CHAPTER TEN

EARLY MODERN LITERARY CULTURES AND PUBLIC OPINION: AN EPILOGUE IN THE FORM OF A DISCUSSION

Jan Bloemendal and Arjan van Dixhoorn

THE LOW COUNTRIES AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This book set out to discuss the relevance of the notion of public opinion to the study of the literary culture of an early modern society. We advanced a pragmatic understanding of that notion in dealing with several related aspects of public life in any given society, and certainly so in such greatly developed regions as the Low Countries. The high level of organization in public life in these countries was epitomized in the well-developed network of print and bookshops and the networks of the chambers of rhetoric, institutions of performative literary culture that stood at the crossroads of various local, regional and supra-regional circles. The rhetoricians maintained tight-knit networks on various levels through their regular exercises, their involvement in local and interurban festive culture, and the organization of (supra-) regional festive literary contests. The chambers were the institutional heart of a much broader civic culture in the core regions of the Low Countries and literary practices were an essential part of that culture. The supranational *respublica literaria* was in many ways linked to the worlds of print, rhetoricians' culture and performative literature. The learned humanists of this Latinized world maintained international networks, witness the many vast correspondences that have been preserved in manuscript and print. For humanists and vernacular rhetoricians alike, literary practices were essential, and both groups spread news and aimed to influence the views of friends and fellow citizens.

The people of the Low Countries could and did engage in debates about a variety of issues, at local, regional and interregional levels through these institutions, networks and other centres of literary culture. Literary institutions and practices created a 'system' that enabled the cross-sectional and interurban circulation and appropriation of ideas, knowledge, literary techniques, rhetorical skills and reputations.

The system was dependent on the publics that engaged wilfully (or otherwise) in public debates and in the formation of consensus views and antagonisms. Publics were always divided, constrained and influenced by widely shared beliefs or by what were believed to be majority and minority views, but recipients could of course also affect and change such views. As several contributions to our volume show, early modern opinions did not necessarily express the voices of authorities, although they did not automatically oppose them either. Contrary to what the Habermasian notion of an early modern one-way 'representative public sphere' suggests, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did abound with controversy; from debates engendered by the Lutheran, Radical, Calvinist and Catholic Reformations to international, national and local political discussions such as constitutional issues, questions of war and peace, poverty, and good governance. These controversies always show a relatively high level of attempts to convince others. Or rather: we often only know about them from the greater number of persuasive texts inextricably intertwined with controversial events, issues, people and institutions.

Of course, this does not imply that in early modern society the connection between social debates and the implementation of proposals supported by the population was self-evident. In our view, however, this is not a precondition for the existence of the formation of public opinion. The contributions to this volume all add to our understanding of the making of public opinion as a communicative process. They question, qualify or affirm our initial views, and in our view they point to seven key problems and issues relevant to the study of the role of literary culture in the early modern process of the formation of public opinion.

The first issue to take into account is: what is the significance of being (part of) a public and how does this affect the study of public opinion? In other words: how do publics come into existence, what opinions do they hold, how can we learn about these views and how do we study them? Secondly, if we study people who seem to intervene in attempts to change 'public opinion', what exactly do we mean by impact and how do we measure influence? Thirdly, if people try to influence public opinion, they wish to be heard and seen, which makes accessibility and observation crucial issues in our understanding of the forming of public opinion. Fourthly, since the making of public opinion is a process involving people who want to be noticed and others who might want to silence them instead, both the restrictions

introduced by formal or group censorship or self-censoring, as well as the means to evade or overcome censorship are crucial. Fifthly, we believe that it is important to distinguish carefully between attempts to influence people's views and outright propaganda. A sixth issue concerns the sources useful for the study of public opinion, and the way they can be studied, not as mirrors, but as factors in the process of the formation of public opinion (both on the level of individual minds and of collective interaction).

This then leads to the seventh issue, the final question of our study: how are literary culture and the formation of public opinion related and how should we study these categories of social life in conjunction with each other on a theoretical level? In other words, how can we study the qualities of a text with respect to public opinion-formation, how do we discern opinions on public issues in literary texts, how can we determine the position that the author might have taken in public controversies, and how should we establish whether that position is representative in relation to other opinions expressing similar views? We will briefly address the seven key issues in an attempt to synthesize the most important challenges, problems and solutions put forward by the contributions in this volume.

I: PUBLICS, OPINIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATIVENESS

The link between spaces and publics is crucial to the study of public opinion since views and texts have their origins in communities and networks. We must discern clearly between local, regional, national and international publics, while always recognizing the interplay between them. The 'shape' of publics and the spheres in which problems are dealt with change with the developing issues. The emerging controversies, like publics, are always local too; however national or international their focus, they need not only virtual but also real locations in which to occur and for people to interact in.

The interplay between geographical space, institutional arena, and local circle is nicely shown in the case of the ditty sung in Alphen aan den Rijn in the 1680s, as discussed by Spaans. The song expresses anger at the role of local authorities in an ecclesiastical conflict turned political. It shows engagement in the conflict on the part of the singing locals. It expresses views, singles out key figures and sides with one party, dismissing the other, in the burlesque terms typical of early

modern satire. Instead of being mere entertainment, the ditty was fully part of the highly charged politicized culture in the village. It dealt with an (initially) institutional conflict in the circles of church and (local and central) government that became the subject of intense observation by larger segments of the population, while more people also became increasingly engaged, and not merely as passive bystanders but as active participants. People incited their children to harass those of the other party by following them in the streets, taunting them with satirical songs.

