and female authors, with a slight preference for the former. Male respondents mainly report to have read male authors. The men who do read female authors, give higher scores to their novels than female respondents do; female respondents give lower average scores to works by female authors than male respondents. The idea that more female judges would benefit female authors, is thus most likely incorrect. Respondents were also asked to motivate one rating of a novel. Again, there are differences between female and male authors – even when I only isolate the female respondents. The first are judged according to content, the second to structural and formal characteristics. Translation might be a confounding factor here (literary novels by female

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3. Note that the elite is also part of this larger reading public. Respondents were allowed to motivate one of their ratings, and some of them indicated being a professional critic.

authors are more often translated than originally Dutch in this corpus, and vice versa for male authors), but a closer examination of motivations on originally Dutch work by female authors shows that there are indeed subtle differences. All these results indicate that also in the eyes of the general reader, female authors take a different position than male authors.

A downside of the NLO is that female and male authors are not evenly distributed across genre, nor across the translation/originally Dutch divide within the genres. There are more literary novels by male authors than female authors, and within the group of female literary authors there is little originally Dutch work. This means that I cannot easily isolate author gender as a factor: genre and translation might play a role. On the one side, this is one of the strengths of the research, as it shows which factors are at play in the backbenching of female authors and how they interact. Dutch female literary authors are less visible in the whole field. However, the question of the importance of gender *sec* remained. That is why I undertook follow-up research with the Riddle of Literary Quality team, in which texts were manipulated to see if the Dutch public believes that female authors are worse at writing literary prose. We split the respondents into three groups and offered them all the same text of 250 words. In the accompanying information the gender of the author was mentioned. Group 1 was told that they were reading work by a male author, group 2 was told the text had been written by a female author, and group 3 received no information on the author's gender. Then the respondents were asked to provide a rating of literary quality on a scale of 1-7, like in the NLO. Contrary to expectations, the average rating for the 'female' author was not significantly lower than in the other conditions. Group 3 however, when asked, had imagined the author to be a man significantly more often than they thought it was a woman. (Literary) authorship is indeed associated with maleness. An important point to note here is that the text was presented in isolation, and the author was presented as making a debut. Respondents therefore had no idea of the author's prestige. This is a possibility for further research.

In sum, Part I of this thesis shows that female authors in the 21st century are not on par with male authors in the Dutch literary field, that this sustained by the whole field (from consumers' buying behavior through juries handing

out awards), and there is no indication that it is about to change. A cause is hard to pinpoint, because all layers of the field, from the general reader to the literary jury, sustain the current situation, it is a vicious circle. I do not want to point to a guilty party either, I merely map the current situation. My goal is to provide insight, so I can push the field a tiny step towards change, and I mainly hope to do this with the second part of my thesis. The critic, on the basis of Part I, can still claim that no change is possible or necessary, because it is the female author's own fault. She writes works of lower literary quality and is therefore not equal to the male author. We should not talk about the women, but about what they write. That is exactly what I will do next.

In the second part of my thesis I examine texts by several authors. Not just female authors, not just literary works, but the texts of all works in the Riddle corpus (which is the list of the National Reader Survey; see Appendix A.1), supplemented with two other corpora. I will get back to those later. The analyses are performed partially by computational analysis and partially by close reading. My question is: how firmly can we connect the novel's text to the author's gender? First I build a theoretical framework in Chapter 4, based on literary-feminist research, supplied with answers from the National Reader Survey. This shows how in earlier days the female author's gender has been attached to the texts she wrote to downplay literary quality and how this is still done today. The style of a woman's novel, in the form of sentiment ('emotional'), choice of words and subject, used to be seen as feminine, according literary historians van Boven (1992) and Vogel (2001), which equated the novel with being less literary. Such 'femininity' of text is still associated with 'less literary' by the respondents of the NLO. There is also the somewhat surprising result that ideas on 'women's books' in 2013 are still current, which shows that this second part of the thesis is not unnecessary.

In Chapter 5 I relate the research I undertook with Andreas van Cranenburgh (Koolen and van Cranenburgh, 2017b). We research through Natural Language Processing (NLP), in other words computational analysis of text, to which extent the author's gender can be linked to the texts she writes. In practice, when textual gender differences are researched by way of a computer, there is not enough rigorous attention to how the corpus is built. Fiction for instance is seen as one genre, and subgenres are ignored. Of the differences

