

# Les écrits du for privé en Europe

(du Moyen Âge à l'époque contemporaine)

*Enquêtes, Analyses, Publications*

Sous la direction de  
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Collection « *Mémoires Vives* »

Permettez-moi, enfin, de conclure par le souhait que je formais le 17 d'octobre 2001, en concluant un séminaire à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme) consacré à la présentation et au débat autour de *I libri di famiglia in Italia, Geografia e storia* :

Il s'agirait surtout de dessiner une carte des particularités stylistiques et historico-sociales des livres de famille dans les différents pays et dans les différents milieux de production, et selon leur développement diachronique. En somme il s'agirait d'écrire *Les livres de famille en Europe. Géographie et histoire*. [...] un tel programme, [...] paraît particulièrement fécond dans la perspective d'une histoire comparée de l'Europe et de ses structures sociales, cognitives et affectives...

Les travaux de ce colloque international, largement ouvert à la coopération européenne, donnent enfin une réalité et une actualité à ce souhait.

## Travellers in time. Nineteenth-century autobiographers and their fight against forgetting

Arianne Baggerman

My thoughts are in disarray, and to take stock of what is in my mind, I should like to introduce some order<sup>1</sup>.

This is why sixteen-year-old Cornelia van Vollenhoven began to keep a diary in 1912. The notes of other diarists and autobiographers also reveal a strong need for ordering thoughts, feelings and memories, or for reconstructing them on the basis of the sizeable body of their own writings or those of their predecessors.

Thus we find in the diary kept by the seventeenth-century regent Pieter Teding van Berkhout quite a few passages in which he despairs of ever getting his father's papers into order. On 16 August 1672, for instance, he says he has spent the whole day sorting out the family archives: "Je rangeois l'océan de papiers de mon père, separant les bons des mauvais." Separating the wheat from the chaff must have taken a great deal of time, because it was a year before he was ready for the next stage: "J'étais occupé toute la journée a ranger les papiers pour mon père par ordre alphabet avec un addition d'un registre, que j'ordonné par titre." To prevent his offspring from suffering the same fate, he put his own papers and letters in alphabetical order<sup>2</sup>.

In the nineteenth century, the engineer Adriaan Gildemeester seems to have attempted something similar. He was burdened not only with his own and his parents' papers, but also those of his grandparents and his in-laws: "Furthermore I must sort out and look through the papers left by the grandparents, parents and brothers of M. [Gildemeester's wife], not to mention my own." Other entries reveal that he had even more on his plate: he was also producing an extract from the diary of his father-in-law, Willem de Clerq, whose diary is the longest ever found in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> No wonder, then, that the mere thought of all the work in store for him was enough to make Adriaan Gildemeester depressed.

All this note-making makes me want to write again

What I am

What I am not

Melancholy but exemplary<sup>4</sup>

The parallels to ego-document research thrust themselves upon us. In 1983 Rudolf Dekker began to inventories all Dutch ego-documents from the period 1600-1914<sup>5</sup>; now this labour of love is nearing completion. A few years ago I already embarked on the next phase of this research by launching a project called "Controlling Time and Shaping the Self", which entails selecting, indexing and analysing all the material found thus far. In this sense my objective coincides with that of my case studies, for they too agonised over the selection, over the plot of their lives: "What I am. What I am not". However, while the above-mentioned diarists – Van Vollenhoven, Teding van Berkhout and Gildemeester – struggled with one, or at most several, identities, the researcher of ego-documents has to contend with multitudes of identities. In our case this was a database of approximately 2500 hand-written or printed Dutch diaries and autobiographies written between 1500 and 1950<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Part of this 13,000-pages diary is currently being transcribed and the whole of the transcription digitised as part of a project directed by J. Van Eijndhoven and G. J. Johannes at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

<sup>4</sup> University Library Amsterdam, MSS collection Revell D. 25a.

<sup>5</sup> R. Dekker et al. (ed.), *Egodocumenten van Noord-Nederlanders uit de zestiende tot begin negentiende eeuw. Een chronologische lijst* (Rotterdam 1993).

<sup>6</sup> The database was a collaborative effort undertaken by the inventarisation project supervised by Rudolf Dekker, 'Inventarisatie van in handschrift overgeleverde egodocumenten 1814-1914' (see: [www.egodocumenten.nl](http://www.egodocumenten.nl)), and a project under the supervision of H. de Valk of the *Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (Institute of Dutch History)*, which drew up an inventory of the Dutch ego-documents appearing in print in the period 1813-1914 and published it on the website of this institute: [www.inghist.nl/onderzoek/projecten/egodocumenten](http://www.inghist.nl/onderzoek/projecten/egodocumenten). G. Schulte Nordholt worked on this inventory for a time, from his position on the project *Controlling Time*, to describe in more detail the titles that met the criteria of this project.

