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PIONEER LITERARY JOURNALISTS

The Intricate Relation Between Literary Journalism and Professional Newspaper Reporting in the Netherlands, 1890–1930

Frank Harbers and Marcel Broersma

Among journalists and audiences alike, literary or narrative journalism has steadily been gaining popularity and esteem in the last decades. It has regularly been considered an attractive alternative to a traditional, objective conception of journalism that struggles to attract younger news consumers in the digital era.[1] Yet, literary journalism is also met with critique and persistent distrust in its truthfulness.[2] Critics argue that it prioritizes "human interest at the expense of structural analysis; dramatizes instead of illuminates; offers light entertainment instead of public service; and leads to trivial stories driven by desire to please commercial interests," as Thomas Schmidt puts it.[3] Narrative journalism in newspapers in particular is often classified, and implicitly disqualified, as a form of soft news, focusing more on entertaining stories than on truthful information.[4] Such false binaries "obscure the interconnectedness" between narration and information, but are commonplace in the discourse on journalism.[5]

This meta-discursive strategy is part and parcel of journalism's professional project to naturalize a particular journalistic regime that revolves around the idea of objectivity and detachment.[6] This has been so successful—as it has in journalism studies—that the objectivity regime has become the foundation of journalism practice; even nowadays, when the objectivity regime has increasingly met opposition, it remains pivotal. However, journalism offers a "particular organization of social experience," as John Carey argues, and there is no self-evident way of organizing and conveying these social experiences.[7] In the 1980s, David Eason argued in an article on New Journalism—without doubt the most famous and most researched strand of literary journalism—that journalism's representation of reality is inherently a symbolic construction. Whether an article is accepted as truthful is much more dependent on social and textual conventions than on it being grounded in "natural ways to know the world."[8]

This chapter analyzes literary journalism at the turn of the nineteenth century, a period and context in which the objectivity regime had not been (fully) established.[9] Studying this particular moment in journalism's history, when professional practice was still incoherent, disputed, and under construction, helps us to understand how professional ideology, everyday work routines, and discursive forms emerged at a time when the outcome of journalism's

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professional project was still undefined. By analyzing the work of a diverse group of journalistic pioneers who were frontrunners in the rise of newspaper reporting in the Netherlands between 1890 and 1930, and who introduced novel forms of on-site reporting that can be typified as literary journalism, this chapter argues that their work should be regarded as pioneer journalism, which shaped the direction of Dutch newspaper journalism. These new professional practices were strongly influenced by both literary naturalism as it emerged in France, and the new event-centered reporting practices, such as on-site observation and interviewing, which would come to underlie the objectivity regime in Anglo-American journalism.

The professional practices and textual forms these pioneer journalists introduced did not become ubiquitous in the everyday practice of Dutch newspapers, however, because in-depth on-site reporting and longer literary stories were time-consuming and costly. Yet, these journalists did set a professional standard of what quality journalism should aspire to. Their work was by and large qualified as "journalism," without the adjective "literary," which signals how the conception of journalism they shaped moved to the center of professional practice. After discussing the concept of pioneer journalism and the historical context in which this new professional practice emerged, this chapter will analyze the work of four influential Dutch pioneer journalists: Frans Netscher, C. K. Elout, Bernard Canter, and M. J. Brusse. These case studies tease out the key elements of this new conception of journalism and demonstrate how these elements resulted in specific narrative characteristics that helped these pioneers to further shape an encompassing journalistic culture in the Netherlands.

Pioneer Journalism in the Netherlands

Andreas Hepp and Wiebke Loosen introduced the concept of "pioneer journalism" to make sense of journalism's transformation in the digital age. It also offers a fruitful approach to understanding the historical transformation of journalism, in our case the emergence of professional reporting practices in the context of the establishment of the mass press. Pioneer journalism is defined as "a particular group of professionals who incorporate new organizational forms and experimental practice in pursuit of redefining the field and its structural foundations."[10] The mass press meant an enormous increase in the scale on which journalism was practiced and newspapers and magazines were produced. This resulted in a considerable rise of the number of journalists, organized in the social structure of newsrooms, and to a differentiation of occupational tasks and roles.[11] In this broader organizational context, journalism's professional practice was transformed by a community of journalistic pioneers who experimented with new journalistic practices, content, and form.[12]

Hepp and Loosen argue that these "forerunners" are typified by several characteristics. First, they are broadly accepted as pioneers within their professional domain. Second, they often adopt the role of intermediary, bridging boundaries between different cultural and/or professional spheres. Third, they build communities of practice, which typically extend beyond national borders and in which experimenting with new practices and forms is stimulated. Fourth, some of these pioneers will take up positions of power within the field, becoming part of its "organizational elite." Fifth, they shape the development of journalism by broadly sharing their ideas and practices with fellow journalists. And finally, they often shape journalism's future because they are recognized as innovative role models that inform the direction in which journalism needs to develop.[13]

The four Dutch journalists to be discussed here have most of these characteristics: they were not only recognized innovators of journalism practice and textual conventions, but also contributed to the establishment of a distinctive journalistic field in the Netherlands. C. K.