The interplay between local, national and international publics is evident in controversies that were acted out on regional and supra-regional levels. There too, the local context from which conflicts spiral into wider spheres (and back to local sites) is crucial in explaining the dynamics of the process of opinion-formation. This is clearly shown in the case of Grotius's epitaph for Arminius as discussed by Van Oosterhout. The poem intervened in a local event and controversy which arose after the death and burial of a well-known theologian and the recent theological disputes at Leiden University between the followers of Arminius and his colleague Gomarus. The poem—which, in accordance with the learned nature of the deceased and of the controversy, addressed a relatively small audience of learned Latinized readers that soon grew and did so beyond the control of its creator, added to the increasingly public nature of the conflict. The case of Grotius's poem shows how such a text could add fuel to a controversy. Its later translation into English also enabled a transition from a sphere of learned debate to even wider vernacular audiences. Although the poem originated from the tight-knit Neo-Latin community of Leiden University, it soon entered wider Neo-Latin networks and, despite its author, did play a role in the gradual development of distinct Arminian and Gomarist political movements. Owing to his irenic views and the responses to his poem, Grotius unintentionally moved to a leading position in Arminianism, first on a national level and then, again without his active consent, in another national arena: England.

The example of Anna Bijns, as discussed by Keßler, also shows how her fight to preserve and purify the Catholic faith of the Low Countries linked a local community of Franciscan supporters in Antwerp to wider networks of Franciscans, priests, humanists and rhetoricians in Ghent and Bruges. If the Stevijn she mentions is to be identified as Stevijn vanden Gheeste, for example, he linked Bijns to Eduard de Dene, a Bruges poet and playwright who acquired his interurban fame as a

rhetorician in the 1560s and was a loyal Catholic. Between the 1520s and 1560s, such groups and networks provided a creative environment and a supportive audience which enabled Bijns to wage her fierce polemics against Protestants. The extant manuscript collections of her poems reflected these local communities, while the Dutch and Latin printed editions reflected and built the larger networks, in attempts to reach out to wider (even international) audiences and provide them with the polemical tools to attack Protestants locally. Several Catholic communities were stimulated by Bijns's polemical qualities. On the other hand, such a polemical literary culture not only emerged from these local communities and regional networks, but also helped to create, sustain and solidify them into a movement that was seeking its own leadership in higher circles as well.

Bijns became a central and iconic figure in a regional network of local communities involved in concerted efforts to defend and rebuild the Catholic Church in the Low Countries and silence the Protestants. Helmers shows how, two centuries later, in the young Dutch Republic of the 1650s, a (loosely organized) network of playwrights and poets—often of non-Calvinist conviction and linked to the States party—engaged in strenuous efforts to influence Dutch policies towards Commonwealth England. Most of them were linked to the Amsterdam City Theatre and its literary networks which dominated the theatrical scene in the Dutch-speaking Low Countries as a whole from the 1630s onwards. In their efforts, the poets and dramatists associated with the Stuart royalist lobby against the radical Commonwealth puritans, who, in their view, might have represented a dangerous model for the Calvinists which controlled the Reformed Church of the Dutch Republic. The dramatists and poets also allied themselves with the Orangist cause, which after the death in 1650 of William II of Orange—who had become very controversial by trying to convince the States of Holland and Amsterdam in particular to intervene in England—formed an opposition to the States party which had decided to leave the office of Stadtholder vacant. These poets and dramatists also opposed the regents of Amsterdam who supported the States and who constituted the political powerhouse of the Dutch Republic, even though many of these writers were part of literary networks that included leaders of the States party. Thus the playwright Jan Vos belonged to the inner circle of Joan Huydecoper, the powerful burgomaster of Amsterdam and opponent of Orange in 1650. The Rotterdam poet Joachim Oudaen was a friend of Johan de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland and leader of

the States party from 1653 onwards. Helmers' case shows how an issue of international politics became intertwined with national politics and the dynamics of partisanship.

Helmers' case helps to unravel the fact that many playwrights, poets and pamphleteers promoted a similar cause, since their consensus in itself does not mean that they were representative of large numbers of people. The Dutch Revenge Tragedies dealing with the execution of Charles I indeed may very well have tried to convey the *impression* that the revenge discourse of 'martyrdom' and 'parricide' resonated with the public. This suggestion is seemingly strengthened by the absence of opposing views. Still, the implicit 'representativeness' of a consensus view remains a *fiction* in the sense that it is difficult if not impossible to verify the general attitudes of the Dutch people versus the English Commonwealth. In any attempt to measure the potential effects of the plays and the consensus view that they defend, it hardly matters whether or not theirs were mainstream views. However, if they had succeeded in solidifying the impression that the general public agreed, the fiction might then successfully have influenced the sense of the climate of opinion among decision makers, and thus the pressure under which they operated. The fiction might also have convinced and pressured the theatre and reading publics to accept the framing of the conflict in terms of 'martyrdom', 'patricide', 'revenge', which must have linked the death of Charles I to the murder of William of Orange and provided fuel for debates on the topic.

The problem of research into historical opinion is that we will never know what most people believed. Therefore, every account which claims to reflect public opinion should be interpreted with the greatest caution, since it may well express just one voice in public debate or mistake the strongly expressed views of a minority for that of the majority, or stem from the principle that people often take the views of their immediate environment to be the mainstream opinion. The fundamental rule should be that historians ought always to consider a view that expressly or implicitly invokes that 'public opinion' comprises first and foremost the ideas of the author, and then only with great care attribute them to a segment of the population, be this a majority or a minority.

When, in his *Auriacus* (1602), the young Leiden scholar Daniel Heinsius referred to the Flemish sorrows inflicted by Spanish tyranny, he implicitly invoked a moral duty to free Flanders. This was the opinion of one person, but since it was voiced in a play, it is likely that he

expected the audience to at least identify with these Flemish sorrows and the notion of Spanish tyranny, particularly since he linked the issue to the murder of William of Orange and the subsequent revenge by Prince Maurits. The more delicate question, however, is how many people among the play's live audience or among the readers of the printed edition would have shared Heinsius's call for revenge in yet another attempt to 'free' Flanders? Did he voice the opinion of a lobby of Flemish immigrants? What did native Hollanders among his audience think about this topic? And what about the people of Flanders on whose behalf Heinsius implicitly claimed to speak in favour of a continued war effort? That he felt compelled to try to convince his audience indicates that support was not universal. In 1609, his fellow citizen Jacob Duym, a nobleman from Brabant, a former captain in the States army and a Leiden rhetorician, borrowed Heinsius's theme of the assassination of William for a similar cause. In the run-up to the Twelve Years' Truce, the options were to make peace with Spain or continue the war. Duym spoke in favour of war too. As Groenland points out, he expressed an opinion that could have been shared by many or by a few—we just do not know.