It could have been worse, for the database originally consisted of twice as many texts. It now contains no travel journals or autobiographical novels, or texts written by authors born after 1914. Furthermore, we included only texts which, after personal inspection, proved to meet the criterion formulated by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser half a century ago: texts in which a first-person narrator is writing about him- or herself.<sup>7</sup> This means sources in which "personal" actions or feelings form the focal point, but "personal" is deliberately given a broad interpretation. After all, the more stringent the criteria, the more limited the view. If we had taken into consideration only those ego-documents that met modern-day requirements as to what constitutes a true diary or autobiography – intimate, introspective, ego-oriented, centred around the development of one's own, unique personality – only a handful of "literary highlights" would have remained: a hall of fame of gifted autobiographers and diarists whose writings give proof of the qualities so highly esteemed nowadays and which point to an increasing amount of individualisation through the centuries. In such cases the criteria determine the outcome in advance: the snake bites its own tail.

Literary historians and historians of ideas have traditionally studied the genre of autobiography from a chronological-teleological perspective. Modern autobiography emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* as an early and influential example, of which the *Confessions* of Augustine were often considered a forerunner or prefiguration. Further steps towards modern autobiographical writing were taken in the Renaissance by such authors as Cellini and Cardano, and in Protestant England by Bunyan, but autobiography did not become a separate genre until around 1800, when the word autobiography significantly began to appear in English and other languages. The development of the genre was placed in the context of the discovery of the individual in Western Europe. This, in turn, was linked with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the widening gap between public and private life. More recently, however, this cluster of historical ideas has been called into question, and it has been suggested that "the discovery of the individual" is in itself a literary construct. Moreover, by describing books such as Rousseau's (and, for example, those of Goethe, Benjamin Franklin and Stendhal) as "modern autobiography", scholars have excluded many other forms of autobiographical writing. In fact, the study of autobiography as a literary genre has been based mainly on circular reasoning, by isolating a limited corpus of texts and calling them autobiography, and in doing so, marginalising other texts.

<sup>7</sup> J. Presser, 'Memoires als geschiedbron', in *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie VIII* (Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1958), reprinted in *idem, Uitzet het werk van J. Presser* (Amsterdam, 1969), p. 277-282.

Only a broader interpretation of the "personal" nature of the texts makes it possible to gain insight into other long-term developments in the autobiographical writing indulged in by a much larger group of authors: men and women of letters, as well as merchants, grocers, engineers, physicians, housewives, sailors and farmers. Our database therefore represents a broad spectrum of autobiographical texts, from journals to pre-printed diaries, from autobiographies to memoirs. Up to now about 500 of them have been inspected closely, and 300 of these subjected to in-depth analyses. We have also compiled detailed information on all those documents – authors' names, their gender, profession, year of birth and death, as well as the year, titles and first lines of publications – all of which offers the opportunity to quantify this small amount of information on wide-ranging subject matter.<sup>8</sup>

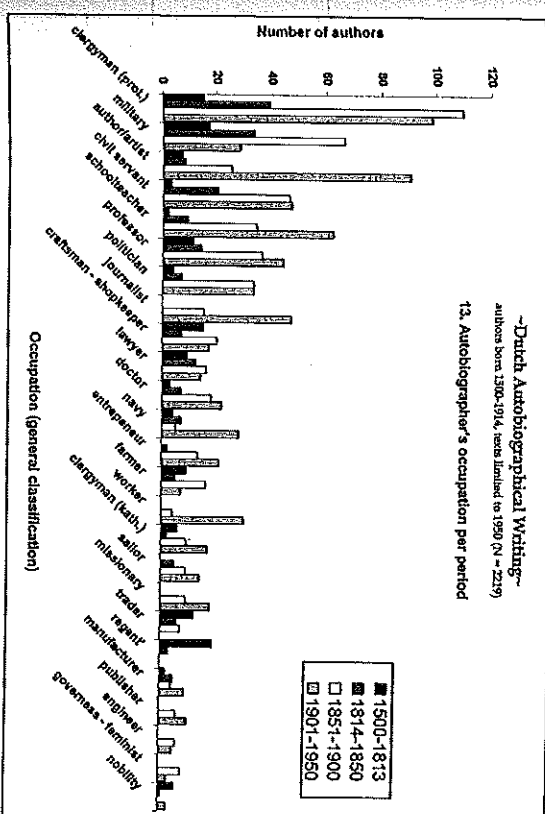
### Ego-documents: a statistical breakdown

The statistics show an important temporal shift in the professions represented in the ego-documents.<sup>9</sup> Before 1900, ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church and military men were by far the most prolific authors of ego-documents. They were followed by other professionals whose work involved a lot of writing, in particular literary authors, civil servants, teachers, professors and politicians. After the turn of the century, the Reformed ministers and military men ceded their top position to other occupational groups: writers, artists, journalists.