Elout, for example, was a founder of the Dutch union of journalists and crucial for the development of professional norms by this organization, and Brusse contributed a chapter to an influential instructional book on journalism, outlining what being a "reporter" entailed.[14] The concept of pioneer journalism emphasizes how they guided a new generation of Dutch newspaper journalists who entered the profession at the turn of the nineteenth century. These four pioneers sparked the debate about what journalism should be and how it should be practiced, and were recognized as important forerunners. Studying their work elucidates the lines along which journalism culture and practice developed in the Netherlands. Pioneer journalism conceptualizes the impact of the new ideas and practices not so much in terms of the extent to which they can be found in everyday newspaper content, but rather in terms of how they gave rise to "models or imaginaries of new possibilities" that shaped the directions in which journalism developed.[15] Thus, while long literary journalistic articles did not dominate the newspaper pages and, when they were written, often resulted in a "watered-down" version of the pioneer examples, these journalists and their literary journalism had a major impact on the professional imaginary of what "good" journalism ought to look like.

Furthermore, these four Dutch forerunners show how pioneer journalists act as intermediaries between different cultural fields and actors. They were important agents in the cross-fertilization between the literary and the journalistic field that had a major influence on the development of Dutch newspaper journalism. Brusse, for example, became one of the most renowned, bestseller authors of novels about people living on the edges of society, merging literary techniques and reporting.[16] Netscher was an important proponent of French naturalism and introduced this literary style into Dutch literature and journalism.[17] All this shows that they were part of transnational communities of practice.[18] They were also influenced and inspired by fellow journalists and literary authors, both within and beyond national borders. In the case of the Netherlands, France and the Anglo-American parts of the world were important sources of inspiration.[19]

The Emergence of a Mass Press in the Netherlands

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Dutch newspaper journalism developed into a mass press and a professional practice. The abolition of the stamp tax in 1869 and technological innovation, accompanied by lower production costs, growing educational levels, and better living conditions opened up new audiences for newspapers.[20] While some feared these changing circumstances would lead to a deterioration of journalistic quality, others saw it as a chance to improve journalism in the Netherlands while simultaneously benefitting from it commercially, or as an opportunity to disseminate a particular political or religious world view. As a result, the number of dailies grew rapidly in the Netherlands. New commercially oriented dailies were founded that aimed to bring the news to as many readers as possible. In addition, numerous papers were founded that advocated for the social and political interests of specific groups in Dutch society. They were important instruments to foster the creation of specific communities, "pillars" of like-minded citizens, which organized the daily lives of their members. These media shaped distinct imagined communities, subsidized by the government, in which the identity of subgroups was created and maintained.[21]

While established up-market newspapers such as *Algemeen Handelsblad* (founded 1828) or the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (founded 1844) saw their readership grow considerably, the most striking growth was with newly founded dailies. Newspapers such as *Het Nieuws van den Dag* (founded 1870) and *De Telegraaf* (founded 1893) focused on the middle classes and boasted readerships up to 100,000 subscribers around the 1920s. This made them especially interesting

for advertisers. The "pillarized" partisan press, in contrast, remained smaller in reach. It catered to a more specific and thus more limited readership and had to compete with the popular press. It did not have a commercial goal, but aimed to advocate for political, social, and religious interests, and to create tight-knit communities; it was also closely connected to political parties that often also financially supported the publications. The focus of these publications was not so much on reporting about the world, but on commenting on it. *De Standaard*, for example, was founded in 1872 with the specific goal of shaping an Orthodox Protestant community, spreading its religious beliefs and advocating for a political perspective on the world. Its editor was the political leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, who used the paper as his mouthpiece. These kinds of interlocking directorates were very common in the pillarized press, whether it was socialist, communist, Catholic or Protestant.[22]

When readership and advertisement revenues grew after World War I, journalism slowly became a profession instead of a side-job or merely a political activity. As the readership grew and the appetite for news increased, newspaper content and editorial staffs expanded, and editorial labor was diversified. In the diverse Dutch newspaper landscape, with its blend of national and local commercial and partisan papers, different conceptions of journalism coexisted. Moreover, loyal audiences of subscribers—not just to a newspaper but also to its ideological orientation—made the news market less competitive than in France, the United Kingdom or the United States. As such, journalistic practice only developed gradually. Until far into the twentieth century, Dutch journalism predominantly remained to be done from behind a desk. Journalists copied and pasted news from other sources, while the heart of the newspaper revolved around reflections on society and the world. Writing extensive and intellectually challenging essays, analyses, or opinion articles was the core business of newspaper journalists. They considered themselves "men of letters" and derived their reputation from this. However, slowly a new species of journalist did appear in the Netherlands, which was at first despised but gradually moved towards the center of the trade: the reporter who would go out into the street to actively find and uncover news.[23]

The Rise of New Journalism in the Netherlands

The rise of the popular press catering to a mass audience led to heated debates about how journalism should be practiced and what newspapers should look like. Dailies like *Het Nieuws van den Dag* and *De Telegraaf* were inspired by the popularity and commercial success of "new" journalism in the British and French dailies in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Papers like the *Pall Mall Gazette,* the *Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Mirror* in the United Kingdom and *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Matin*, and *Le Petit Parisien* in France were sources of inspiration for the Dutch press. These attracted a large audience by moving away from reflective, partisan, or opinion-oriented journalism towards event-centered reporting. Journalists were expected to go out on the streets and factually report what was going on. To reach a mass audience, these reporters produced engaging, diverting, and sensationally written stories about everyday topics that readers could recognize and with which they could identify. Their articles were published in a clearly structured and visually attractive newspaper style.[24]