Contemporary notions of public opinion

The appearance of the fictitious representation of public opinion in many texts shows that people were familiar with the notion, and quite likely were aware of the problematic (numeric) nature of such representations as well as of their impact on the way people estimated mainstream views and trends. In fact, the example of Cornelis Everaert as discussed by Mareel shows that at least some of the early modern literate inhabitants of the Low Countries were not only highly aware of the existence of public opinion phenomena, but also had sophisticated views about their dynamics. The argumentation structure of early modern Dutch allegorical theatre (and many of the early printed pamphlets) already provided a model of everyday small talk, conversation and discussion, with protagonists representing mankind, the citizenry, the government or the clergy, debating a particular problem.¹ These plays dealt with a variety of topics, some of them highly controversial. Everaert's plays also explicitly represent and discuss the world

¹ See Spies, "Op de questye..." and Ramakers, 'In utramque partem vel in plures'.

of gossip, newsmongering, and public formation of opinion. The 'popular' voices of *Everyday Chitchat* and *The People's Gossip* represent the circulation and discussion of bits of news among the people. These 'popular' voices often disagree with the 'official' voices such as *The Will of the Lord*. Mareel contends that this world of the speedy transmission of news as represented in Everaert's plays, corresponds with what the study of chronicles, diaries and court records has brought to the surface. He rightly points out that these plays do not just illustrate everyday reality but instead offer an insight into the ways in which the nature and the workings of these phenomena were understood.

A fundamental notion in the early modern perception of public opinion was the apparent volatility of the public. In Everaert's words, it would be hard to draw any consistent conclusions about what the public was thinking, 'because the opinion of the people is so unstable and changeable'. This principle of social life was summarized in the classical proverb, quoted, for example, in the chronicle of the beginning of the Revolt by Marcus van Vaernewijck, 'daer veel volcx es, daer zijn veel zinnen' (so many people, so many opinions),² or in the Latin of Erasmus's *Adagia*, 'quot homines, tot sententiae'.³ According to Dirck Pietersz. Pers's Dutch appropriation of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1644), a woman in elegant dress should represent 'Opinione', a concept translated into Dutch as 'Gemeen Gevoelen of Waen' (Common Feeling or Delusion).⁴ In order to stress how easily she might be convinced, *Opinio* is pictured with wings on both hands and shoulders.

The *Iconologia* defines Common Feeling as 'probably anything that takes place in the minds (*sinnen*) and the imagination (*inbeeldinge*) of a Person', and 'since there are so many different minds and feelings', it follows that there is also an enormous number of opinions, as recognized in the common proverb 'so many heads, so many feelings'.⁵ The many wings, the *Iconologia* amplifies, stress the readiness

² See Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden* 8, 28, ed. Vanderhaeghen, vol. 4, p. 130. See also dbnl.

³ Erasmus, *Adagia* 207 (I.3.7). The notion of the volatility of the people also dates back to Antiquity, witness, for instance, the representation of Fama (the volatile rumour) in Virgil, *Aeneid* 4, 173–77.

⁴ See the image of *Opinio* in the contribution by Spaans.

⁵ 't Gemeene Gevoelen of Waen is misschien, al 't geene dat plaets heeft in de sinnen en in de inbeeldinge van den Mensch: of ten minsten in dat alleene, dat niet waarschijnlijk is te bewijzen, en om datter verscheyden verstanden en genegentheden zijn, soo zijnder oock oneyndlijcke meeningen. Waer uyt dit gemeen spreekwoord

(‘vaerdigheyt’) with which opinions or common feelings are instantly accepted and then rejected again. *Iconologia*’s final (rather pejorative) association depicts *Opinio* hurrying through the world, mostly wearing the dress of ignorance, wherever she might go.⁶ This female image of Opinion running through the world quite likely refers to a view, often invoked in early modern Europe that associated women with gossip and the spread of rumour.⁷

In a refrain with the *stok* or *sententie* ‘Want alzo menigh hooft Also menich zin’ (for so many heads, so many feelings), the Bruges rhetorician Eduard de Dene (1505–1576/79), confronts true Reason (*Reden*) with Opinion, whom he clearly associated with conceit, vain learning, heresy, wisdom of man (instead of wisdom of God), and sophistry. In a manuscript containing his ambitious poetry anthology, the *Testament Rhetoricael* (1561), a brief introduction preceding the refrain summarizes the message of De Dene’s rhymed argument:

Carnal Feeling, Opinion, Blinded Mind
and Ingenious Wit, please believe me,
these four, give council and assist,
in concealing and embezzling the truth.
It often goes topsy-turvy as it turns out:
People’s opinions govern the world.⁸

Opinion in these views is a many-headed monster, ignorant, easily persuaded, and highly volatile. Such pejorative notions circulated in early modern Europe, as part of the Classical heritage and, certainly, as the result of the personal ‘experience’ of people who believed themselves to be governed more by Reason than by Opinion. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Opinion’s rather elitist and pejorative view was mainstream. Neither does it follow from this that Opinion,

komt, soo veel hoofden, soo veel sinnen.’ Pers, *Cesare Ripa’s Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghen des Verstants*, p. 152.

⁶ ‘De vleugels aen handen en schouders, betoonen de vaerdigheyt, waer mede de opinie of het gemeen Gevoelen, wort aengevat en wederom verworpen, jae by nae op een tijt en oogenblick. Rennende in der yl door de gantsche Wereld, dragende ten meestendeel het kleed der onwetenthey, waer zy oock gaet.’ *Ibidem*.

⁷ See, for example, Capp, *When Gossips Meet*; Cowan, ‘Gossip and Street Culture in Early Modern Venice’, p. 315; Horodowich, ‘The gossiping tongue’.

