

Defending Freedom of Conscience: The Dutch Poet Gesine Brit, ca. 1669–1747, in the Dutch Enlightenment

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This essay examines the historical and intellectual significance of the Dutch Doopsgezind-Collegiant poet Gesine Brit. It reconstructs the historical background that led to the writing of a religious-political poem that Brit penned in 1705 to denounce the persecutions suffered by her religious companions in Groningen at the hands of the local religious and civil authorities. It then offers both an examination of its content and its first English translation. It demonstrates that Brit belonged to a tradition of Nonconformist intellectuals who contributed to shaping Dutch Enlightenment culture, thus expanding the canon of political writing to include women and their poetry.

Among its many consequences, it is now well established that the Reformation provided early modern women with a new space of ‘agency’ in which they could find room to intrude into the traditional male sphere(s) and often to voice their opinions, thus ‘disturbing’

ACA = Amsterdam City Archive; GCA = Groningen City Archive
References to ACA and GCA are given by access and inventory numbers

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early modern patriarchal society – Protestant and Catholic alike.¹ This was not a linear process and often traditional gender roles were reasserted and renewed. We can see that women’s opportunities to engage across established bounds of gender segregation in religious discursive practices peaked during the first decades of religious reform.² The complexity of early modern women’s condition is well exemplified by the emergence of a new category of ‘domesticity’, with a new understanding of the household as a private and intimate sphere. This new category reinforced the traditional prohibition of women’s public speech, but also allowed for the gradual emergence of new public spheres which offered new opportunities for expression that women used to make themselves heard.³ The early modern Netherlands – both the northern Dutch Republic and the southern provinces under the Spanish rule – provides many examples of women who entered male-dominated public spheres. ‘Nederlanders’ showed ‘attitudes towards women and gender that were among the more female-friendly in Western Europe’, which does not mean that ‘women were not constricted by patriarchal norms’, but rather that ‘their range of activity was wider than historians often assume’.⁴ It is not surprising then that many scholars from several fields have paid increasing attention to the early modern Low Countries – particularly the Dutch Republic – in examining women’s economic activities, their literary and artistic works, their legal status and position in marriage, as well as the depiction of women and ideals of femininity by male authors.⁵

Despite the many studies and the increasing scholarly attention, there are aspects of women’s history in the Netherlands that have received less attention. Women’s religious activities there and a comprehensive

¹ For a careful discussion of the concept of ‘agency’ see Martha Howell, ‘The problem of women’s agency in late medieval and early modern Europe’, in Sarah J. Moran and Amanda C. Pipkin (eds), *Women and gender in the early modern Low Countries, 1500–1750*, Leiden 2019, 21–31.

² Amanda Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters: Reformed women in the Dutch Republic*, Oxford 2022, 30–1.

³ Martine van Elk, *Early modern women’s writing: domesticity, privacy, and the public sphere in England and the Dutch Republic*, Cham 2017, 1–2. Van Elk has demonstrated that several women writers continued to represent themselves according to the previous, traditional model of absolutist power and publicity, as a way to counter the growing emphasis on the household and its private realm.

⁴ Sarah J. Moran and Amanda Pipkin, ‘Introduction’, in Moran and Pipkin, *Women and gender*, 2–3.

⁵ For a careful discussion of the historiography of early modern women in the Netherlands and the pre-eminence given to the northern provinces see *ibid.* 6–16. A useful resource on Dutch women is the *Digitaal vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*, at <<https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon>>. See also the monumental anthology compiled by Els Kloek and Irma Boom, *1001 vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, Nijmegen 2013.

examination of their political writings are among these.⁶ The former appears particularly remarkable when considering that women were the majority of church members among the Reformed and the Mennonites and Doopsgezinden.⁷ And, despite the substantial growth of publications related to women's contribution to fields such as philosophy, literature, religion and political thought in the early modern period,⁸ Jacqueline Broad emphasised that 'in the standard intellectual histories, we rarely hear about the opinions of early modern women'.⁹ The reason why Dutch women's political ideas seemed to have received less attention appears to be that they expressed them in genres that are outside the usual canon of political writings, such as poetry, plays and devotional texts.¹⁰ But religion was

⁶ Moran and Pipkin, 'Introduction', 12–13.

⁷ Ibid. 10–11; Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 1; Mirjam van Veen, "'... Polué et souille ...': The Reformed polemic against Anabaptist marriage, 1560–1650", in Mirjam van Veen and others (eds), *Sisters: myth and reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind women*, ca. 1525–1900, Leiden 2014, 88, 91–2; Piet Visser, 'L'Honneste Femme: a French, Roman Catholic role model for Dutch Doopsgezind sisters', in Van Veen, *Sisters*, 198. In this essay I follow Piet Visser's use of the terms 'Mennonite' and 'Doopsgezind'. The former refers to those Dutch Anabaptists belonging to more conservative communities, while the latter to those who emphasised the responsibility of individual believers over the authority of the congregation, thus resulting to a certain extent in more tolerant communities. It is uncertain when exactly the term 'Doopsgezind' began to be used, but it was after 1557, when the Waterlanders separated themselves from the group led by Menno Simons, Dirck Philips and Lenaert Bouwens. The Waterlanders seem to have been the first to use the term Doopsgezinden to refer to themselves. For more information on this schism and the use of these terms see Piet Visser, 'Mennonites and Doopsgezinden in the Netherlands, 1535–1700', in John Roth and James Stayer (eds), *A companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, Leiden 2007, 299–300, 311–14. This distinction between 'conservative' Mennonites and more 'liberal' Doopsgezinden was reinforced in the seventeenth century, when the latter associated with the Collegiants. On the use of the terms 'Mennonite' and 'Doopsgezind', and the preference for more neutral terms such as 'baptiser' or 'adult baptiser' see also Michael Driedger, 'The year 1625, the Dutch Republic, and book history: perspectives for reframing studies of Mennonites and early modernity', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* xcvi/1 (2023), 12–14, 22–3.

⁸ Among the many studies see at least Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, *A history of women's political thought in Europe, 1400–1700*, Cambridge 2009; Danielle Clarke, *The politics of early modern women's writing*, 2nd edn, London–New York 2013; Victoria Brownlee and Laura Gallagher, *Biblical women in early modern literary culture, 1550–1700*, Manchester 2015; Kirilka Stavreva, *Words like daggers: violent female speech in early modern England*, Lincoln 2015; Emily Thomas (ed.), *Early modern women on metaphysics*, Cambridge 2018; and Derval Conroy (ed.), *Towards an equality of the sexes in early modern France*, New York–London 2021.

⁹ Jacqueline Broad, 'Women on liberty in early modern England', *Philosophy Compass* ix/2 (2014), 112.

¹⁰ Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 21; Moran and Pipkin, 'Introduction', 12–13; Pipkin, 'Women's writing', 32. On the growing circulation of women's writing in the

women's main motivation and provided fora for activity outside their conventional roles and thus their political ideas were often expressed in religious poetry and texts.¹¹ This article aims to contribute to our understanding of how Dutch women intervened in both religious and political discourses at the same time. The focus is on the historical and intellectual significance of a Dutch poet named Gesine Brit (*ca.* 1667–1747), who wrote a poem in 1705 to denounce the persecutions stirred up by the Dutch Reformed Church against her co-religionists.

Brit was a Doopsgezind living in Amsterdam. There she also had ties with an aconfessional group, the Collegiants.¹² In other words, she belonged to one of those Protestant groups that did not align to seventeenth-century confessional traditions and often reacted against them to defend freedom of conscience.¹³ Belief in the spiritual equality of men and women was one of the main tenets of the Collegiants, and thus women were actively engaged in organising meetings or in providing financial support to the group.¹⁴ Therefore, it should not be surprising that Gesine Brit took upon herself the task of denouncing the persecutions suffered by the Collegiant group in Groningen. But she did not confine herself to exposing the sufferings of the Groningen Collegiants.

seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, either in manuscript or in published form, see Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 224–5.

¹¹ Patricia Crawford, *Women and religion in England*, London 2005.

¹² As further explained below, the Collegiant movement was aconfessional in the sense that it did not require a confession of faith for participation in its religious assemblies. Some of its members also openly opposed confession of faiths as a group-defining factor. This picture may be complicated by the unclear position of the Collegiants towards Roman Catholics. According to the historian Jacobus van Slee, the Collegiants were inclined to allow Catholics to participate in their religious assemblies, but it is not certain that Catholics ever did so: *De Rijnsburger Collegianten: met inleiding van Dr. S. B. J. Zilverberg*, Utrecht 1980, 404–8. Further research may prove whether or not Catholics actually participated in Collegiant meetings, and if not, how this might change the scholarly view of the Collegiant movement as aconfessional.

¹³ The historiography on 'confessionalisation', which includes both 'confession-building' and 'social discipline', is vast. For a concise, careful summary see Michael Driedger, 'Konfessionalisierung (im Täuferum)', in *Mennonitisches Lexikon (MennLex)*, at <<https://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:konfessionalisierung>>. See also Michael Driedger and Gary Waite, 'From "the radical reformation" to "the radical enlightenment"? The specter and complexities of Spiritualism in early modern England, Germany, and the Low Countries', *Church History and Religious Culture* ci/2–3 (2021), 135–66. Leszek Kolakowski included the Collegiants among the groups and individuals that he labelled as 'Christians without a church': *Chrétiens sans église: la conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIe siècle*, trans. Anna Posner, Paris 1987, chs iii–iv.