Newspaper owners and publishers were convinced that this way of doing journalism was necessary to attract and exploit the recently emerged potential readership from the middle and working classes. They believed that the societal role of newspapers included not just educating, guiding, and elevating these social strata, but also reflecting their world experiences in the papers' columns.[25] However, compared with the French, British, and American popular press,

Dutch papers practiced a highly restrained version of New Journalism. Headlines remained very sober, photographs were scarce until the mid-1920s, and although crime, sports, and human-interest stories entered the pages, topics such as politics, international relations, and trade news remained the central focus.[26] In retrospect, Dutch press historian Mariëtte Wolf called *De Telegraaf*, the Dutch newspaper most strongly associated with New Journalism, "a truly well-behaved and moderate newspaper, not only in layout, but also in content and style."[27] Yet, within Dutch journalism and society, the slow and careful development towards New Journalism was experienced as a significant change in form and style. It was characterized as "pick-pocket journalism" that lacked "all elementary decency" in its "uncompromising hunt for news, disrespectful approach of authorities, and unprecedented sensationalism."[28]

Despite this critique, which focused more on the form of news that was considered sensational than on the underlying reporting practices, popular newspapers were an important impetus for the emergence of an event-centered journalism. Factual reporting was gradually given preference over a partisan, reflective, and opinionated style of journalism that was common in the Netherlands.[29] However, where the factual reporting practices of event-centered journalism paved the way for the objectivity regime in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Great Britain, this was different in the Netherlands.[30] Here, on-site reporting was fused with the poetics of literary naturalism.[31]

Literary Naturalism as Journalistic Inspiration

Naturalism emerged as a new literary movement in France around the 1870s, and gained international acclaim with authors such as Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant. It was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Hippolyte Taine, who argued that literature could reveal important insights into human behavior and everyday reality by adopting the positivistic foundations of scientific research and its claim to objectivity.[32] He posited that people were the product of *race, milieu*, and *moment*, arguing that to understand people, one had to take their hereditary disposition, the specific environment in which they lived, and the specific events that occured during their lives into account.[33] These ideas strongly influenced journalism in the Netherlands.[34]

As a literary movement, naturalism is regarded as a critical response to the moralistic idealism that dominated literature earlier in the nineteenth century, which promoted novels with uplifting stories and idealized images of the world as it should be. The author was guiding the reader through the narrative, pointing out the flaws and virtues of the characters. These stories were mostly situated in decent settings and recounted how their main characters fell from them, proselytizing a clear distinction between good and evil. The authors thus held up a moral mirror for their readers, intimating to them what proper behavior entailed. Naturalism rejected such idealized moralism. Rather than presenting a moral vision of the world, naturalistic writers aimed to show the world as it really was, with all its dark sides and ugly faces. Naturalistic novels had a predilection for slums, for the obscure, and for everything that happened behind closed curtains. They focused on flawed characters in the seamy side of life, governed by their primal urges.[35]

In *Le roman expérimental* (1880), Émile Zola outlined how naturalistic literature could be regarded as a form of social scientific research into the laws of human society. Although we now might find it hard to accept literary fiction as a form of scientific research, naturalists argued that literature allowed them to conduct thought experiments on how the hereditary roots, circumstances, social settings and events that determine people's lives affect their behavior. By manipulating these variables in their stories and imagining how these "experiments" would

play out, they were said to have conducted social experiments. Based on such "research," they claimed to offer insights into the social complexity of reality. Inspired by the success of scientific empirical research, the aspirations of the literary author shifted from being a moral authority to an objective societal "anatomis," who meticulously described their "study" in a detached tone and impartial manner.[36] The emphasis within naturalism on the role of race and environment as determining factors in life resulted in much attention to the physical appearance of characters and how they behaved. This was seen as an important reflection of their "temperament" and upbringing.[37]

It is easy to understand why such a poetics inspired a new generation of journalists who wanted to move away from a partisan form of journalism in which reflection and opinion were central characteristics.[38] Naturalism's claim to objectivity resonated with reporters who aimed to portray reality as it was and aligned well with an emerging event-centered journalism practice. It provided newcomers in the journalistic field with an argument to position themselves and claim authority.[39] The scientific aura of literary naturalism provided it with authority and trustworthiness. In addition, the idea of offering an unpolished version of the different ranks within society fitted well with journalists who catered to the new working- and middle-class audiences. By turning to the streets as roving reporters, being there to witness what is going on and talking to the people involved, these journalists aimed to reflect the social environment and everyday experiences of their readership. They wanted to reveal what was going on in society beyond the official version of the authorities and the perspectives of the elite.