⁸ Eduard de Dene, *Testament rhetoricael*, ed. Waterschoot and Coigneau, vol. 2, p. 81: ‘Vleeschlick zin / Opinie / verblendt in tverstandt // midsgaders vernuft inden gheest / wilt Luusteren // dese viere gheuen Raedt / en bieden dhandt // Omme de waerheyt verborghen en verduusteren // Tghaetter Al auerecht meest ghekeerelt // Opinien der mensschen Regieren de weerelt’. Also dbnl.

in the words of De Dene, did *not* govern the world.⁹ Despite such reservations, however, it is safe to assume that Opinion's pejorative view was prominent among members of government. The correspondence of Margaret of Parma, governess of the Low Countries from 1559 to 1567, for example, abounds with the view that people are easily deceived, particularly women, the unlearned and the young, which made them vulnerable to all sorts of doctrines. This principle made it imperative for anyone who was interested in the support of the people to invest in attempts to win their hearts and minds. It also put a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the deceivers and those who had to defeat them. In fact, evidence from the persecution of heretics in the Low Countries does indeed show that opinion leaders were punished more severely than their followers. Early modern rhetorician drama engaged with these dynamics by making the wise (councillors, scholars and rhetoricians) and the deceivers (the so-called *sinnekens*) fight for the minds of figures representing Mankind, the citizenry and all kinds of 'ordinary' people.

II: IMPACT, INFLUENCE AND AUTHORITY

The idea of the volatility of public opinion and the responsibility given to opinion leaders, texts, images and performances in the early modern period show that contemporaries believed that it was possible to influence the opinions of the public, and that this was something important. Of course, this is no 'proof' for actual impact, and measuring the impact of a publicly expressed view remains a high on impossible task for the historian. An important factor in the potential effects of a publicly expressed opinion which does, to a certain extent, lend itself to investigation is the authority of the 'speaker' and his or her texts.

Literary culture offered 'speakers' various means to claim authority. De Dene's contrasting positioning of Reason and Opinion can, for example, be interpreted as a way to claim the position of a wise person who voices a stable truth, instead of uttering just another interchangeable opinion. An author's attempt to associate with an accepted source of authority such as the Scriptures, the Ancients, Reason, Learning or Common Sense, is just another way to become a source of reference to

⁹ For a positive view on public opinion, see Van Dixhoorn, 'The grain issue of 1565–1566'.

others. Rather, implicit sources of authority could be the age, gender, education, class and institutional status of a 'speaker', or his or her historical moment in time. The case of Anna Bijns shows how women experienced different constraints and possibilities than men in spreading their opinions and making them highly regarded and potentially influential. Since authority is always attributed, often claimed, but never self-evident, it was also derived from the institution, group, network or faction to which the author belonged. Bijns, for example, partly derived her authority from an institutional base, i.e. the Minorites or Franciscans, and from a close-knit network of orthodox Catholics. Clearly, she will not have had much authority among Lutherans, just as Luther did not have much authority among Catholics.

There are several ways of acquiring authority that are relevant to the study of the role of literary culture in the process of public formation of opinion. Authority can first be granted on the basis of attributed representativeness: in the case of someone considered to be speaking for the people, a majority, or a considerable group. Anna Bijns acquired such a 'representative authority', with the Franciscans promoting her as their spokeswoman. A second type is the 'intrinsic' or 'ethical' (in a rhetorical sense) authority, with someone speaking as an expert on the matter, as did Grotius in his poem on Arminius. A third type of authority can be derived from the outsider position. 'Outsider authority' can be acquired by someone claiming to look at a case as an outsider (an 'other') and who, from that position, can express new and revealing opinions. This position might be taken by foreigners in travel reports, but might also, and more frequently, be represented by internal 'others', such as, in early modern times, the fool and other literary personifications of the simple folk (or common sense). A fourth type is the 'authority of the inspired', derived from inspiration by God, angels or saints. The 'exceptional' role attributed by the Franciscans to Bijns in what they thought to be apocalyptic times in which Lutheranism spread also relates to this type of authority. In many cases, such as those of Bijns, a person or institution's actual role will combine various types of authority.

An author who acquired (rather than just claimed) authority could become an important agent in the process of opinion formation, an opinion leader acquiring attention and reactions from wider audiences. In his epitaph for Arminius, Grotius presents himself as a scholarly humanist, claiming for himself the authority of an expert. The way his Latin poem circulated points to the role of networks in the creation

of his authority and the impact of his arguments. He might also have used his poem about Arminius to make a name as a theologian. He certainly used his theological knowledge and reputation to present an irenic stance in the controversy around Arminius's views. The role of a learned community in creating authority also helped Bijns, whose skilful mastering of vernacular rhetorical culture was acknowledged by the Franciscans and other experts in theology. Thus the use of a certain language, Latin or vernacular, and literary techniques, played an important role in the creation of authority. The young Heinsius (he was twenty-one at the time) claimed some authority by writing a fully-fledged Senecan drama. He might have done so in order to restore classical drama in the northern Low Countries, to acquire a position at Leiden University, or to exhort Maurits not to abandon the southern provinces. He did so in tragedy, a genre familiar from Latin literature. His views were then (skilfully) adapted for vernacular audiences by the learned rhetorician Duym.

Naturally the impact or influence of these texts on audiences cannot simply be assumed from the skills and authority of their author, their language, the quality of the production (be it a performance or a printed book or a manuscript). The effects on the minds of individual members of the audience or reading public must be assumed to have been as diverse as were the people, depending on the intensity of their attention, their knowledge of the topic and their linguistic and interpretative skills, experiences and preconceived views; all impossible to measure for the historian. The task of assessing influence is hampered further by the two-step-flow principle of mass communication: attentive members of the audiences and readers are likely to have discussed their theatrical or reading experiences with others.¹⁰

Impact and influence can be measured on various levels, and the setting of an agenda is one of them.¹¹ This means that an important form of impact is achieved when an audience is informed of a certain problem or certain views, which might invite or even seduce them to think about or at least make them attentive to the issues. This might then lead to the acceptance of the issue or of these views as important matters that need further attention. This second form of impact might be achieved when members of the public come to view an issue as their own, even if they would not agree with the views of the one who

¹⁰ For the 'two-step-flow theory', see the introduction, p. #.