¹⁴ J. M. Zijlmans, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw: vereningsvormen van het informele culturele leven te Rotterdam*, Den Haag 1999, 99–126. On the early modern concept of equality between sexes and its difference with the equivalent modern idea see Derval Conroy, 'Introduction: women and the history of philosophy', *Early Modern French Studies* xliii/1 (2021), 1–4.

She also made a plea for political concepts such as freedom of conscience and of religion, while arguing for state control over the Church. The first section of this article gives an account of the Collegiant movement and of the group in Groningen as a means of contextualising Brit's poem, while the second provides biographical information on Brit herself. The third section examines her remarkable poem, which in many ways appears to contribute to key Enlightenment political and philosophical values. Brit was part of a tradition of Nonconformist writers and intellectuals who shaped an early Dutch Enlightenment culture in which opposition to religious constraints, freedom of conscience and freedom of expression were key principles.¹⁵ Such a tradition includes several male writers, but only a small number of females. Brit and her poem are thus crucial to expanding such a canon.¹⁶ The appendices include the first English translation, with footnotes, of her poem, as well as a transcription of the Dutch version.

The Collegiant movement and its oppression in Groningen

Among the many religious groups born in the decades following the Reformation, the Dutch Collegiant movement is one of the most

¹⁵ Among the many studies see at least Piet Visser, 'Enlightened Dutch Mennonitism: the case of Cornelius van Engelen', in Anselm Schubert and others (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns / Boundaries of Anabaptism*, Gütersloh 2009, 369–91; Wiep van Bunge, *De Nederlandse republiek, Spinoza en radicale verlichting*, Antwerp 2010; Ruben Buys, "'Without thy self, O man, thou hast no means to look for, by which thou maist know God": Pieter Balling, the radical enlightenment, and the legacy of Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert', *Church History and Religious Culture* xciii/3 (2013), 363–83; Ruben Buys, *Sparks of reason: vernacular rationalism in the Low Countries, 1550–1670*, Hilversum 2015; Gary Waite, 'The drama of the two-word debate among liberal Dutch Mennonites, c. 1620–1660: preparing the way for Baruch Spinoza?', in Bridget Heal and Anorthe Kremers (eds), *Radicalism and dissent in the world of Protestant reform*, Göttingen 2017, 118–36; Joke Spaans and Jetze Touber, *Enlightened religion: from confessional Churches to polite piety in the Dutch Republic*, Leiden 2019; and Michael Driedger, 'Aufklärung', in *MennLex*, at <<https://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:aufklaerung>>.

¹⁶ Brit is listed among the eight women (out of eighty-four authors) who were active between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. See Piet Visser, 'Aspects of social criticism and cultural assimilation: the Mennonite image in literature and self-criticism of literary Mennonites', in Sjouke Voolstra and Piet Visser (eds), *From martyr to muppy: a historical introduction to cultural assimilation processes of a religious minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, Amsterdam 1994, 82. But she is not listed, for instance, in the 'Dictionary of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch philosophers', in which Michael Driedger counted nineteen men and one woman belonging to the Mennonites and Doopsgezinden. Driedger also reveals that women were active in compiling hymnbooks and, more broadly, in the Dutch book trade. For these reasons, he follows a previous statement by Troy Osborne in stressing that 'there is a need for more research on early modern Dutch adult baptizing women': Driedger, 'The year 1625', 34–5, 38–9, 42.

fascinating. They were a Protestant group, founded without clerical or governmental oversight. Their meetings were called *collegien* ('colleges'), from which came the Dutch name *Collegianten* ('Collegiants') for their members. They were also called *Rijnsburgers*, after the village of Rijnsburg, near Leiden, where they established their first college sometime between 1619 and 1620 in the aftermath of the Synod of Dordrecht.¹⁷

The name *collegien* for their meetings derives from similar religious meetings within Protestant churches. 'College' was indeed the term used to designate religious assemblies directed or overseen by church ministers where a small number of congregants met to read and interpret scriptural passages.¹⁸ However, the Collegiant meetings in the Dutch Republic had characteristics that made them unique. Firstly, there was no minister from any existing church designated to oversee and administer the meeting. Secondly, the colleges established by the Collegiants advanced specifically a method of meeting based on communal dialogue that was egalitarian in nature, because each participant – regardless of gender, social background and confessional belonging – was entitled to freedom of conscience and of expression. Their meetings revolved around the practice of free prophecy, or freedom of prophesying, a mode of utterance based on the free interpretation of scriptural passages and the free expression of religious views. The goal of such a practice was mutual religious edification. This meant that women participated in these meetings together with men, and that Reformed people were gathering with Mennonites, Remonstrants with Socinians, Quakers with Christians belonging to no Church, debating and exchanging ideas on a variety of religious topics. Heterodoxy was largely accepted at such meetings, at times even explicitly cherished as a value. In this sense it is legitimate to describe the Collegiants not as a religious group or Church in the ordinary sense – focused or established on

¹⁷ Although it seems hard to establish exactly who started to use these terms in the first place, it appears that the term 'Rijnsburger' was well established among the Collegiants themselves by 1672, when Joachim Oudaen wrote the first history of the beginnings of the movement. As for the term *Collegianten*, it appears profusely in archival documents from the Collegiants in Amsterdam starting from the late 1670s. See respectively [Joachim Oudaen], *Aanmerkingen over het verhaal van het eerste begin en opkomen der Rynsburgers*, Rotterdam 1672; 'Inventaris van het Archief van het Weeshuis der Doopsgezinde Collegianten de Oranjeappel', ACA, 169/1. For more information on the controversies within the Dutch Reformed Church between Remonstrants and Gomarists, and the defeat of the former at the Synod of Dordrecht, see Adriaan Goudriaan and Fried van Lieburg, *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*, Leiden 2011. For the socio-political context of such controversies see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness and fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford 1995, 422–49.

¹⁸ Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 34–7. See also Fred van Lieburg, 'Het gereformeerde conventikelwezen in de classis Dordrecht in de 17e en 18e eeuw', *Holland, Regionaal-historisch Tijdschrift* xxiii/1 (1991), 2–21.

common doctrines and insisting on doctrinal conformity – but rather as a movement or community founded on practices advancing a form of public sphere.¹⁹ In short, colleges were aconfessional urban spaces where proto-democratic values were put in place, as all sorts of people could gather there to practise egalitarianism, freedom of expression and toleration in real terms.²⁰

Many colleges were founded in several Dutch cities in the course of the seventeenth century.²¹ This had far-reaching consequences for the Doopsgezinde and Mennonite communities in the Dutch Republic, as many Doopsgezinden participated in the Collegiant meetings. In Rotterdam, for example, five preachers were expelled from the United Flemish Doopsgezinde community in 1655 and joined the Waterlanders, because of disagreements over the manner of conducting the college within the Flemish community.²² Moreover, the participation of many United Flemish Doopsgezinden in the Amsterdam college – notably the deacon Cornelis Moorman, and the preachers Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt – gradually led to what is now known as the *Lammerenkrijgh* – ‘the war of the lambs’, after the name of the Amsterdam Doopsgezinde church ‘t *Lam* (‘the Lamb’). The dispute between the two parties – those who sympathised with the Collegiants and those who opposed them – began in the mid-1650s and was fought out through sermons from the pulpit and a large

¹⁹ Driedger, ‘Gesellschaften und Vereine’, in *MennLex*, at <<http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:gesellschaften-und-vereine>>. The historiography on early modern ‘publics’ is constantly growing. An excellent summary of recent discussions on early modern privacy and the public sphere(s) can be found in Van Elk, *Early modern women’s writing*, 3–10. Among the many studies on this topic see Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin (eds), *Making publics in early modern Europe: people, things, forms of knowledge*, New York–London 2010, and Peter Lake and Steve Pincus (eds), *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England: public persons and popular spirits*, Manchester 2012.

²⁰ For more information on the Collegiants see Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*; Wiep van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691): een Rotterdamse collegiant in de ban van Spinoza*, Rotterdam 1990; Andrew Fix, *Prophecy and reason: the Dutch Collegiants in the early Enlightenment*, Princeton 1991; Leszek Kołakowski, ‘Dutch seventeenth-century anti-confessional ideas and rational religion: the Mennonite, Collegiant, and Spinozan connections: translation and introduction by James Satterwhite’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* lxiv/3–4 (1990), 259–97, 385–416; Gerrit Voogt, ‘“Anyone who can read may be a preacher”: sixteenth-century roots of the Collegiants’, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* lxxxv/1 (2005), 409–24; and Francesco Quatrini, *Adam Boreel (1602–1665): a Collegiant’s attempt to reform Christianity*, Leiden 2021.

²¹ For a list of the several colleges and an account of their beginnings see Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, 79–237.