A direct connection between the scientific nature and objectivity of naturalistic literature and the rise of the objectivity regime in journalism should not be taken too strictly, however. Rather, it should be seen in the context of the polemical rejection of an idealized and moralistic literature that had long dominated the public imagination. As literary scholars have shown, naturalistic writers acknowledged the inevitable role of their subjectivity in depicting reality in a novel. They often considered the personal artistic qualities of literary authors as a necessity to paint a true picture of the world. As Zola argued in *Le roman expérimental*, naturalistic literature provides "a corner of nature seen through a temperament," thus accepting that stories always convey the world through the eyes of the author.[40] Naturalism should therefore be characterized not only in terms of its scientific claims. For many writers around the world, it referred more broadly to a form of literature that strived to convey the experience of reality. Objectivity was not interpreted as getting rid of all subjective elements, but more broadly as depicting the world in an honest fashion and refraining from clear moral judgment.[41]

Apart from the fact that the work of naturalistic authors in practice did not always adhere to the strict scientific norms they propelled, a subjective and colorful portrayal of reality was accepted as inherent to this way of writing. The imaginative and creative power of the writer was embraced as necessary to evoke a vivid, but truthful picture of the world. Dutch naturalistic writers were inspired parrticularly by the evocative and colorful style of the Goncourt brothers. They considered it important not only to portray sensory experiences, but also to convey the feelings and emotions that were sparked by that experience. In this line of thinking, naturalistic writers were still considered artists more than scientists.[42]

The influence of naturalism as a literary movement is not just grounded in the specific poetics heralded by its exponents that resonated well with the developments in journalism. It is also explained by the fact that the literary and journalistic fields were not clearly separated from each other. Many literary writers at the *fin de siècle* began their careers in journalism or needed to continue undertaking journalistic work to pay the bills. The boundaries between the two fields were still very porous. Yet, although literary writers and journalists moved in the same circles, there was a clear hierarchy. Literature was more prestigious, which partly explains why

journalists accepted literary naturalism as their standard in form and writing style. Rather than raising suspicion about its truthfulness, these journalists felt that the literary prestige of naturalism would positively influence the perception of their journalistic work.[43]

Literary Journalists Roaming Dutch Streets

Inspired by different cultural domains and transnational contexts, a new generation of Dutch journalists pioneered the profession by fusing event-centered journalism and its routines of on-site reporting and interviewing with the principles and writing conventions of literary naturalism. These journalists would develop into important role models who shaped the professional conception of journalism in the Netherlands, and set the bar to which other journalists aspired. A key characteristic of this new type of journalism was its focus on going out onto the Dutch streets to report on what was happening in all walks of life, and particularly the everyday realities of the classes beyond the societal elite. A famous example that clearly illustrates this new approach is a reportage series by Bernard Canter in the popular newspaper *De Telegraaf*. He went undercover as panhandler to experience such a life and portray it from the inside. In his role as panhandler, Canter investigated how he was treated by different people and paints the tough and scruffy circumstances under which these people had to live just to get by. The naturalistic fascination with the seamy sides of life is clearly visible in his writing, as he tried to evoke the setting and atmosphere of this environment. For example, when he enters his shabby lodging where he would spend his first night, he zooms in on the agony of the "other" tramps:

> I went to the corner where my bed was. First, I walked past the foot end of a bed, from where two big naked, terribly neglected feet of a man lying on his back stuck up from under the blankets. Next to that was a bed, whose foot end faced the walk way, with a man who had put a nasty deformed hunk of meat of a withered arm without a hand on his blankets.[44]

The series is driven by such on-site observations and first-hand experiences of the journalist, which was absent in the abstract and distant perspective on the world offered in the more reflective and analytic exposés on poverty in society that were common in newspaper journalism.[45]

In a similar fashion, M. J. Brusse's popular series "Onder de Menschen" ([Among the people], 1924) attests to his aim to abandon the desk-bound type of journalism, which he described as a "cage where he would forget how to sing."[46] To be "among the people" for him meant going out and meeting up with fishermen, workers, sailors, convicts, and prostitutes to hear and see how they lived their lives. He joined them during their work and in their spare time, asking them about their thoughts and experiences. Typical for his stories are the interviews he had with his sources. He wrote these down in as lifelike a way as possible by mimicking their speech in their specific dialect, idiosyncratic register, and pronunciation. These interviews are nothing like the sharp or even adversarial question-and-answer type of interviews that became common in Anglo-American journalism, but are instead carefully portrayed atmospheric conversations. They are modelled after the French version of the interview, the *visite*, which focused more on a respectful, somewhat submissive and even exchange between journalist and interviewee. The setting and atmosphere of the interview played a central part in the story.[47] Interviewing was not so much a critical interrogation coaxing the interviewee into revealing information, but an opportunity to get to know the experiences and perspectives of the people interviewed. This resulted in a better, more vivid understanding of everyday life in certain parts of society.[48]