¹¹ See also Bloemendal, 'Receptions and Impact'.

initially made them aware. This might lead to a third form of influence that is achieved when the original messenger comes to be seen as the problem and becomes the centre of controversy. In short, the fact alone that people are 'forced' to deal with an issue should be considered as a form of influence with an impact on the course of (a smaller or larger segment of) society. An author or text might also be successful in effectively framing an issue. For example, if people accepted the Dutch playwrights' representation of the execution of Charles I as an illegitimate regicide, the King as a martyr, and the act as a call for revenge, this already could be claimed a success, even if people might not have accepted their call for war against England.

In an early modern society such as the Low Countries, literary texts were very important in creating a public pool of arguments, names, and frames that could be used to interpret events and issues, as is shown in the demonization of the Catholic Church by the Dutch humanist Gnapheus, or that of the Lutherans by Bijns, of the English Puritans by Dutch playwrights, of the local minister and other authorities by some inhabitants of Alphen, of Protestants by Jesuits, and of Spanish Catholics by English writers. A similar effect might have been achieved by Heinsius's portrayal of the 'sorrows of the Flemish', Duyym's and Heinsius's portrayal of William of Orange as a hero, or Van de Wael's portrayal of Maurits as a new David. Grotius might have persuaded some of his readers into a more favourable view of Arminius despite a continuing disagreement in matters of theology, or he might have succeeded in convincing others that the issues had to be dealt with in the scholarly community instead of openly. The problem of influence is shown in the fact that Grotius's intervention provoked others to react by doing precisely the opposite: making the controversy public in the vernacular, as Gomarus did. An unfavourable effect, however, is still an effect. The arrest of the Alphen singers is another example of an unintended form of impact (which gave their song further publicity). Whatever impact one is looking for, it is important to distinguish between effects on the opinions of populations and effects on the fictive public opinion, or the idea people have or with which they are confronted, or what the general public supposedly believes.

III AND IV: THE PUBLIC EYE AND CENSORSHIP

The ditty sung in the Alphen 'Pig War' is not only an example of the way in which texts could make an impact, but also shows that

interested outsiders were actively gauging the conflict. The fact that the observation of the conflict was expressed in a song was part of what made the conflict into a public phenomenon. The public eye already has an impact when insiders in a controversy act upon their awareness of being watched. Whatever the ditty accomplished politically and institutionally, and whatever its message conveyed to the ultimate settling of the conflict, it already *worked* in the conflict as a reminder to others that people were watching and evaluating the conflict, and forming their views. Each time ditties about the conflict were sung when people were at work or as a way to attack and profile people, they helped to keep the issue on the public agenda. Singing the ditty was therefore partly what made the controversy a public issue in the first place. The same dynamic can be found at the highest international level with the media attention and spin surrounding the 'Spanish Match', the intended marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales and the Spanish Infanta Maria in 1623 as discussed by Moser. This media attention is what generally creates 'historical' events (and gives them their names).

The importance of being noticed is closely linked to the idea of the public. People watch and observe and are being observed.¹² Or they take others who have made observations as their witnesses. Catching the public eye is one of the first goals of literary techniques that help the ideas expressed to be noticed and memorized. As we argued before, the fact alone of being noticed means having some impact or influence. Grotius distributed a poem in praise of Arminius among his friends and that in itself was already an act of seeking attention which extended beyond the effect and influence that he might have achieved through taking part in conversations. The fact that a text is fixed and encoded in a literary way suggests an orientation towards an audience. This can therefore only mean that the author or the printer wanted it to be heard, read and/or seen, and was aiming to wield some power over the audience's minds, particularly if the text showed a superior mastery of form, language and argumentation. Such a text could be disseminated in print, manuscript or performance, and these are all attempts to catch the public eye. In early modern times this

¹² See for example, Schlögl, 'Politik Beobachten. Öffentlichkeit und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit'.

was already recognized, witness the 'sharpness' attributed to 'a honed tongue' by Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft.

The power of tongue and pen was clearly acknowledged in the early modern Low Countries, as elsewhere. The dangerous aspects of this power called for a balancing power, which was laid out in moral and legal principles concerning the limits of free speech.¹³ Authorities and ordinary people alike could take action against those who, in their view, had broken these rules, or had aimed to prevent people from taking action. Various policies of censorship, self-censorship and ways to speak the truth without insult or transgression of rules emanated from the recognition of the dangerous power of speech. As Mareel has shown, the Bruges rhetorician Cornelis Everaert noted in the manuscript of his *Van Groot Labuer en Sober Wasdom* that the performance of the play was blocked 'because the truth had not been concealed'. This raises the question as to whether this 'truth' could have been revealed in ways that would not have caused unease. One of the ways to evade censorship might be to veil the message in allegory or mythology, thus not directly attacking a contemporary authority or group of people. An obvious way to evade the effects of censorship would be to conceal the author and printer of a work. The famous and controversial Amsterdam poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel for instance had his *Maria Stuart* (1646) published anonymously and with a false imprint, 'In Cologne, at the old printing house' ('Te Keulen, in d'oude druckerye'). He did so to prevent censorship from the authorities, but it should be stressed that literary texts might also be self-censored through the author's assessment of the public's reaction.