researchers find between texts by female and male authors in such a corpus, it is assumed that they are *caused* by author gender, while there are possible other confounding factors. To show this is indeed the case, we perform computational analysis on the Riddle corpus, which contains multiple genres of fiction. We examine subject, sentiment and overall style. When we look at the differences between female and male authors, they appear to be large. Then we perform the same analyses again, but then on a corpus of novels that were all nominated for a large literary prize in the Netherlands (see Appendix A.2). The ‘gender differences’ turn out to be much smaller in the set of nominated novels. This shows the importance of genre. Additional visualizations also show that the nature of the differences are not what they appear to be at a first glance. For instance, a topic that the computer identified from the novels and that we labeled as ‘settling down’, was indicated to be one of the biggest differences between female and male authors: it was more typical for female authors. However, upon closer scrutiny we find that it is present in almost all of the novels by male authors, and more so than the topic of ‘military’ that was seen by the computer as more typical for male authors. It shows the importance of the angle at which we look at the data. Finally, there are indications in our research that the difference between dialogue and narrative is more important than the differences between author gender – which, in my view, is more interesting from the perspective of literary analysis. In other words: computer analysis also wants interpretation, and this interpretation is too easily used in Natural Language Processing and digital humanities to enlarge and stress gender differences, even though commonalities are also often large. Gender is not a self-explanatory variable and female authors are not a different kind.

In Chapter 5 I performed bottom-up analysis with my colleague, we analyzed the texts with little prior focus. In the final two chapters I take on a different perspective and perform top-down research, starting with a specific topic. This is a subject that I identified in Chapter 4 as a subject that is seen as ‘feminine’, namely that of attention to physical appearance. For this analysis, I use a set of originally Dutch chick lit and literary novels, that was used in Jautze et al. (2013), see Appendix A.3. In Chapter 6 I describe the process of automated extraction of the sentences that have as their main subject ‘a description of physical appearance of a human character’. By applying several

computational analyses, I attempt to localize such sentences, but this proves to be more complex than anticipated. The first method is based on queries, a sort of basic frame for sentences, which I have written manually (see Appendix B), the second is a form of machine learning, where the computer attempts to learn which sentences contain such a description, based on sentences that I marked as containing a description of physical appearance. Both methods have their strong suits – the queries are good at finding sentences that deal with the body in general, the machine learning is good at finding descriptions – but neither separately, nor together do they reach a high enough percentage of performance to be applied to unseen sentences. There are other results: the chick lit novels turn out to be less varied in language use than the literary novels. The second result is more surprising. The sentences I have used to teach the computer which of them do contain a description of physical appearance show that there is more attention to physical appearance in the literary novels than in the chick lit novels. Therefore I choose to analyze these sentences in the next chapter.

In Chapter 7, I analyze a set of over 200 sentences which contain a description of a character's physical appearance, selected from the first chapters of the chick lit and literary novels used in Chapter 6. Applying the concept of the 'gaze' – roughly definable as looking at a character with lust – I identify (without a computer this time) patterns in the 'viewing behavior' of characters in the novels. In other words: who looks at whom and how? I attempt to find patterns, repetitive types of descriptions. This shows again that the gender of the author is of importance, but not crucial. More important is the gender of the main character – although in this corpus this roughly equates to author gender.<sup>4</sup>

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4. In the corpus that I used in Chapter 5, that of the literary award nominees, this was not the case. There the connection male author – male protagonist was strong, but female authors used protagonists of different genders.

Because I examine two genres on the same level, that of the literary novel and of chick lit, it becomes clear that stereotypical descriptions are not just part of the chick lit but also of the literary novels. In chick lit I find, seen through the eyes of the female protagonist, the Caring Adonis, the beautiful man with (often) blue eyes who pampers the female protagonist. In literary novels I find a mirror and anti-thesis, from the perspective of the male protagonist: the Destructive Nymph, a beautiful woman with something delicate in her appearance or constitution, who both seduces and eventually betrays the male protagonist. The common factor over female protagonists in both genres is the appraisal of one's own appearance, with undefined 'others' in mind as judges.

In other words: male and female protagonists look at female characters in both genres in these first chapters. Only in chick lit novels does the female protagonist consistently look at a (potential) male love interest, which rarely happens in the literary novels. Men are hardly looked at in the literary novels. Surprisingly, the male literary author, through the eyes of the male protagonist, produces the most sentences on description of physical appearance; only not on the male protagonist's appearance. Description of appearance is 'feminine' in the sense that women are most often the subject of such descriptions in literary novels, not that it is described by female authors. Moreover, in chick lit the men are also described, so in that sense the subject is also not exclusively feminine. Nor is it strongly linked to the 'woman's novel' in the form of chicklit, in the literary novels more of such sentences are present. This shows, again, how important the perspective is with which we analyze the idea of 'femininity' in a text.

With this second part of my thesis I show that perception is key. Female authors are not a different kind, they write, like male authors, in the style of the genre they practice. Of course there are some differences, women and men are socialized differently, but gender is not the cause of all differences. The stress lies both with 'cause' and with 'all' in this previous sentence. The work of an author is not less literary, *because* the author is a woman. Moreover, the idea of femininity is put into texts by female authors, where first there is no explanation of why female equals 'less literary' – and, even more problematic in my view, why 'male' does not – but which is quite easily subverted, when we

also take other types of literature into account. In other words, let us indeed talk about literary quality, but without wielding words such as 'female author', 'emotional' or 'women's book', because these concepts have much less content than their frequent use suggests. Let us, like my title proposes, 'read beyond the female'.

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