The Mediating Subjectivity of Journalistic Witness-Ambassadors

Rather than offering value-laden reflection and opinion, event-centered reporting emphasized the factual and thus truthful nature of its journalism practice. It promised to convey the world as it was, not as it ought to be. In terms of norms, this links up closely to the objectivity regime in which factuality is also central. However, where the objectivity regime propagates a detached and neutral way of reporting in which the role of the reporter is erased, this was certainly not the way objectivity and fact-based reporting were understood by the new generation of Dutch reporters at the turn of the nineteenth century.[49] As Géraldine Muhlmann has shown in her insightful book on the different modes of journalism throughout history, "ideas of objectivity were still far from profound and relatively untroubled."[50] What objectivity referred to within journalism was not clearly delineated yet, nor was it really operationalized or problematized. Michael Schudson argues that the ideas about truth and objective reporting derived from what he calls a "naive empiricism." This epistemological perspective showed unencumbered faith in the capacity of an observer to depict reality as it was, and believed that the first-hand observations and experiences of a journalist could be exactly the same as those of other people had they been in that same situation.[51]

In Anglo-American journalism, it was precisely this "naive empiricism" that was criticized for resulting in singular and subjective representations of reality prone to bias and distortion. This critique propelled the emergence of a professional ethics that aimed to prevent such biased and colored reporting. With the ideal of "a-perspectival objectivity" in mind, norms, practices, and textual conventions were developed that were meant to depersonalize journalism and prevent any subjective influence on the coverage. Yet, as a result of the persisting influence of literary naturalism and the prestige literary stature brought in combination with a widely shared resistance towards "Americanization," in the Netherlands a more subjective form of journalism remained dominant.[52]

Muhlmann introduced the ideal type of the "*witness-ambassador*."[53] The first part of this term refers to the importance of the on-site presence of the reporter. It stresses that the representation of social reality is inextricably tied to the person of the journalist who is the one that observes and experiences newsworthy events. The second part of the term points to the idea that the reporter is not on the spot as part of a singular, personal endeavor, but that he or she represents the audience who cannot be there. As Muhlmann puts it:

> For those who practise it, it means constantly reminding us, more or less explicitly, that they see *in all our names*, hence reminding us of the pact which binds them to "us," enabling them to give "us" a sort of experience by proxy. It is as if the "I," singular though it may be, is at the same time "collective."[54]

Clearly, this conception presupposes that observation and sensory experiences are interchangeable between people.

Muhlmann shows that this "naive empiricism" is rooted in the opposition between expressing an opinion or judgment about the world and conveying sensory impressions of what is going on in the world. Truthful reporting was conceived as refraining from giving one's opinion or passing judgment on what was going on, but it did not restrict a journalist in conveying what they saw, heard, smelled, or felt. On the contrary, sensory experience played a crucial role in vividly conveying what it meant to "be there," what it meant to witness and experience a certain event or be in a specific situation.[55] To make sure that their readership could "feel" reality and step into the shoes of the reporter, "witness-ambassadors" used literary techniques such as

first-person narration and focalization, emplotment, and colloquial language and dialogue. They provided detailed descriptions of the environment and atmosphere in which imagery had a central role. In the objectivity regime, these techniques would be considered as subjective elements that jeopardized the veracity and trustworthiness of reporting. Yet, the professional model of the "witness-ambassador" very much relied on this "mediating subjectivity" of the journalist. The explicit presence of the reporter was seen to underline the truthfulness of the coverage.[56]

The pivotal role of the mediating subjectivity of the reporters is present in the work of all four pioneer journalists discussed in this chapter. However, the parliamentary sketches of Dutch politicians by Frans Netscher offer the best illustration of this mode of expression. As one of the first parliamentary reporters, he covered political debates by carefully and vividly portraying politicians. He drew his inspiration from the British genre of the parliamentary sketch, which aimed to bring politics to life, thus adding to the dominant lengthy and dreadful verbatim parliamentary reports.[57] Like them, Netscher's concise portraits focused not so much on providing the key information from these debates, but offered instead an evocative impression of how politicians behaved and what they looked like during these debates. A striking example of this is the picture Netscher paints of one of the leading voices in the anti-revolutionary party, Alexander de Savornin Lohman. He starts by offering a detailed impression of his appearance:

> It is a sharp, pointed, angular face, with hard, sharp features, and a sniffing, ferret like expression. The shape of his head is narrow, and from a slim profile protrudes a sharp, inquiring nose: two small sideburns at the ears, and for the rest a clean shaven face. The forehead is thin and low, the chin insignificant and drooping, and the eyes are deep-set and lack a powerful glance. And this head rests on the shoulders of a medium-sized body, rather flat, more nervous-tough than muscular-strong, plainly dressed in dark fabric without any striking feature. He has in his appearance much of an inner-city judge or simple receiver, but nothing at all of nobility or a scholarly professor.[58]

Clearly, this depiction shows De Savornin Lohman through the eyes of Netscher who, particularly at the end, does not shy away from his particular impression of the member of parliament.

Later in the piece, Netscher is even more sardonic, when he describes how De Savornin Lohman acts when he listens carefully to a critical remark about his anti-revolutionary party:

> First, he gets some sort of nervous shock, and then he puts his nose in the wind like an excited bloodhound. He gets a wrinkle between the eyebrows due to his intense listening, and he squints his eyes in a staring gaze on the speaker. He bends forward in his bench, so he won't miss a word, hands resting on the edge of the little table, and it seems as if he is ready to leap. He glances to his left and right to his fellow party members as if he wanted to say silently: "Are you hearing this! How can that man state such nonsense!" And he is boiling inside; he is becoming more agitated as the speaker proceeds, and it is becoming hard to contain himself and not interrupt the liberal representative.[59]

In this excerpt, Netscher goes one step further by not only depicting his impression of the appearance of the member of parliament, but also freely intuiting De Savornin Lohman's feelings based on his behavior and expressions. In Netscher's attention to appearance can be recognized the influence of literary naturalism and the idea that people are determined by their hereditary roots and social milieu, and that someone's appearance is telling of their character.