We should not forget, however, that early modern society in the Low Countries seems to have left some space for free speech if delivered in certain forms, such as those embodied by the fool. The fool or 'foolish' texts could present controversial views under the pretext of 'folly', as Erasmus famously did in his *The Praise of Folly*. This does, not mean, however that the position of the fool was without limits; problems could still arise if the object of attacks was singled out explicitly or if a text or act became associated with controversy. *The Praise of Folly*, for example, was put on the Index with all Erasmus's other works. To some extent, a similar logic of freedom as embodied in the 'timeless' culture of laughter evoked by comical texts and

¹³ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*.

performances might also be discerned in the 'higher' forms of literary genres epitomized by the tragedy. In this case, the topicality of a play might be veiled somehow by forcing it into a 'timeless', universal logic of the rise and fall of the high and mighty. Tragedy for example, required the fall of lofty persons through their own faults or those of others, moulded into the Aristotelian unity of time and place. Through the constraints of the genre, the fate of William of Orange or Charles I as represented in tragedy was taken out of the immediate political (and therefore potentially provocative) context, and sublimated into the universal logic of the tragedy. The world of performance had, of course, its own dynamics in relation to censorship. This was exemplified in the performance of poems and songs which, unlike plays, do not need a set time and place, require no organization, and instead can be disseminated physically and verbally by individuals. The authors of such texts, who, if known, could be held responsible in law for the views they voiced in their work, could easily remain unidentified and the ephemeral character of reciting a poem or singing a ditty made pre-emptive censorship impossible and punishment problematic. The fact that early modern authorities tried to impose self-censorship by banning provocative texts from the public realm already attests to the impact they were expected to have.

V: OPINION MAKING AND PROPAGANDA

Historians easily turn to the notion of propaganda when they are confronted with attempts to influence others. However, most interventions in the process of opinion-formation come from individuals and small groups, voicing their opinions among many others, without having the ability to control the flow of news and opinions. We believe it is crucial to distinguish between, on the one hand, individual attempts to influence people's opinions and, on the other hand, outright propaganda. In general, propaganda is defined as a systematic and repeated attempt to influence people's minds:

Propaganda is neutrally defined as a systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels.¹⁴

¹⁴ Nelson, *A Chronology and Glossary of Propaganda in the United States*, p. 233.

Propaganda, then, is a process—a form of manipulative communication designed to elicit some predetermined response—‘the organized spreading of special doctrines, information, ideas or beliefs to promote or injure a cause, group, nation, etc.’¹⁵ Manipulation, exclusion (of other views), organization and control, and thus a link to power, are the features of propaganda. Because of the haphazard and open-ended nature of most of the public process of opinion formation we are convinced that the term propaganda should be used strictly for concerted and systematic efforts to manipulate people. Even if more people try to push similar views at the same time, or if someone tries to repeat another’s efforts, in the absence of a powerful organizational centre or of a propaganda machine which promotes a single view while aiming to exclude others, we should be careful to speak of propaganda. It is also important to consider the context of efforts towards propaganda. An organization responsible for such efforts will, by definition, be unwilling to engage in open discussions of the issues at stake. However, if these efforts take place in a totally open and heterogeneous society, with well-developed cultures of criticism, the term propaganda should also be used with caution. This is because, despite the intention of the propagandists, the communicative practices with which they are confronted are beyond their control. It might then be useful to distinguish carefully between the propagandistic intent and its practice or effect.

For instance, the plays dealing with the execution of Charles I, as discussed by Helmers, certainly promote similar views. However, there is no evidence of a well-organized network or even the active engagement of a central authority, such as Charles II’s entourage, in sponsoring and organizing these playwrights for a concerted campaign to change the minds of the Dutch and their government so that they would favour war. If there would have been a royalist plot to influence Dutch people or their authorities, the plays could have been considered part of a propaganda campaign, while in this instance the evidence only points to a commonly held opinion among an informal group of like-minded poets. In the case of Bijns, the fact that a network of the Antwerp Minorites and other clergymen was active in the promotion and printing of her poems comes close to a systematic effort to influence Roman Catholics to defend their Church and others to return. This was, however, also a very special project, with the poems most

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

likely emerging from Bijns's activities in the local community. They were not, or so it seems, the result of a continuous and organized intervention, but rather of the manifold attempts by individuals and smaller networks of Catholics to counter the rise of Protestantism. The Spanish and English campaigns against the Spanish Match discussed by Moser are probably closest to a propaganda effort, if they were indeed orchestrated by Olivares and Buckingham or their courtly entourage. Even then they were conducted in unfavourable environments and represented a view that ran counter to the official line in both Kingdoms.

Demoed's analysis of the Dutch humanist Gnapheus's scholarly and polemical career, focussing on his play *Hypocrisis*, also shows how problematic the use of the notion of propaganda is in the context of the Reformation. The Hague-based Latin teacher Gnapheus became one of the early leaders of the movement for Reform in the Low Countries. Although he was arrested in 1523 with Jan de Bakker and Cornelis Hoen on suspicion of heresy, he was only temporarily incarcerated then, and again in 1525. After he was banished from the country in 1528, he moved to Elbing in the equally Catholic Kingdom of Poland. This suggests that he had not yet broken with the Church of Rome. Gnapheus clearly was one of many humanists and vernacular literati who helped to carve out Reform projects locally while striving for a leading role on a regional and international scale as well. Gnapheus was accused of Sacramentarianism and Anabaptism in Elbing, and later showed interest in Zwinglianism. His individual style, Demoed's analysis shows, was derived from Neo-Latin humanist and vernacular written, printed and performative cultures. His individual struggle for reform might have been the reason for his expulsion from Königsberg, although we should be careful in casting him as the victim of a unified Lutheran Orthodoxy. It could be significant that his heresy trial began in 1547, following the death of Luther in 1546, which might have sparked controversies about the future of Lutheranism. In short, Gnapheus's interventions for evangelical Reform points to a highly personal search for public leadership in debates and controversies concerning the Reform movement rather than an organized propaganda effort on behalf of a fixed set of opinions against another easily identifiable set of doctrines. The Catholic Church, which these scholars first reified and then attacked, was already deeply heterogeneous in itself.