²² *Ibid.* 105–107; Visser, ‘Mennonites and Doopsgezinden’, 334. In the 1650s the United Flemish congregations also included the Young Frisians and the High Germans, as the three groups had united in 1639. For further information on the several Doopsgezinde and Mennonite groups in the Netherlands between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century see Visser, ‘Mennonites and Doopsgezinden’, 319–28.

number of pamphlets from both sides. At the heart of the dispute was the claim by Abrahamsz and Spruyt that the Doopsgezinde church could not prove to be God's true Church, nor could its offices and ceremonies be the same as those of the Apostolic Church. Therefore, confessions of faith – including doctrinal statements on Christology and the Trinity – should not be a determining factor in deciding who could take part in the ceremonies of the Doopsgezinde church and who should be excluded. Nor should confessions of faith be regarded as essential to attain salvation, because only the essential doctrines included in the Apostle's Creed were necessary for this purpose. The dispute reached its climax in 1664, when the United Flemish split into two groups, the 'Lamists' – namely the groups following Abrahamsz and Spruyt – and the 'Zonists' – the opposing group which began to meet in a former brewery, 'de Zon' ('the Sun').²³

It should be noted that the Collegiants were also associated with Socinianism by their opponents – namely with the doctrinal system based on the views of the Italian Nonconformist Fausto Socinus.²⁴ In the early modern polemical literature, however, Socinianism had become a broad term of scorn used to denounce Nonconformists or, more generally, one's opponents, regardless of whether or not they were close to or even sympathetic to Socinus' ideas.²⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that the Reformed ministers of Amsterdam referred to the local Collegiants as 'Socinians' from the very beginning when trying to stop them and denouncing them to the local burgomasters.²⁶ And the opponents of Abrahamsz and his group also frequently accused them of being nothing but Socinians. These accusations were particularly dangerous in the Dutch Republic after September 1653, when the States of Holland and West Friesland issued a decree against Socinianism. Punishments for spreading Socinian ideas, and for publishing and trading Socinian texts, included heavy fines and banishment from the province of Holland.²⁷

The disputes that led to the schisms between Lamists and Zonists and the dangers following charges of Socinianism lie at the heart of the case of the Groningen Collegiants. In Groningen the college was established only later

²³ Visser, 'Mennonites and Doopsgezinden', 334–40. On the *Lammerenkrijgh* see also Michael Driedger, *Obedient heretics: Mennonite identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona*, 2nd edn, London Park–New York 2017, ch. iii. The divide between the 'tolerant Lamists' and the 'confessional Zonists' matches roughly the distinction between Doopsgezinden and Mennonites described above.

²⁴ The historiography on Socinianism is vast. For a concise and careful analysis of Socinianism as a doctrinal system see Zbigniew Ogonowski, *Socinianism: history, views, legacy*, Rome 2021.

²⁵ For example, Gary Waite has revealed that both opposing parties accused each other of Socinianism during the Two-Word dispute: Waite, 'The Two-Word debate'.

²⁶ Quatrini, *Adam Boreel*, 87–8, 97–119.

²⁷ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 911–12.

in the century, when most of the other Collegiant groups had been already active for a few decades. Sometime in 1688, eleven Doopsgezinden – seven men and four women – were banished from their congregation when they refused to cease holding a college within the Doopsgezinde church. From that time onwards, those banished would hold separate assemblies independently from any church control, following the practices and ideals of the Rijnsburgers. The Groningen college was thus born; at first it counted mostly Doopsgezinde members.²⁸

It might have been expected that the Reformed church in Groningen would oppose the establishment of a new heterodox group in their city as soon as it began meeting independently. However, for more than a decade, the Reformed church appeared to pay no attention to it. Two reasons can explain this: firstly, they considered the Collegiants as a subgroup or separate group of Doopsgezinden that would not attract Reformed members; secondly, as we will see, it appears that they considered the college private enough to not cause any real threat. However, the situation changed suddenly in early 1700. On 6 March the consistory summoned one of their members, Thijes Textor, who, ‘mised by a certain vagabond named Carel Cats’, had joined ‘the sort of Mennonites who call themselves Collegiants’.²⁹ Examined on doctrinal points related to the Remonstrant religion and to Socinianism, Textor denied being a follower of either Arminius or Socinus. The consistory then admonished him to avoid the Collegiants, ‘people who taught temptation’, but Textor refused ‘to promise that’.³⁰ At the next consistory meeting, on 28 April, the Reformed ministers reported ‘how the so called Collegiants, who originated from the Mennonites, took the liberty to treat of all religious points in a Socinian manner in a public assembly’.³¹ Moreover, not only did they attract one of their members, making explicit reference to Textor, but they were also inviting others through such ‘publycke tsaemenkomsten’ (‘public meetings’). These two minutes from the book of the Reformed consistory and their use of the term ‘public’ are certainly revealing. It was exactly when Reformed members began attending the assemblies of

²⁸ Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, 221–6.

²⁹ ‘Thyes Textor misleydt door seker landloper Carel Cats genaemt, en naemaels overgegaan tot de soorte van Mennisten, die sich Collegianten noemen, herwaerts geciteert verscheen’: GCA, access no. 1517, Kerkenraad van Hervormde Gemeente te Groningen, 1568–1951, inventory no. 4 (here in after GCA 1517/4), 6 Mar. 1700 (no foliation).

³⁰ ‘Vermaent dat sich te wachten hadde van’t geselschap der Collegianten, als luden die tot verleydinge leerden, wilde dat niet beloven’: *ibid.*

³¹ ‘Ingelyxs wierde gerept, hoe die so genaemde Collegianten, die uit de Mennisten uitgegaen syn, haer selven de vryheit nemen om in een publycke vergaederinge van alle punten der religie op een Sociniaensche maniere te handelen’: GCA 1517/4, 28 Apr. 1700 (no foliation).

the college and when these were becoming too popular that the Reformed consistory decided they could not tolerate this Nonconformist group anymore. And thus, they decided to appeal to the city council. The burgomasters had to ‘take away this liberty from the abovementioned Collegiants’; moreover, these person had to make a profession of faith to prove that they were not Socinians.³²

In the following months the consistory tried to secure support from the burgomasters. In August the city council commissioned the *advocaat-fiscaal* – a judicial officer whose role could be compared to a modern public prosecutor – to find information on the college meeting place and on the doctrines discussed there. The *fiscaal* made some inquiries, but it is likely he was not giving priority to such a task.³³ Indeed, almost a year later, on 29 May 1701, the consistory clerk revealed that the burgomasters had not taken any measures against the Collegiants yet, even though their *buitensporicheden* (‘extravagances’) were in front of everyone’s eyes.³⁴ At the insistence of the consistory, on 6 December 1701, the burgomasters enacted an ordinance against the Collegiants. Repeating the reasons why the consistory decided to oppose them in the first place, the Collegiants were identified as ‘a new sect from the Mennonites’, who ‘lure people from this community to their doctrine by going in [their] houses’. Their opinions on the fundamentals of religion were regarded as ‘very dangerous and deviating’. For this reason, the Collegiants were ordered to exhibit a written confession of faith on such doctrines, which concerned the nature of Christ and of his office.³⁵

The Collegiants fulfilled this order on December 19. In a written statement delivered to the burgomasters, they denied the accusations made by the Reformed and detailed their religious opinions, reminding the burgomasters that they had been able to exercise their beliefs freely in Groningen for some years. Therefore they asked that they might continue ‘unhindered to live up to our conscience’, while guaranteeing their full

³² ‘Dese vryheit an opgemelte Collegianten te benemen’: *ibid.*

³³ It was not uncommon that Dutch magistrates left dissenters unmolested for some time, despite the Reformed ministers’ pressure: Van Veen, ‘The reformed polemic’, 89–90.

³⁴ GCA, 1517/4, 29 May 1701 (no foliation). For the discussions around the Collegiants in the preceding months see the consistory minutes dated 8 June, 25 Aug., 4 Sept., 24 Nov. 1700 at GCA 1517/4.

³⁵ ‘Een nieuwe secte uit de Mennoniten by de huizen gaande, om volk van dese Gemeente tot haar leere te trecken Collegianten genaamd en dat ... deselve seer gevaarlyke en dwalende gevoelen hadden omtrent het Fundament onser saligheid’: GCA, access no. 1605, Stadsbestuur van Groningen (2), 1594–1815, inventory no. 25 (hereinafter GCA 1605/25), 461. There is an identical copy of this ordinance in GCA, access no. 2041, Register Feith-stukken Stadsarchief Groningen (meest afschriften), 1291–1815, inventory no. 967 (here in after GCA 2041/967), extract dated 6 December 1701 (no foliation).

obedience to their authority at the same time.³⁶ However the city council delivered this document to the Reformed consistory, which rejected all the Collegiants' theological positions and listed eight doctrinal points on which the Collegiants had to make a clearer declaration.³⁷ The burgomasters drafted a new ordinance on 30 January 1702, asking for a new statement on these eight points within two weeks,³⁸ but this time the Collegiants refused. They asked to be relieved from handing over a second statement and to be allowed to exercise their *vryheid van conscientie* ('freedom of conscience'). This request was rejected and on 15 February the burgomasters formally forbade the Collegiants from holding any meetings until they fulfilled the city authorities' orders.³⁹

Despite this, the Collegiants did not stop their activities. On 25 May 1704, the Reformed ministers reported that 'notwithstanding the Lords of the council had forbidden such [meetings] by ordinance, they [the Collegiants] notoriously go against the prohibition of the magistrate' and 'still continue stoutly in their assemblies and this in their old place, where their number first increased, then decreased'.⁴⁰ Facing a new city ordinance, the Collegiants attempted to appeal to the separation between the *forum conscientiae* and the *forum externum*, pledging obedience to the city authorities in all civil matters. However, 'concerning the refraining from their religious meetings, they [the Collegiants] knew in [their] conscience that these were commanded by God and Christ, [whose command] prevailed'.⁴¹ In other words, they were not willing to cease the meetings of the college, as it was not within the power of the burgomasters to decide over religious matters. Unsurprisingly, the city authorities were not of the same opinion and commanded the Collegiants to fulfil the terms of the previous ordinances.⁴² They also ordered the bailiff to

³⁶ 'Dat wy onbehiinderd in 't beleeven van onze conscientie onder U Ed: Mog: regeringe nog mogen continueren': GCA 2041/967, extract dated 19 December 1701 [no foliation].