Evoking Sensory Sensation

That reporters functioned as the readers' eyes and ears, and all other human senses, becomes even more pronounced in the travel reportage that C. K. Elout wrote for *Algemeen Handelsblad* at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s. Elout traveled to the Dutch East Indies in 1929, and in his articles he aimed to convey the clash of cultures he experienced when crossing the colony. He tried to portray the natural beauty and the culture of the Indigenous population in a way that made it tangible, palpable, and understandable for his Dutch readers, most of whom had never set foot in that country—and would never do so. Elout was very much aware of the fact that many of his readers had only limited knowledge of the geography, climate, and culture of this Dutch colony. He therefore attempted to convey his experiences as well as possible. By fully exploiting the toolkit of literary techniques and stylistic devices, he wanted to evoke a vivid picture of the Dutch Indies, the impression the colony made on him, and the effect it had.

Some of his pieces, particularly those aiming to convey the natural beauty and atmosphere of the Dutch East Indies, are among the best example of the colorful style of literary naturalism that was inspired by the work of the Goncourt brothers in France. In the Netherlands, Elout was inspired by the Movement of the Eighties, a group of poets who also utilized an expressive and visceral way of writing by combining naturalism's focus on reality with sensitive prose that highlighted the feelings evoked by reality.[60] This specific type of *écriture artiste* made heavy use of adjectives, alliteration, and assonance to almost onomatopoeically convey the author's perception of reality. Elout applied it in his reporting about the Dutch East Indies. For instance, when he tried to evoke the scenery of the falling evening in this part of the world and the impression it made on him in an article that appeared on the front page of *Algemeen Handelsblad*:

> Krekels snerpen. **V**uurvliegen komen aange**v**onkt op 't lamplicht van den pasanggrahan.
>
> Een d**o**nker b**o**nkelen van r**ie**men (nu eens geen pagaaien) m**o**mpelt uit de d**ie**pte **o**p.
>
> **Zw**aar **zw**oegt de **z**ee.[61]

In the original Dutch, reproduced here to demonstrate the text's poetics, the richness of Elout's stylistic devices is meant to express to the reader the colonial experience in all its aural and visual richness. His use of assonance and alliteration, emphasized above in bold, is unfortunately mostly lost in translation: "Crickets chirrup. Fireflies come sparkling over to the lamplight of the pasanggrahan [guesthouse]. A dark rappling or oars (no paddles this time) is babbling from the deep. Heavily sighs the sea." The fact that such stylistic devices were accepted, praised and even appeared on the front page underlines how strongly Dutch journalism was oriented towards and inspired by the literary field at this time. This is also evidenced by the success and prestige these authors had with their work. Series of newspaper reportage were often compiled and printed in book form, making these journalists well known and esteemed reporters who combined the best of both worlds.

Conclusion

The active reporting routines and narrative forms that were inspired by literary naturalism did not become dominant overnight in the Netherlands. It was a gradual process, driven by a new generation of Dutch journalists. The four journalists discussed in this chapter are pioneers who innovated the practice and the writing of journalism by taking full advantage of a newspaper

industry in flux. Some of them started out at newly founded popular dailies, such as *De Telegraaf*, and made a name for themselves there. Others worked at established quality newspapers such as *Algemeen Handelsblad*, which had to compete with the popular newcomers in a much more competitive newspaper market. Initially, the stories that these four journalists wrote, for which they went out into the street to experience the everyday lives of societal groups not typically covered in the press, were associated with the rise of a "new journalism." They were seen as an American invention, driven by profit and commercial gain. For this reason, such coverage was generally considered as superficial, sensational, and even in poor taste.[62]

Yet, when more esteemed and elite newspaper adopted these same novel practices and textual conventions, and the forerunners who had introduced them gained prominence, readers and journalists alike gradually became used to these new ways of practicing and presenting journalism. The journalistic novelties not only became acceptable but were even considered in a more positive light. In part, this was driven by the popularity of such stories and the commercial success of this style of reporting, which appealed to a wider readership. In an increasingly competitive newspaper landscape, the established dailies could no longer ignore this new journalistic practice.[63] At the same time, the rise of literary naturalism, with its fascination for the seamy sides of society and its rejection of idealized representations of reality, added prestige to this type of journalism. Dutch journalism still emphasized the artistic nature of reporting and had a clear orientation on the literary domain when it came to quality markers for what counts as a good story. The close connection to this literary movement helped to make it *salonfähig*, or socially acceptable, for the elite press to publish such stories and attract its own pioneering journalists.