VI: THE SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION

The formation of public opinion is a communicative process that involves the interaction of individuals and larger groups, cultural practices and institutions. In this process, people's perceptions of the effects of those interactions play a crucial role. To put it differently, the process of public opinion-formation is characterized by a continuous evaluation of events, institutions, groups and of people's actions, words and thoughts. This also means that the number of sources that provide evidence of the process of public opinion-formation is huge. In this book, we have focussed on a highly visible and obvious group of sources which nonetheless have largely been ignored by historians: literary texts. This focus on literary texts and, by extension, literary culture is inspired by the contextualization approach in writing on literary history, as well as by the more recent trend of focussing on the performative qualities of literary texts that were indeed part of a larger culture of eloquence and wit.¹⁶

The view that the categorization of early modern texts into literary and non-literary is based on a modern taxonomy of genres, which is very different from the early modern view that made no clear-cut distinctions between written texts, is relevant to the study of the role of literary texts in the public process of opinion-formation. In fact, literary culture in general should be considered just as crucial for the understanding of early modern opinion as the modern media are worthy of study for the understanding of modern public opinion. This means that historians need to take recourse to the study of literary texts and literary culture to understand the dynamics of opinion-formation: continuing, of course, to make use of their more traditional sources such as archival material, as Moser effectively demonstrates. It also means that literary historians interested in the study of literature beyond formalism, structuralism and post-structuralism, need to turn to sources and research methods traditionally used by historians and historical sociologists, while both need to link their research to the larger discussions about public opinion in the historiography of modernity, philosophy and the social sciences. This is important because we believe that the formation of public opinion is at the heart

¹⁶ Van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten*; also O'Callaghan, *The English Wits*.

of early modern literary cultures, both Latin and vernacular, which interacted on various levels, as is shown in several of the contributions in this volume.

Should literary sources be our most important source in the study of public opinion? If that would be our argument, early modernists would make the same mistakes which theorists of modern public opinion, with Habermas as their protagonist, have made. Instead of isolating and privileging the sophisticated means of communication controlled by rather small groups of society (be it the mass media of modern or the literary cultures of pre-modern societies), these texts should be studied as unique interventions flaring up in a continuous chain of other unique, but perhaps everyday interventions (spoken and body language, acts, images of people) and the (actual and possible) perceptions of those interventions by the same or other people. The focus of research should be on a series of interventions by an author (and on his or her means of publication, such as in the case of Bijns or Gnapheus) or on a specific text (such as in the case of Grotius, Everaert, Heinsius and Duym). It could also take the form of an extensive analysis of a Dutch fragment report on a theatrical event at the occasion of the Spanish Match, as Moser shows. Furthermore, the focus could be on a larger controversial issue (such as the Spanish Match and the Winter King, the royalist cause in Holland in the 1650s or the Alphen Pig War). Whatever the focus, a text clearly should be studied in all cases as a communicative act that cannot be seen isolated from the author, from his or her network and the communicative practices (often controversial) in which he or she was engaged (deliberately or otherwise). Certainly the range of sources that show these communicative practices extends far beyond the literary text, its paratexts and peritexts, and the materiality of the scribal or printed copies of the text. They already start with evidence of the live performance of a large number of texts which, during each performative event, produce a unique, transient version of the text and its interaction with producers and audience.

Moser's exploration of the status of a seventeenth-century Dutch fragment describing such an ephemeral event most strikingly highlights the methodological caveats involved in the use of literary texts as sources for the study of early modern public opinion. Her convincing proposition is that the fragment is the indication of an attempt to write, translate or copy a text in line with a (Protestant) polemical tradition (invoking anti-Protestant performances that probably never

took place) and, more specifically, English polemics surrounding the Spanish Match. This text might either have been intended for further circulation in print or in manuscript. Moser rightly argues that in the reconstruction of a case of moulding public opinion every small particle of evidence should be taken into account, including (fragments of) literary texts, whether in print or in manuscript. These indications of the web of events, representations and interventions can be used to reconstruct what actually happened or what people believed to have happened (or wanted others to believe). Provided they are related systematically to other indications, literary texts, and even fragments of texts, also reveal the existence or development of certain techniques that people could use to frame events or issues. One of these (literary) techniques was the fake eyewitness account of fictitious performances, a mode of disinformation which, if considered in the context of the use of theatrical means, reflects the importance of such performances in the making of events and issues.

Moser's contribution emphasizes three important considerations for the study of the role of literary texts and codes in the early modern process of opinion-formation. First, controversial events and issues became more visible through the interplay of rituals, ceremonies, the printing press, performances and manuscripts, with the various media having a mutual multiplier effect: theatrical performances highlighting ceremonies, printed and manuscript pamphlets spreading the news of these ceremonies and performances, as well as framing them for distant audiences. Secondly, like many other pieces of evidence in this volume, the fragment discussed by Moser clearly points to the ways in which early modern societies were also defined by the creation of international 'issues'. What happened on the international stage, and what was being discussed elsewhere, generated local responses, and only in doing so could issues become truly appropriated by international audiences. Thirdly, Moser's argument also stresses once more how all-pervasive literary techniques were in the shaping of early modern issues.

The case of the Dutch fragment linking two major issues of the early seventeenth century Protestant cause, the fate of the Winter King and the Spanish Match, raises many questions about the aim of writing such an account, about the relationship and interplay between fact and fiction, and about the status of the text in a wider public exchange of news and views. Exactly how the traces of early modern literary culture (mainly manuscript and printed texts) can be used in public opinion

research is thus dealt with most accurately in Moser's contribution. Even though the manuscript leaflet may not have been intended for intervention in the process of opinion-formation, it can still be of major interest to our research, for it reveals, at the very least, the interest of one member of society in an international issue and his attempt to deal with this issue. The fact that the extrapolation of such an individual expression into a more generally held opinion needs extreme care has already been expressed in this epilogue. Moser's contribution shows which questions can be raised to study such a source, and how we can become interlocutors of texts that represent only one view and have a problematic status, in order to elicit interesting data about the process of public opinion-formation. Moser, to some extent arguing against Groenland's concerns about the possibility of constructing a plausible context, shows that even the most fragmented products of literary culture can be turned into revealing sources for the study of the early modern public process of opinion-formation if studied with the utmost care, a thorough knowledge of the issues at stake and the courage to use informed speculation.