³⁷ Ibid. extract dated 9 Jan. 1702 (no foliation).

³⁸ GCA 1605/25, 482.

³⁹ GCA 1605/25, 493-4.

⁴⁰ 'Wierd wederom gerept van de soo genaemde Collegianten, die alsoch in hare vergaderingen stoutelik voortvaren, en dat op haer oude plaetse, alwaer haer getal eer vermeerderde als verminderde; en dat onaengesien de Heeren des raads by resolutie haer sulx verboden hadden, so datse tegen 't verbodt der magistraet notirlich aengaen': GCA 1517/4, 25 May 1704 (no foliation). The reformed ministers had already reported two years earlier that the Collegiants had continued to meet on Sundays in their usual meeting place: GCA 1517/4, 20 Aug. 1702 (no foliation).

⁴¹ 'Belangende het naelaaten van haer Godsdienstig 't zaamenkomsten, dat in conscientie verstonden, haer sulks van Godt en Christus was belasten, dat vermogten': GCA, access no. 1605, Stadsbestuur van Groningen (2), 1594-1815, inventory no. 26 (hereinafter GCA 1605/26), 327.

⁴² Between August 1702 and May 1704, the burgomasters had enacted three further ordinances concerning the Collegiants, namely on 7 September 1702, 8 January 1703 and 11 December 1703: *ibid.* 37-8, 79, 320-1.

inquire into the college meetings and if they were still held, the city *fiscaal* should take measures against them.⁴³

Sometime in January or early February 1705, the Collegiants complied with the burgomasters' decision and delivered two new statements of their beliefs.⁴⁴ The first was longer and signed by many, the other shorter and signed only by a Collegiant named Jan Cornelis. Both documents were then handed over to the Reformed consistory in early March, which immediately charged both statements with Socinianism.⁴⁵ On June 11, at the consistory's insistence,⁴⁶ the burgomasters enacted a new ordinance and ordered the bailiff to remove all the chairs and benches from the college meeting place, so as to stop their assemblies.⁴⁷ It seems that such a measure bore some fruit. On 30 August, the consistory stated that 'this pernicious assembly is thus far beaten'.⁴⁸ The news of the measures taken against the Collegiants in Groningen likely spread across the provinces and cities of the Dutch Republic, certainly among Doopsgezinde communities and Collegiant circles. Hearing what her fellow-Collegiants endured in Groningen, a Doopsgezinde-Collegiant poet living in Amsterdam decided to put pen to paper and write a poem denouncing the acts of persecution by the Reformed Church and the civil authorities who obeyed them. Her name was Gesine Brit.

Gesine (or Gesina) Brit (ca. 1669–1747)

The biographical information about Gesine Maartens Brit⁴⁹ is meagre.⁵⁰ She was born sometime between 1668 and 1669 in Blokzijl, a small village in the north-east part of the Netherlands, in the province of Overijssel.⁵¹ Her father was Maarten Hendriks Brit, while her mother's

⁴³ Ibid. 327. ⁴⁴ Ibid. 342. ⁴⁵ GCA 1517/4, 4 Mar. 1705 [no foliation].

⁴⁶ Ibid. 10 June 1705 (no foliation). See also the minutes dated 24 May.

⁴⁷ GCA 1605/26, 379.

⁴⁸ 'Dese schadelicke by-een-komste dus verre is gestoyt': GCA 1517/4, 30 Aug. 1705 (no foliation). It should be noted that the Collegiants resumed their assemblies in the following months. For information on the history of the Groningen College during the eighteenth century see Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, 229–37.

⁴⁹ Variants of her name include Geesie, Gezine, Gesina and Gezina.

⁵⁰ The following biographical account is based on the biography composed by Van Oostrum and further updated using archival findings. Thus, when not otherwise specified, biographical information is taken from W. R. D. van Oostrum, 'Brit, Gesine', in *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon*, at <<https://resources.huuygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/brit>>.

⁵¹ The date of birth can be concluded from her marriage certificate, which states that she was forty-two years old on 4 September 1711: ACA, access no. 5001, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam, inventory no. 708 (here in after ACA 5001/708), fo. 70r.

name was Baartje Roelofs. She also had a younger brother, Roelof Brit, who was born sometime between 1676 and 1677.⁵² We do not have much information on her parents either, besides the fact that they were Doopsgezinden. They moved to Amsterdam for unknown reasons in early 1682, carrying an *attestatie*⁵³ from Blokzijl and registering at the Lamist church, now called 'bij 't Lam en Toren', in February 1682.⁵⁴ There is no exact information on Maarten Brit's death, but this occurred before 1710, as on the burial certificate of Baartje Roelofs, dated 16 January 1710, she was mentioned as the widow of Maarten Brit.⁵⁵ It is likely that Baartje Roelofs remarried after her husband's death and that she had at least another daughter. In the first version of her will, Gesine Brit mentioned 'Gilles Hogeveen, the son of her half-sister's husband', as one of her heirs.⁵⁶ The nineteen-year-old Gesine Brit had officially joined the Doopsgezinde community on 15 February 1688, when she was baptised in the 't Lam en Toren church with her parents as witnesses.⁵⁷ Her brother never joined the Doopsgezinden, as he preferred to become a member of the Amsterdam Remonstrant Church on 24 May 1729.

Unfortunately, there is no information on Gesine Brit's upbringing and education.⁵⁸ The hypothesis that she contributed to Doopsgezinde songbooks in her early years cannot be dismissed. After all, the Dutch Doopsgezinden had a rich and growing singing culture, producing numerous songbooks to which Brit might have contributed anonymously. If so, Brit would be following in a tradition that included Doopsgezinde

⁵² According to his marriage certificate, Roelof Brit was fifty-three years old when he married Maria Catharina de Bruine on 25 August 1730: ACA, access no. 5001, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam, inventory no. 571, fo. 19r.

⁵³ This was a declaration given by the consistory of a congregation on behalf of a member who was moving elsewhere, testifying that the said member was irreproachable in both belief and behaviour. The *attestatie* for Maarten Brit and Baartje Roelofs was dated 17 December 1681. ACA, access no. 1120, Archief van Verenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente van Amsterdam en rechtsvoorgangers, inventory no. 245, Attestatie voor Marten Hendrikx Brid en syn huysvrouw Bartie Roelofs 17 decemb. 1681 (no foliation).

⁵⁴ The Doopsgezinde church *bij 't Lam en Toren* was established in 1672 from the union of the Lamists *bij 't Lam* and the Waterlanders *bij 't Toren*: Visser, 'Mennonites and Doopsgezinden', 337.

⁵⁵ ACA, access no. 5001, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam, inventory no. 1070, fo. 99v.

⁵⁶ 'Gilles Hogeveen haar man halvesusters soon': ACA, access no. 5075, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, inventory no. 8508 (here in after ACA 5075/8508), notarial act dated 24 January 1732 [no foliation].

⁵⁷ ACA, access no. 1120, Archief van Verenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente van Amsterdam en rechtsvoorgangers, inventory no. 213, 106.

⁵⁸ For information on women's education in the Dutch Republic see Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 13–15, 167–213.

song- and hymnwriters such as Soetken Gerijts and Judith Lubberts.⁵⁹ Jacobus van Nieuweveen's foreword to the reader of a new Dutch edition of Elizabeth Jocelin's *The mothers legacie*,⁶⁰ published in 1699,⁶¹ acknowledged those who took part in this editorial project, and he listed Brit as 'the honorable Geesje Brit, a not unexperienced lover of the art of poetry'.⁶² Brit contributed to this edition by writing a sonnet which was placed immediately after the foreword by Van Nieuweveen, and three poems, added as appendices to the book.⁶³ These were not Brit's first published verses. In 1697 she had published a poem in Herman Schijn's *Salomons Tempel-Bouw*.⁶⁴ Between 1699 and 1711 Brit published other verses, contributing to the works of Doopsgezinden such as Adriaan Spinniker and Jan Huygen, as well as to a collection of poems by the Reformed preacher Gerard Outhof.⁶⁵ It is quite significant that Brit cooperated not only with both Lamists and Zonists – Schijn belonged to the latter, while Spinniker to the former – but also with a Reformed church member.⁶⁶

We have no information on Brit's financial means. Perhaps hers was a well-off family and she could dedicate herself freely to poetry, living off her father's inheritance. This might also explain why she married quite late in her life. In 1711, Brit married Jacob van Gaveren with her brother as witness: he was thirty-two years old and she was forty-three.⁶⁷ Another unusual feature of in Brit's marriage is that Van Gaveren did not belong to her Doopsgezinde community. Born in Leiden, he had moved to Amsterdam and joined the Zonists, being baptised in their church on 5 November 1702.⁶⁸ There is no evidence suggesting that

⁵⁹ Visser, 'L'Honneste Femme', 203; Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 32.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Jocelin, *The mothers legacie, to her unborne child*, London 1624.