Netscher, Canter, Brusse, and Elout were important journalistic pioneers who set the professional standard for other journalists to aspire to. They obviously had personal qualities that made them stand out, but they also managed to find new ways of fusing literary techniques with active reporting practices, such as on-site observation and interviewing, and they covered novel topics and social groups that became salient in a changing society. The prestige they gained was also both reflected in and reinforced by the important (organizational) roles some of them played in the development of journalism as a profession in the Netherlands. The novel journalistic practice of active reporting, packaged in colorful and evocative literary writing, was grounded in norms about factuality, impartiality, and neutrality. However, this does not mean this type of journalism and longer literary-inspired reportage dominated the Dutch newspapers, which were still full of brief news reports, longer analyses and reflections, opinionated articles, and other journalistic genres. Despite its limited size and frequency, this new kind of reporting became seen as the highest form of journalism, within the reach of only a select group of star reporters.[64] It thus became the norm for quality newspaper journalism.

The specific historical development of (literary) journalism in the Netherlands, in which newspaper reporting and literary journalism are very much entwined, reveals several issues with scholarship in journalism history as well as in literary journalism. First, although its literary qualities were acknowledged and lauded, this type of journalism was not labeled "literary journalism," but simply as "journalism." It illustrates how dominant this epistemic regime had become in the Netherlands. The basic reporting routines that developed in active reporting came to underlie both journalism under the objectivity regime and literary journalism, showing that on-site reporting and interviewing are not necessarily connected to a specific set of norms and forms. Second, the analysis here shows the fuzziness of notions such as objectivity and factuality. These terms have been understood in very different ways, both in journalism and in the scholarship on journalism. It suggests that we need to move beyond the

now-familiar polarity between objectivity and subjectivity, between detached facts and emotional experiences, between information and story. These binaries are charged with normative evaluations about what constitutes "good" and "bad" journalism. As Schmidt argues, "While a distinction between story and information seems useful to analyze different news styles, it also obscures the interconnectedness between the two terms."[65]

This chapter also shows that the long-standing suspicion towards the truthfulness of narrative forms of journalism is culturally and historically informed. It is a testament to how influential the objectivity regime has become as a self-evident professional ethics ever since its emergence in the United States around the 1920s. Yet, an argument can be made that there is no natural connection between a specific journalism practice and the representation of reality. What is accepted as truthful and trustworthy journalism is the result of a social negotiation about journalism practice, which is influenced by a broader societal discussion about how reliable knowledge can be produced and what epistemological regimes are deemed sound. The dominance of a professional ideal and practice that heralded a narrative form and emphasized naturalism as literary inspiration shows that journalism and literature are not natural opposites, and that colorful storytelling is not untrustworthy by default.

Notes

1 Neveu, "Revisiting Narrative Journalism," 533–42; Boesman and Costera Meijer, "Nothing but the Facts," 997–1007; Van Krieken and Sanders, "Framing Narrative Journalism," 1364–380.
2 Eason, "New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture," 144–46; Hartsock, *American Literary Journalism*, 1–21; Boesman and Costera Meijer, "Nothing but the Facts," 997–1007; Harbers, "Dangerous Narratives," forthcoming.
3 Schmidt, "Rediscovering Narrative," 28.
4 Smeenk, Harbers, and Broersma, "Negotiating Journalistic Epistemologies," forthcoming.
5 Schmidt, "Rediscovering Narrative," 5.
6 Broersma, "Journalism as a Performative Discourse," 1–15; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 16–18.
7 Carey, "Problem of Journalism History," 88.
8 Eason, "New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture," 144. See also Broersma, "Journalism as a Performative Discourse," 1–15.
9 For a more extensive analysis of the way objectivity emerged within European journalism, see Steel and Broersma, eds., *Redefining Journalism*.
10 Hepp and Loosen, "Pioneer Journalism," 578.
11 Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 18–20, 30–33.
12 Hepp and Loosen, "Pioneer Journalism," 577–95.
13 Hepp and Loosen, 578.
14 Hagen, *Journalisten in Nederland*, 293.
15 Hepp and Loosen, "Pioneer Journalism," 581.
16 Hagen, *Journalisten in Nederland*, 288–94.
17 Anbeek, *Geschiedenis van de literatuur*, 44.
18 Hepp and Loosen, "Pioneer Journalism," 577–95.
19 See, for instance, Chalaby, "Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention," 304–10; Høyer and Pöttker, *Diffusion of the News Paradigm*; Broersma, "Journalistic Form, Style and Strategies," ix–xxix; Harbers and Broersma, "Impartial Reporter or *écrivain engagé*?," 218–40.
20 Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 18–20.
21 Broersma, "Mediating Parliament," 167–84.
22 Harbers, "Naar een massapers," 123–63.
23 Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 54–58; Broersma, "Journalistic Form, Style and Strategies," ix–xxix.
24 Wijfjes, 30–33; Broersma, ix–xxix.
25 Hampton, "'Understanding Media,'" 213–31.
26 Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 159–76.