VII: LITERARY CULTURE AND PUBLIC OPINION MAKING

Literary culture then, in whatever way we use the concept and however broadly or narrowly we define the term, should be taken into consideration in historical discussions on the early modern process of public opinion formation and in 'making publics'. So in what way were early modern literary culture and public opinion-formation related, and how did they interact with each other?

Literary texts could air specific opinions and so, as trendsetters, put specific matters on the agenda or, as followers of a trend, put a given consensus into words in specific circles. A literary work could reflect the opinion of a single individual or a small group, and at the same time claim to represent the opinion of a larger group or community (the mouthpiece function). In the early modern Low Countries, literary culture was one of the forces in creating local, regional and supra-regional networks of rhetoricians, humanists, printers and booksellers through which authors could readily disseminate literary works. Literary works were written and read, but above all spoken and heard, performed and watched. Sometimes this occurred in consultation with local or supra-local authorities, but often independently of

them as well. The rhetoricians sometimes acted as representatives of the local community, sponsored by the local government, and they actively contributed by producing plays, ballades and tableaux vivants at joyous entries of princes or local lords; however, they were just as likely to express direct or indirect criticism (especially in songs and ballades) of the government, the church and its representatives, the community, and dominant beliefs, religious or otherwise.

The way in which an opinion is expressed (and the level of literary encoding applied) affects the research method of the historian. The stronger the literary encoding, the more the creation of a literary work requires mental effort, skill and knowledge, for example, of other literary texts, which means that the opinions it contains—a text can of course express or confront various opinions—are shaped, refined, and altered during the creative process. Literary texts can open minds to many possibilities via various channels for change or stabilization. They could do so by means of their content, but sometimes the writing and publishing of a literary work could in itself be a statement. In the early seventeenth century, a time when the Jesuits in France were regarded as too critical as intellectuals, and their freedom was restricted, the French Jesuit Nicolas Caussin wrote his Latin plays about biblical subjects and the lives of the saints, an act which demonstrated the vitality of his order.¹⁷

Literary texts informed public opinion in another way too. They offered various narrative strategies, rhetorical devices and basic plots through which events could be narrated and interpreted.¹⁸ In other words, they provided an arsenal of media techniques and repertoires (allegory, dispute, conversation and oration) which could, and was, deployed to influence public debate. Literary culture could stimulate people, including those without official authority in the public sphere, to follow an author's example and so promote and also spread their views by applying literary techniques and targeting an interested audience. Through the use of dialogue and debating techniques, many early modern literary works also made the main themes and arguments of current debates accessible to larger audiences. Literary

¹⁷ See Chevalier, 'Le châtement de la démesure: les tragédies bibliques de Nicolas Caussin' and Valentin, *Les jésuites et le théâtre (1554–1680)*, pp. 489–95.

¹⁸ See Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion', which points to the impact of basic plots disseminated through popular literature on the political imagination of the British public.

culture can be seen as a breeding ground for ideas in the sense that in early modern texts boundaries were often explored and regularly overstepped. Authors of literary texts often experimented with different forms and viewpoints, while ideas from other circles or other regions were adopted into and adapted for the local context. Conversely, local voices could be adapted for inclusion in Latin texts aimed at an international audience.

In early modern society the link between social debates and the implementation of proposals supported by the population was far from self-evident. It would, however, be useful to carry out systematic research into the precise influence of public issues and debates on the course taken by the authorities and on trends in, for example, lifestyle or social campaigns among the population as a whole. Research topics which come to mind are: How often did themes from public debate and the arguments it generated become the focus of decision-making and to what effect? What was the role of the media and of opinion makers? How much space did society offer for people to propound dissenting and critical ideas? Did public opinion have any authority as such? What attitude did the authorities adopt within the public debate and on what did that attitude depend? Which groups in the population were actively involved in public issues and debates, thereby helping to shape them? Did that involvement lead to both short-term and lasting effects on the cohesion and degree of the organization of society? Did issues and debates deal with real problems or was there a significant amount of exaggeration and hype, whether conscious or unconscious? How well or how badly informed were the people involved, and what impact did this have on their role? How long did public debates last and how did they come to a close? What were the effects on the course of such debates of social movements, interest groups, lobby and pressure groups, the media and opinion leaders?

The importance of literary sources in the study of public opinion, then, is that they represent particular modes of dealing with public issues. We might be inclined to think of public opinion in relation to current contemporary political, economic or religious issues that dominate the talk of the town. However, Groenland warns that literary texts also deal with moral values and norms to such an extent that literary form and moral content were inseparably intertwined. Thus more generally held and less controversial moral opinions could be applied in certain circumstances to deal with particular topical matters. Of

course, as Moser and others in this volume argue, the mimetic, representative character of literary texts is problematic. Literature does not 'present' things in a straightforward manner; instead we observe 'the world' in the literary work through the eyes of the author or, rather, through the eyes of the narrator(s) and/or character(s). Literature as such moulds the world as experienced and perceived by the author into an artefact, the process known as 'representation'. But it is also true that 'representation' of public opinion reveals something about the way the author—again, one voice in a debate—thought about that opinion or those opinions, even though he may well abstract from 'reality' to a more general notion for 'the eternal prevails over the moment' ('*eeuwig gaet voor oogenblik*') as Vondel wrote in a consolatory poem about the death of his son Constantijn. In such instances authors may well expect their audiences or readership to apply general notions of how to react or behave in certain circumstances to specific situations. In a larger sense, literary culture urged the public or readership to develop a discerning and critical mind, providing people with models of thought to deal with the world around them.

The study of early modern public opinion is a complex field which calls for the cooperation of historians of art, literature and books as well as social, cultural, intellectual and political historians. It offers a unique possibility of making the methods of these branches of historical studies join forces. In the study of early modern public opinion, the Low Countries are a special case because of the high level of organization that can be compared to other countries such as England, France, Italy and Germany, where different complexities seem to be in place. We hope that the results of these investigations will contribute to the international debate about the formation of early modern public opinion. If insights gained from the study of public opinion and literary culture in the Low Countries and surrounding regions are compared, this will further our understanding of an important factor in the development of society.