⁶¹ Idem, *Uyterste Wille van een Moeder Aan haar toekomstige Kind, Toegeuegent aan de Volkmaaktste Huysmoeder: den tweden druk, met vaarzen en koopere platsen versiert*, Amsterdam [1699].

⁶² 'De Eerbare Geesje Brit, geen ongeoeffende liefhebberes van de dicht-konst': *ibid.* fo. *3v.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 209–47.

⁶⁴ Gesine Brit, 'Op Salomons Vreede Tyd, uyt 1 Kon. 1. v. 4, 5: verklaart en toegepast ter gelegenheid van de Vrede, door Dr. Hermannus Schyn: Leraar der Doopsgezinden te Amsterdam', in Hermannus Schyn, *Salomons Tempel-Bouw, of Regt Gebruik des Vredes, op den algemeene Dankdag (gevierd op den 6 november 1697), aanwezen, in de Verklaring en Toepassing van Salomons Woorden: 1 Koningen v: vers 4, 5*, Amsterdam 1697.

⁶⁵ By contributing to other people's works and to larger editorial projects, Brit complied with the ordinary custom of the Dutch Republic: Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 128–29. For the titles of these poems by Brit see the biographical entry by Van Oostrum, who has compiled a preliminary bibliography of Brit's poetry.

⁶⁶ Nina Schroeder, 'Art and heterodoxy in the Dutch Enlightenment: Arnold Houbracken, the Flemish Mennonites, and religious difference in "The great theatre of Netherlandish Painters and Painteresses" (1718–1721)', *Church History and Religious Culture* ci/2–3 (2021), 324–56.

⁶⁷ ACA 5001/708, fo. 70r.

⁶⁸ ACA, access no. 877, Archief van de Doopsgezinde Gemeente de Zon, inventory no. 35 (no foliation).

either of the two spouses left their community to join the other, so it is likely that each one kept attending church services and ceremonies in their own church. This might suggest that Brit kept some liberties when marrying Van Gaveren, without being confined to the privacy of the household. This suggestion is supported by the facts that she was also an active member in Collegiant circles and that she did not comply with another common Dutch custom according to which women writers were generally unmarried and often stopped writing after their marriage.⁶⁹ Yet, Brit kept writing and publishing after marrying Van Gaveren.⁷⁰ In 1723, she had contributed to the *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden*, a posthumous emblem collection by the Lamist painter and writer Arnold Houbraken. Her name even appeared on the title page of the edition.⁷¹ She began working on this project in 1718, when Houbraken's former pupil Jacob Zeeus died without completing his task:

After a good while ... I was introduced to the ingenious poet Gezine Brit, wife of Jacob van Gaveren, famous for the making of several excellent poems. She was earnestly asked by me and her brother to resume what Zeeus had been negligent about, which she granted me and also fulfilled in a short time, because that matter flattered her nature.⁷²

In November 1727 Van Gaveren died, leaving the now almost sixty-year-old Brit without children.⁷³ There is no evidence that she ever remarried. In a notarial act dated 27 January 1728, she chose her brother as the legal person authorised to handle her affairs.⁷⁴ She also named him as her only and universal heir in her will, drafted on 24 January 1732, and signed in front of the notary Isaak Angelkot. She made an exception only concerning her linen and wool clothes, which were to be given to

⁶⁹ Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 13, 156–7. For more information on the gendered aspects of marriages in the Dutch Republic see pp. 29–31, 40–8; Michael Driedger, 'Mennonites, gender, and the rise of civil society in the Dutch Enlightenment', in Van Veen, *Sisters*, 232–5, 237.

⁷⁰ Johanna Coomans, a well-known writer from the province of Zeeland, was another famous exception to this unwritten rule: Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 44.

⁷¹ *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden gepast op deugden en ondeugden in LVII tafereelen vertoont door A. Houbraken, en verrykt met de bygedichten van Juffr. Gezine Brit*, Amsterdam 1723.

⁷² 'Naa het verlopen van een geruimen tydt ... kreeg ik aanleyding tot de vernuftige Dichteresse Gezine Brit, huisvrouw van Jacob van Gaveren, berucht door 't maken van verscheiden puikdichten. Deze wert door my en haaren broeder ernstig verzocht om 't geen waar meergemelde Zeeus nalatig in gebleven was, op te nemen, 't geen zy, om dat die stof haaren aart vleide, my toestont, en ook in korten tydt voltooide': *ibid.* (no page number).

⁷³ ACA, access no. 5001, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam, inventory no. 1103, fo. 64r.

⁷⁴ I was not able to access the original notarial act. The information is taken from Van Oostrum.

Harpje Jacobs who lived in Rijnsburg. In turn, Jacobs had to distribute them between herself, Aaltje Alberts Visser in Blokzijl, Aaltje Alberts Visser in Hoorn, Aleintje Martens Room, Stintje Jonge Jans, and Grietje, Aaltje, and Geesje Stuurman. Her brother, if he died childless, was also to leave an inheritance of 2,500 guilders to the same women (and to two men, named as Adriaan Hendriks and Jacob Rem).⁷⁵ The sum was to be distributed equally, or at least to those still alive. Brit also left a Bible to the abovementioned Gilles Hogeveen, the stepson of her unnamed half-sister.⁷⁶ Six years later, Brit changed her will, according to which Roelof Brit was the only and universal inheritor of all his sisters' goods, without any reference to the persons mentioned before. However, she retained the authority to designate further legates.⁷⁷ The reasons for this change in her will are unknown.

In her later years Brit was still close to Collegiant circles. On 1 June 1737, she decided to donate a house to the orphanage De Oranjeappel in Amsterdam, administered by the local Collegiants. There is no mention of the house's worth, but it was located on the Nieuwendijk, at the south side, on the east corner of Smaksteeg.⁷⁸ Around the same period she was also still active as a poet. In 1735 and 1736 two editions appeared of the *stamboek* – a book wherein the names of one's friends are written – of the Lamist Joanna Koerten (1650–1715), a widely admired *knipkunstnares*.⁷⁹ Brit contributed four poems to the 1735 in-octavo edition, including her widely famous pastoral poem *Koridon*.⁸⁰ The 1736 edition in quarto included only two of Brit's poems from the previous edition, one being *Koridon*, but she added a translation of a Latin poem dedicated to

⁷⁵ If one were to find information on these people, it would be helpful to reconstruct Brit's network. The suggestion that Jacobs was a Collegiant is certainly enticing, even though the only element supporting this is the fact that she was living in Rijnsburg.

⁷⁶ ACA, 5075/8508, notarial act dated 24 January 1732 [no foliation]. A few months before, Brit had appeared in front of the same notary to sign an act for the transfer of an *obligatie*, namely a debt letter of loan, to Helena van Soesdijk. Brit had inherited this *obligatie* of the value of 12,000 guilders from her late husband: ACA, access no. 5075, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, inventory no. 8505, notarial act dated 2 June 1731 [no foliation].

⁷⁷ ACA, access no. 5075, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, inventory no. 8531, notarial act dated 28 October 1737 [no foliation].

⁷⁸ ACA, access no. 5075, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, inventory no. 8529, notarial act dated 1 June 1737 [no foliation].

⁷⁹ *Knipkunstnares* could be translated as 'a cutting artist', where the *knipkunst* was the art or ability of cutting all kinds of things out of paper. See Schroeder, 'Art and heterodoxy'.

⁸⁰ *Het stamboek op de papieren snykunst van Mejuffrouw Joanna Koerten, huisvrouw van den Heere Adriaan Blokk. Bestaande in Latynsche en Nederduitsche gedichten der voornaamste dichters*, Amsterdam 1735.

Koerten and written in 1696 by Martin Crell, nephew of the Socinian theologian and preacher Johan Crell.⁸¹ These editions are clear proof that in her later life Brit was still deeply involved in the intellectual life of her own Doopsgezinde circles and, more broadly, in Enlightenment Dutch culture. She died in October 1747,⁸² but the *Koridon* and the several reprints of the *Stichtelyke zinnebeelden* made sure that her fame would last for decades.