27 Wolf, *Geheim van De Telegraaf*, 340: "[E]en in en in brave en ingetogen krant, niet alleen qua opmaak, maar ook qua inhoud en stijl." All translations from Dutch to English in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are our own.
28 Wolf, 35–36, 79: "zakkenrollerjournalistiek"; "een elementair gebrek aan fatsoen"; "een compromisloze jacht naar nieuws, een respectloze benadering van autoriteiten en een ongekende sensatiezucht."
29 Broersma, "Botsende stijlen," 40–68; Broersma, "Journalistic Form, Style and Strategies," ix–xxix.
30 See Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 117–20; Hampton, "The 'Objectivity' Ideal," 477–93; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 118–21, 130–34, 159–63.
31 Wijfjes, *Journalistieke in Nederland*, 62–65.
32 Nelson, "Zola," 1–18; Anbeek, *Geschiedenis van de literatuur*, 39–46.
33 Taine was certainly not the only one who made such deterministic claims about society, but he was an influential voice in this debate. For a longer discussion of such ideas and their influence on (Dutch) literature, see Kemperink, "Medische theorieën," 114–71.
34 For an intricate analysis of this, see Kemperink, *Het verloren paradijs*.
35 Bel, *Bloed en rozen*, 90–91.
36 Anbeek, *Geschiedenis van de literatuur*, 42–43; Kemperink, "Wat wil het naturalisme?," 41–60.
37 Kemperink, "Medische theorieën," 114–71.
38 Broersma, "Journalistic Form, Style and Strategies," ix–xxix.
39 Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 118–21.
40 Zola qtd. in Nelson, "Zola," 4.
41 Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, 190–97; Kemperink, "Wat wil het naturalisme?," 41–60.
42 Anbeek, *Geschiedenis van de literatuur*, 43–46; Kemperink, "Wat wil het naturalisme?," 41–60.
43 Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 173–84.
44 Canter, *Twee weken bedelaar*, 5: "Ik ging naar den hoek, waar mijn bed stond. Eerst liep ik langs het voeteneind van een bed, vanwaar onder de dekens uit de twee groote, naakte, afzichtelijk verwaarloosde voeten opstaken van een man, die op zijn rug lag. Daarnaast stond, met het voeteneinde naar het loopgangetje gekeerd, een bed met een man, die de akelig misvormde vleeschhomp van een verschrompelden arm zonder hand op 't dek had gelegd."
45 Van den Broek, "Visualizing the Social Question," 59–81.
46 Brusse, qtd. in Hagen, *Journalisten in Nederland*, 289.
47 Kött, *Das Interview in der französischen Presse*, 239–42.
48 Broersma, "The Discursive Strategy of a Subversive Genre," 143–58.
49 See Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, 190–91; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 120–21; Broersma, "Objectiviteit als professionele strategie," 163–81.
50 Muhlmann, *A Political History of Journalism*, 17.
51 Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 6–7.
52 Dubbelboer, "Rewriting the News," 157–75; Broersma, "Americanization," 403–19.
53 Muhlmann, *A Political History of Journalism*, 22.
54 Muhlmann, 22.
55 Muhlmann, 21–28.
56 Harbers and Broersma, "Impartial Reporter or *écrivain engagé*?," 218–40.
57 Broersma, "Mediating Parliament," 167–84.
58 Netscher, *In en om de Tweede Kamer*, 56: "Het is een scherp, spits, hoekig gelaat, met harde, scherpe trekken, en een snuffelende, fretachtige uitdrukking. De vorm van zijn hoofd is smal, en uit een magere profiel-lijn steekt een scherpe, speurende neus vooruit: twee kleine wangbaardjes bij de ooren, en overigens een kaalgeschoren gezicht. Het voorhoofd is smal en laag, de kin onbeteekend en wegloopend, en de oogen zijn diep inliggend en missen een fikschen opslag. En dit hoofd rust op de schouders van een middelmatig groot lichaam, nogal plat, eerder nerveus-taai dan gespierd-sterk, eenvoudig gekleed in donkere stof, zonder eenig markant kenmerk. Hij heeft in zijn uiterlijk veel van een binnenstadsch rechtertje of een eenvoudig ontvangertje, maar in het geheel niets van een adellijk heer of een hooggeleerden professor."
59 Netscher, 57: "Eerst krijgt hij een soort van nerveuschen schok, en dan steekt hij als een opgewekte speurhond den neus in den wind. Door het ingespannen luisteren, trekt hij een rimpel tusschen de wenkbrauwen, en de oogjes worden klein geknepen in een starend kijken naar den spreker. Hij buigt voorover in zijn bankje, om toch geen woord te missen; de handen steunen op den rand van het tafelje, en 't schijnt, dat hij klaar zit voor een sprong. Hij kijkt eens links en rechts zijne partijgenooten aan, als wilde hij stilzwijgend zeggen: 'Hooren jullie 't wel! Hoe kan die man zulke dwaasheden vertellen!'

En 't kookt in hem; hij wordt onrustiger, hoe verder de spreker doorgaat, en 't kost hem moeite zich in te houden, en den liberalen afgevaardigde niet in de rede te vallen."

60 Kemperink, "Wat wil het naturalisme?," 41–60; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 202–4.

61 Elout, "Ternataansche idylle," 1, bold emphasis added.

62 Broersma, "Americanization," 403–19; Wolf, *Het geheim van De Telegraaf.*

63 Broersma, "Botsende stijlen," 40–68; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 96–97.

64 Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, 62–65; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, 120–21.

65 Schmidt, *Rediscovering Narrative*, 5.

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