'On the persecution of the Collegiants in Groningen'

Brit's poetry is known as being mostly religious in nature, treating biblical and moral subjects, and emphasising the significance of a Christian education for children. But she composed at least one poem which had a clear political stance, written to denounce the persecution by the Reformed Church in Groningen of local Collegiants. Brit was not the first Dutch woman to use poetry to write about religious and political issues of her time. Other famous examples include Anna Roemers Visschers and Cornelia Tellinck.⁸³ And in years closer to Brit, Cornelia van der Veer, Katharina Lescaijlie and Henrica van Hoolwerff also engaged with political issues in their poetry. The latter, for instance, authored two poems in 1696 and 1701 against Louis XIV.⁸⁴ Brit's poem is titled 'On the persecution of the Collegiants in Groningen' and was penned sometime in 1705. The poem itself provides evidence to date its writing. In one passage, speaking directly to her fellow Collegiants, Brit mentioned 'your confession / so recently given to your sovereign', while a few lines earlier she stated that the Collegiant meeting place had been 'violated, ruined, and deplorably plundered' by order of the city authorities.⁸⁵ These are clear references to the document that the Groningen Collegiants delivered to the burgomasters in early 1705 and the measures taken afterwards, when the bailiff was ordered to remove chairs and benches from their meeting

⁸¹ *Gedichten op de overheerlyke papiere snykunst van wyle Mejuffrouwwe Joanna Koerten, huisvrouw van wylen den Heere Adriaan Blok, gedrukt na het origineel stamboek; Benevens een korte schets van haar leven*, Amsterdam 1736.

⁸² ACA, access no. 5001, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam, inventory no. 1104, fo. 45r.

⁸³ Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 81, 101, 105–6; Amanda Pipkin, 'Women's writings during the Dutch revolt: the religious authority and political agenda of Cornelia and Susanna Tellinck, 1554–1625', in Moran and Pipkin, *Women and gender*, 32–67.

⁸⁴ Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 129–30, 136; Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 208–10.

⁸⁵ The quotations from Brit's poem here and following are taken from Appendix 1 below, which includes the first English translation of Brit's poem. Appendix 2 includes the transcription of the original Dutch manuscript.

place. The poem was then published, posthumously, in 1775 by Elias van Nijmegen, the first historian of the Collegiant movement.⁸⁶ But it did not receive any further consideration afterwards. In the library of the Mennonite Community of Amsterdam, kept in the Allard Pierson Museum, there is a manuscript copy which has some variants from the published version.⁸⁷ Thus, this manuscript version must be regarded as a pre-print copy, even though there is no definitive proof that it is in Gesine Brit's own hand. The following brief analysis is based on the manuscript copy because the specific variants make it more likely that it is closer to the original than the published edition. In one case, for instance, the latter has the Dutch word *staat* ('state, condition'), while the manuscript has *haat* ('hate'), which makes more sense in the specific context of the passage. The poem consists of twenty-five quatrains following an ABAB rhyme scheme, for a total of one hundred lines. One can divide its content into three main themes: Brit condemned the endeavours of the Reformed ministers to stop the Collegiants; she advocated for freedom of conscience and religion; and she urged the Groningen civil authorities to avoid following the dictates of the Reformed Church.

The first aspect is perhaps the most prominent throughout the poem. Brit attacked ecclesiastical authorities by using a double comparison. At first, she likened the Reformed Church – and the city authorities who followed its dictates – to a wild beast ravaging the body of true Christians. As already mentioned, she wrote that the college had been 'violated, ruined, and deplorably plundered / on the command of the legitimate sovereign'. And such actions were comparable to 'a wolf, a fierce winter bear' that 'unexpectedly falls upon the innocent flock ... in order to ravish, to rob the defenceless nest'. All this was the result of the 'poking of the Calvinist rule'. The use of the sexual verbs *schenden* ('to violate') and *schaaken* ('to ravish') to describe actions that have no sexual content – namely the removing of chairs and benches from a house, and the attack by a wolf or a bear upon a nest – aims to intensify and give emphasis to the immorality of measures taken by both the Reformed Church and the city authorities, an accusation that is further strengthened by the fact she is a woman making an analogy to rape. And the use of the term *weerloos* ('defenceless') is used in the same way. This is a key term used to refer to the Doopsgezinden, who were advocates of non-resistance – that is, they condemned the use of violence in resisting evil and repelling violence. Mentioning the 'defenceless nest', Brit made clear who was the object of the Reformed persecution – the Doopsgezinden-Collegiants, who would never oppose the legitimate sovereign authority's command and actions,

⁸⁶ Elias van Nijmegen, *Historie der Rijnsburgsche vergadering*, Rotterdam 1775, 228–32.

⁸⁷ Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam, HS 65–129 (loan of the Mennonite Community of Amsterdam).

even when these were clearly morally wrong. Brit then reinforced her criticism of Reformed ministers by drawing a second comparison, this time with the Spanish Inquisition. Reminding her readers of the period preceding the Dutch revolt, she wrote that the Reformed Church itself complained that popery and the Inquisition ‘would fetter her free neck’ in those decades. This comparison with Spanish violence and tyranny would certainly strike a chord in Dutch readers, as anti-Spanish propaganda had been a fundamental part of Dutch cultural life in the decades following the Dutch revolt. Cornelia Tellinck, for instance, authored four patriotic poems against the Spaniards and the so-called Spanish fury.⁸⁸ Brit used a similar rhetoric, but changed the characters of the oppressor and the oppressed and directed this anti-Spanish sentiment against the Reformed Church itself. Moreover, according to Brit, even at the time, when facing the Inquisition – ‘the monster from Hell’ – Christians were not allowed to resist and rebel, because ‘in Christ’s school [it] is severely commanded / to be loyal, even [to] harsh magistrates’. Therefore, she asked rhetorically: ‘is it not a disgraceful intemperance / that people [the Reformed] who have inferred precisely / the preaching of the Gospel and the martyrdom / put their feet in the shoes of a cruel tyrant?’ And the hypocrisy of the Reformed is emphasised even more by their sorrow for the Huguenots in France. Here Brit did not make explicit reference to the Edict of Nantes, but the analogy to the persecutions of the French Calvinists is clear. And yet, the Dutch Reformed were now persecuting other Christians too.

The Reformed ministers were not her only target. According to Brit, the successful attempts of the Reformed ministers to make the city authorities take action against the Collegiants made the city of Groningen itself, implicitly likened to a woman, lose ‘her first virtue and fame’, namely the fact that it ‘never defiled her hands / with martyr blood, even in spite of Popery / when the Spanish force crashed our Netherlands’. In other words, not only had the Reformed acted immorally, but they also made the very city of Groningen immoral. The first four quatrains are meant to emphasise the sorrowful condition of the city when compared to her glorious past and to the broader atmosphere of freedom permeating the Netherlands. One can perceive this clearly when Brit rhetorically asked: ‘How does it come that now she [Groningen] forges / fetters for the conscience free from constraint / In this time when everyone, sat in peace and silent tranquillity, freely experiences their religion and freely professes it? Can that go together with justice and freedom?’ Indeed, her fellow Collegiants in Groningen ‘are forbidden to exercise religion publicly’. Brit’s advocacy for freedom of conscience and religion grew in the course of the verses, and thus she wrote again that the ministers’ and

⁸⁸ Pipkin, ‘Women’s writing’, 40–55.

burgomasters' deeds could not be regarded as 'otherwise than violence, and tyranny, and oppression of the free conscience'. However, while the criticism against ecclesiastical authorities was always fierce and clearly stated, Brit appeared more hesitant in condemning the burgomasters. This was functional to her direct address to the city authorities of Groningen, where she made an erastian argument about sovereignty and Church-State relations: 'But Thou, who preserves Groningen's law / thou, magistrates, ... / restrain those fellows who show themselves / so fierce, so schismatic in Christ's Church / who would wish to live alone in the country / just as the chosen ... Israel.' The erastian tone of these verses is evident. Not only should civil authorities not follow the dictates of the Church, but they should also restrain it, when its action goes beyond the religious sphere. This did not mean that Brit favoured the restraint of the Reformed religion *per se* – as if she advocated toleration for her own coreligionists but constraint of conscience for others. Like many other champions of religious freedom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, she argued that civil authorities had to guarantee religious pluralism by keeping the Reformed under control when they exhibited intolerant behaviour. Only in this way could they stop 'the hate of the spiritual guild' ('den haat van't geestlijk gild'). Referring to the maxim of the *Rasphuis* – the prison in Amsterdam, whose entrance read 'wilde beesten moet men temmen' ('wild beasts must be tamed') – and thus resuming the previous beast comparison, Brit reinforced her arguments, writing that 'taming that of which everyone is scared and before which everyone trembles' is a sign of bravery and honour. In other words, if the civil authorities were to 'tame' the Reformed, they would give proof of virtue and they would be praised by pious citizens.

These three main themes in Brit's verses might suffice to prove the modernity of her writing at a time when ideas of and pleas for freedom were certainly strengthening and growing in intellectual circles, but they were not yet fully shared and established. On the contrary, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic witnessed the anti-Socinian campaign, as well as opposition to philosophers and intellectuals such as Descartes, Spinoza and Balthasar Bekker.⁸⁹ But Brit's poem is not significant only for its political stand for freedom of conscience and religion. There are verses that are more of a philosophical nature, revealing both Brit's learning and her awareness of the changing times. For instance,

⁸⁹ Among the many studies see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750*, Oxford 2001; Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: an essay on philosophy in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic*, Leiden 2001; Michiel Wielema, *The march of the libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)*, Hilversum 2004; and Alexander X. Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism: philosophy and theology*, Oxford 2017.

after writing that Groningen had never oppressed anyone and only recently begun persecuting people for religious reasons, she suggested that someone might want a ‘proof’ (‘bewijs’) of what she said. And she gave such a proof, dividing it in two parts following a schematic and logical methodology: ‘The first part of the thesis is fulfilled ... the other ...’ These lines suggest a sensibility to logical and scientific arguing, if not philosophical training. There are also other instances of such a technical language scattered in the poem, as when she said that the Reformed ‘have inferred precisely’ the preaching of the Gospel. When providing the proof of her assertion, Brit also revealed her learning, quoting the Dutch historian Pieter Cornelisz Hooft to sustain her assertion. Then she seemed to play with the Dutch word *reen* – which means ‘course, gallop’, but could be also a variant for *rein*, which means ‘purity’ – to express a sort of motion set off by ‘the Christian multitude that defends / the free prophesying in God’s Church’. This hints at a movement towards an advancement of human agency in religion as a form of purity, which is also a gendered virtue.⁹⁰ Brit here seemed to suggest that this movement had been momentarily stopped by the Reformed in Groningen, but it would eventually resume its course. This awareness of the changing times is clearer in the last quatrains. Before concluding her poem with a classical praise of martyrdom and suffering following Christ’s example, Brit invited her fellow Collegiants to fear not, because something new was ahead: ‘But you who suffer oppression for the faith / Oh Christian multitude ... / ... / Take courage, a wind, begotten in the quiet south / Which refreshes the dry ground with its splendour / Comes after the raging of the previous wild northern ... storm.’ Given that concepts such as egalitarianism, and freedom of conscience and religion, would soon become fundamental Enlightenment values, we can read Brit’s poem as an early champion of this new era.

Recent studies on early modern women and their writings have revealed that women from different social background and with diverse religious and political affiliations contributed to shaping forms of public debate in a variety of networks.⁹¹ Protestant pious practices sometimes also encouraged women’s writing, which could break the division between the domestic private (the female sphere) and the public (the male sphere).⁹² And even when women’s writings were not published but circulated in manuscript form in larger or smaller networks, they were still intervening in a

⁹⁰ I would like to thank Katherine O’Donnel for pointing this out.

⁹¹ Van Elk, *Early modern women’s writing*, 4, 16, 90.

⁹² Danielle Clarke, ‘The countess of Pembroke and the practice of piety’, in Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Bauman (eds), *The intellectual culture of Puritan women, 1558–1680*, Houndmills 2010, 28–41.

civic and public discourse that was broadly reserved for men. This is especially true for the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, when the Habermasian public sphere was not yet fully developed and other types of publics were forming.⁹³ Brit certainly contributed to stirring discussion around the religious persecutions occurring in Groningen in the early eighteenth century and, more broadly, around freedom of conscience and religion through her poem. There is no evidence to establish exactly how widely her verses circulated, but one can assume that they were well known at least in her own influential network. Thus, she took part in a tradition of Dutch women engaging in public discourse, offering a gendered perspective on crucial themes of her age. Poetry was a powerful means used to express both religious and political ideas.⁹⁴ Like Cornelia Tellinck, for instance, Brit assumed an unconventional position of power and was very outspoken.⁹⁵ But she was speaking against circumstances less grave than those denounced by Tellinck – the removal of chairs and benches from the Collegiant meeting place does not seem comparable to the Spanish violence exerted in the Netherlands – which might suggest how important freedom of expression and religion were to her and her fellow Collegiants. Indeed, Brit vehemently opposed the Reformed Church and urged the burgomasters to act otherwise than they had done in the name of freedom. And she did so without styling her voice *via* gendered stereotypes – for instance, she did not present herself as submissive and meek to justify her capacity to counsel and command.⁹⁶ She simply uttered her opinions, defending spiritual freedom and liberty of conscience and thus posing a threat not only to the magisterial Churches, but more broadly to paternal and husbandly authority.⁹⁷ Therefore, her poem is also an important contribution to expanding the boundaries of what can be considered a political text beyond the classical canon of treatises and books by early modern male philosophers, theologian and jurists.⁹⁸ Brit offers to scholars another instance of an early modern woman, her writing contributing, in innovative ways, to the formation of Enlightenment political ideals.⁹⁹

⁹³ Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 8; Pipkin, 'Women's writing', 58.

⁹⁴ Van Elk, *Early modern women's writing*, 132; Pipkin, *Dissenting daughters*, 112

⁹⁵ Pipkin, 'Women's writing', 40, 51.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 62.

⁹⁷ Broad, *A history of women's political thought*, 112.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 8–9.

APPENDIX I

On the persecution of the Collegiants in Groningen

Something strange, just on the overseas wind,
 Strikes now our ears with grief and sorrow,
 Groningen, so laudably famous,
 Lost her first virtue and fame so quickly!
 That city, which never defiled her hands
 With martyr blood, even in spite of Popery,
 When the Spanish force crushed our Netherlands
 With fire and sword and massacre of souls;
 How does it come that now she forges
 Fetters for the conscience free from constraint
 In this time when everyone, sat in peace and silent tranquillity,
 Freely experiences their religion and freely professes it?
 Can that go together with justice and freedom?
 And if anyone wants to look for a proof of [these] points.
 The first part of the thesis is fulfilled
 In the excellent work of Hoofts' books of History.*
 The other, the Christian multitude that defends
 The free prophesying in God's Church
 With the force of a gallop† as clear as day can now
 Learn with sorrow to hold on in Groningen.
 There, oppressed with reproach and slandering,
 They are forbidden to exercise religion publicly,
 There that much is contrived
 By the poking of the Calvinist rule.
 That goes further and against all purity.‡
 The house, set aside for their godliness,
 Is violated.§ ruined and deplorably plundered

* This is a reference to the *Nederlandsche historien* by Pieter Cornelisz Hooft, which appeared in two volumes between 1642 and 1654: *Neederlandsche historien, seedert de ooverdraght der heerschappye van Kaizar Kaarel den Vyfdten op Kooning Philips zynen zoon*, Amsterdam 1642, and *Vervolgh der Neederlandsche Historien, seedert het ooverbyden van Prins Willem, tot het heinder der landtvooghdychap des Graaven van Leicester*, Amsterdam 1654.

† This the first occurrence of the term *reen* ('course, gallop'), which could also be a variant of the term *rein* ('purity'). It seems that Brit played with these two words in her poem. In this occurrence, it has been translated as 'gallop' to express that sense of movement captured by the following verb *vesten* ('hold on'). But if *reen* means also 'purity', then Brit here aimed at representing the movement set off by the Collegiants toward a purer form of religion, a movement that was stopped by the Reformed in Groningen. I would like to thank Gary Waite for suggesting that *reen* could be regarded as a variant of *rein*.

‡ This is the second occurrence of the term *reen*, this time translated as *rein*, because 'purity' makes more sense in the context of the line.

§ The word *schenden* has an explicit sexual meaning, clear in expressions such as *eene maagd schenden* ('to defile or deflower a virgin') and *vrouwen schenden* ('to ravish women, to commit rape').

On the command of the legitimate sovereign.**
 As a wolf, a fierce winter bear,
 Unexpectedly falls upon the innocent flock
 In the open field, in calm and pleasant weather,
 In order to ravish,†† to rob the defenceless‡‡ nest.
 Now, who, free from blind prejudice
 To disguise vice with no mask of the state,
 Can call that otherwise than violence and tyranny,
 And constricting of the free conscience?
 It goes further. Thus spoke the church in the sorrowful
 Torments of Popery, that it would fetter her free neck,
 When the Inquisition, the monster from Hell,
 Tried to uproot§§ godliness to the ground,
 That was the Plague, the firebrand who formerly
 Brought our land blindly, miserably to shame,
 Who has even snatched from their hands the staff
 Of the highest administration of the law, the Spanish lord.
 Yet, that must not be used
 To defend rebellion and sedition.
 Far from it. In Christ's school [it] is severely commanded
 To be loyal, even [to] harsh magistrates.
 But alas, is it not a disgraceful intemperance
 That people who have inferred precisely
 The preaching of the Gospel and the martyrdom
 Put their feet in the shoes of a cruel tyrant?
 Whereas they were to be the theatre and object
 Of affliction and disgrace, and of the most exquisite miseries,
 When once the Roman power came here
 Only to tack the course of the helm of the state;
 Whilst the stench, the stifling air of the faggot,
 Which made their community suffocate in France,
 Even to this day [has] filled their nose and ears
 With sorrowful weeping, and misery, sigh upon sigh.
 But Thou, who preserves Groningen's law,
 Thou, magistrates, if you still live in the footsteps

** Both the manuscript and the published versions read *overheen*, an adverb meaning 'over, across, on top of'. However, such an adverb would make no sense in the context of the line. It is most likely a misspelling of the word *overheer* ('master, sovereign'), possibly done on purpose for rhyme's sake.

†† The use of another sexual verb – *schaaken* ('to ravish, to commit a rape') – in a context unrelated to sexuality – a wolf or a bear hunting a nest – aims at stressing the immorality of what happened in Groningen.

‡‡ *Weerloos* is a key term for Doopsgezinden, Mennonites and Collegiants, who generally defended a non-resistant approach towards evil and violence.

§§ This might very well be an implicit reference to the Parables of the Tares in Matthew xiii. 24–30, a *locus classicus* in the early modern discussions around tolerance and intolerance.

Of your fathers, those laudable footsteps, and stir
 Your generous blood in the veins to the people's salvation,
 Restrain those fellows who show themselves
 So fierce, so schismatic in Christ's Church,
 Who would wish to live alone in the country
 Just as the chosen Israel.
 May your authority teach their proud spirit,
 Which they consult spitefully in spiritual matters,
 So that the hate of the spiritual guild no more
 Beats the drum to the detriment of your citizens.
 Thus, the maxim in front of the house of discipline,***
 At the river of Amsterdam, shall stick to the purpose here indeed.
 It is said, taming that of which everyone is scared
 and before which everyone trembles
 Is a virtue of the pious conscience.
 Thus, you will excite a sincere delight and joy
 In the multitude of your pious citizens,
 Whilst your name, your diligent conduct††† and virtue
 Will become clear in honour and glory to everyone.
 But you who suffer oppression for the faith,
 Oh Christian multitude, even though the reasonableness of your confession,
 So recently given to your sovereign,‡‡‡
 Has suffered no opposition from anyone,
 But uncorrupted, it knocks malice on the mouth
 Take courage, a wind, begotten in the quiet south,
 Which refreshes the dry ground with its splendour,
 Comes after the raging of the previous wild northern storm.
 You know the nature of the sublunary spirit.
 What misfortune and mounting plagues
 From the cradle of the world the pious in particular
 Must endure to maintain the truth.
 You know what fate your Savior came across,
 How He, chased, persecuted on all sides,
 Climbed the pinnacle of the endless rejoicing
 As soon as his sorrow in this world came to an end.
 You have a rather clear example that you,
 After the end of your pain and troubles for His name,
 Will triumph with him in the three-time blessed light,
 Century after century.

*** Namely the Amsterdam prison *Rasphuis*, whose motto, on front door reads 'wilde beesten moet men temmen' ('wild beasts must be tamed').

††† The term *beleid* was used for *bestuur*, *regeering*, *bevelvoering*, that is 'administration, government, command'.

‡‡‡ As above, here also recurs the term *overheen* for *overheer*.

APPENDIX II

*Op de vervolging der Collegianten te Groningen**

Wat vreemde maar uit de overzeese lucht,
 Slaat nu met smert en droefvenis onze ooren,[†]
 Heeft Groeningen, zo loffelijke berucht,
 Zijn eerste deugd en roem zo ras verlooren!
 Die stad, die zelfs in spijt der Paperij,
 Toen't Spaanse geweld, ons Nederland verplette,
 Met vuur en swaard en zielen moorderij,
 Haare handen nooit met martelbloed besmette.
 Hoe komt het nu dat zij, in deezen tijd,
 Daar elk, in vrede en stille rust gezeten,
 Zijn Godtsdienst vrij beleeft, en vrij belijdt,
 De kluisters smeed voor't dwangeloos geweeten?
 Kan dat met recht en vrijheid zaamen gaan?
 En wil men naar bewijs van zaaken zoeken.
 Het eerste lit van't voorstel word voldaan,
 In't heerlijk werk van Hoofts Histori boekken.
 Het and[e]re, kan de Christelijke schaar,
 Die in Godtskerk, het vrije profeteeren,
 Met klem van reen verdedigd, zonneklaar,
 Nu met verdriet in Grunoos vesten leeren.
 Daar zij,[‡] verdrukt met smaad en achterklap,
 De Godsdienst, daar zo veel aan is geleegeen,
 Door't wroeten van't kalvijnsche meesterschap,
 In't openbaar verboden werd te pleegen.
 Dat verder gaat en tegen alle reen.
 Het huis tot haare Godsvrucht afgezonderd,
 is, op't bevel der wettige overheen,
 Geschend verwoest en deerlijk uitgeplonderd.
 Gelijk een wolf, een felle winterbeer,
 Om't weerloos nest te schaaken, uit te schudden,
 In't openveld, bij stil en liefvelijk weer,
 Op't onversienst valt op de onnooz[e]le kudden.
 Wie kan nu, van een blind vooroordeel vrij,

* This is a transcription of the manuscript version kept in Allard Pierson HS 65–129 (loan of the Mennonite Community of Amsterdam). For the published version see Van Nijmegen, *Historie*, 228–32. In the following, only the chief and most significant variances between the two versions are pointed out.

[†] Van Nijmegen has the superlative *vreemder* in the first line, closing the second line with a question mark as if Brit were asking 'what is stranger' than the news coming from Groningen. Although this would make sense, the simple adjective *vreemde* in the first line of the manuscript, which has no question mark at the end of the second line, seems to better convey the flow of the first quatrain.

[‡] Van Nijmegen has *haer* instead of *zij*.

Om de ondeugd met geen staatgrijns te verbloemen,
 Dit anders als § geweld en dwing[e]landij,**
 En 't prangen van het vrij geweeten noemen?
 't gaat vast. Dus sprak de kerk in't droef gekwel,
 Van't Pausdom, dat haar vrijen hals wou boeien,
 Toen de Inquisitie, 't schrikdier van de hel,
 De Godsvrucht tot den grond zocht uit te roeien,
 Dat was de plaag, de stoker, die verblind,
 Wel eer ons land erbermlijk bracht te schanden,
 Die zelfs den staf van't hoogste rechts bewind,
 Den Spaansen Heer, gerukt heeft uit zijn handen.
 Nogtans, dit moet niet worden toegepast,
 Om muiterij en oproer te verweeren.
 T'zy ver. In Christus school, word scherp belast,
 Getrouw te zijn, zelfs ook den harde Heeren.
 Maar is 't helaas †† geen eerloos onbescheid,
 Dat menschen, die het Evangeli preeken,
 En 't martelschap nauw hebben afgeleid,
 Hun voeten zelfs in wreedaards schoenen steeken?
 Daar zij wanneer de Roomse macht, den lijn,
 Van't staatroer hier maar eens kwam om te wenden,
 Een schouwtooneel en 't voorwerp zouden zijn,
 Van kruis en ramp, en de uitgezochste ellenden;
 Terwijl de stank, de bange mutsaard lucht,
 Die hun gemeente in Vrankrijk deed versmooren,
 Met droef geween, en jammer, zucht op zucht,
 Zelfs heeden nog vervuld hun neus, en ooren. ††
 Maar gij, die 't recht van Grunoos stad behoed,
 Gij Heeren, zo in't spoor van uwe vaders,
 Dat loff[e]lijk spoor, u't eedelhoedig bloed,
 Tot heil van't volk noch leeft en speelt in de aderen,
 Houwd aan den band, die maats, die zich zo fel,
 zo scheuringziek, in Christus kerk betoonen,
 Die even als 't verkooren Israel,
 Alleen in't land wel zouden willen wonen.
 Dat uw gezach, hun trotsen moed verleer,
 In 's Hemelszaak met wrevel gaan te raade,
 Op dat den haat §§ van't geestlijk gild, noit meer,

§ Van Nijmegen has the equivalent term *dan*.

** *Dwinglandy* in the manuscript.

†† Van Nijmegen has 'maer is 't, helaes!' However, as above, the exclamation mark appears to break the flow of the passage.

†† Van Nijmegen has a question mark at the end of the quatrain, instead of a full stop, making the two quatrains starting from 'daar zij wanneer de Roomse' a second, long rhetorical question, instead of an assertion as in the manuscript version.

§§ Van Nijmegen has *staat*, which means 'state, condition'. But in this sentence, such a term would make less sense than the word *haat* ('hate') which is in the manuscript version.

Den trommel roerd, tot uwer burg[e]ren schaade.
Dus zal de spreuk voor't tuchthuis, aan den vloed
Van Amstels stad, hier wel ter sneede klemmen.
Die zegt, het is een deugd van't vroom gemoed,
Het geen, daar elk voor schrikt en beeft te temmen,
Dus zult gij een recht schapen lust en vreugd,
Verwekken, in uw vroomme burgerschaaren,
Terwijl uw naam, uw kloekbeleid en deugd,
Bij elk in eer en glori op zal klaaren.
Maar gij die, om't geloof verdrukking lijd,
O Christen schaar, schoon uw belijdenis reden,
Uw overhee[n] zo onlangs toegewijd,
Geen tegen spraak van ymand heeft geleeden,
Maar ongekreucht de nijd klopt op de mond;
Schepmoed, een lucht, geteeld in't stille zuien,
Die met haar glans verkwikt den dorren grond,
Vold op't geraas der guure noorder buien.
Gij kend den aard van de ondermaandse geest.
Wat kommernis en opgehoopte plaagen
Van 's waerelds wieg den vroomen allermeeft,
Om't voorstaan vande Waarheid moesten draagen.
Gij weet, wat lot uw Heiland overkwam,
Hoe hij veryaagd, vervolgd aen alle zijden
Zo haast zijn leed op aarde een einde nam,
Ten toppunt klom van eindeloos verblijden.
Gij zyt met een wel duidelijk bericht
Dat gij, na 't eind van uwe smerte en kwaalen
Om zijnen naam, in't driemaal zalig licht
Met hem, eeuw in eeuw uit zult zegepraalen.