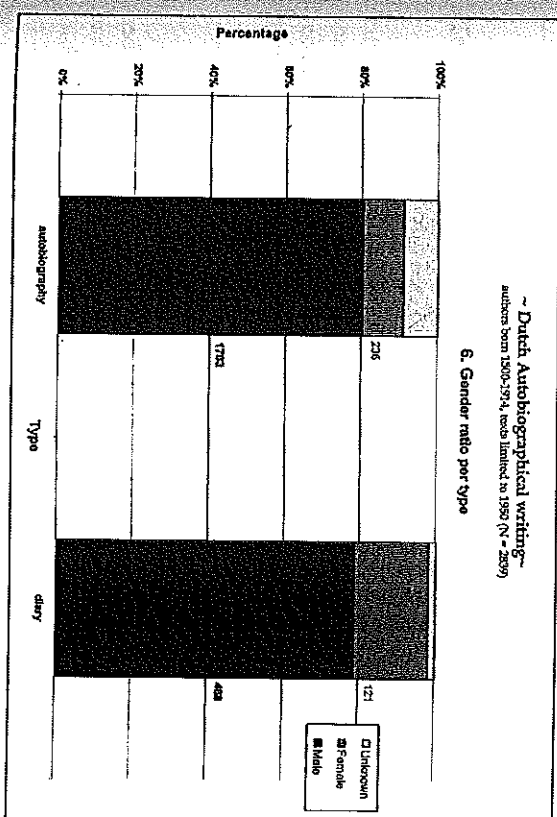
This development is connected with the rise during the last decades of the nineteenth century of so-called "celebrity autobiography", which will be discussed later. The graphs also give an impression of the proportion of male to female authors within our research population. Women writers are more strongly represented in diaries than in autobiographies, but in both categories the number of male writers is disproportionately high.

<sup>8</sup> Analysis of content combined with a quantitative approach is also to be found in, for example, Diana Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Robbie Gray and Donna Loftus, "Male autobiographical writing and the self-making of the Victorian middle class", *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6 (2001), p. 286-312. Examples of other projects that also apply a broad definition of "ego-documents" include Universität Basel (Prof. K. von Greyerz, SNF-project "Deutschschweizerische Selbstzeugnisse (1500-1800) als Quellen der Mentalitätsgeschichte") and Freie Universität Berlin, Fr.-Mietzke Institut (Prof. C. Ulbrich, DFG-project "Selbstzeugnisse in transkultureller Perspektive").

<sup>9</sup> The following graphs were produced by Dr Jeroen Blaak, a post-doctoral researcher who has been working on this project for some time. A methodological account of the selection criteria and the categories used can be found in his article "Ego in numbers: egodocuments 1750-1914", to be published in A. Beggeman and R. Dekker (eds.), *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Autobiographical Writing since 1750* (Leiden, Brill Publishers, forthcoming).

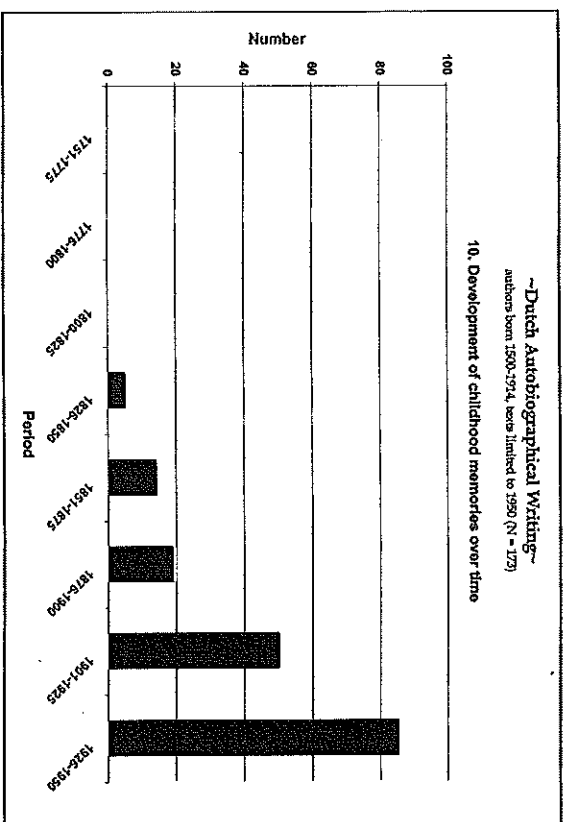


Graph 1



Graph 2

Roughly speaking, the average age at which people started their diaries was 33, and that age barely changed throughout the periods examined. Before 1850, the average age of the beginning diarist was 34.3; after 1850 the average dropped to 32.6 years of age. It is hardly surprising that people generally wrote their autobiographies at a much later age, namely around 60. These statistics have also enabled us to give earlier hypotheses a firmer foundation. For example, in *Childhood, Memory and Autobiography in Holland*, Rudolf Dekker suggests the existence of a shift around 1800 in the way people experienced childhood: in autobiographies, childhood became more highly valued as a stage of life.<sup>10</sup> He supports this hypothesis with a qualitative analysis of a selection of ego-documents from the early-modern period and from the nineteenth century. The figures tentatively prove him correct. We see reminiscences of childhood becoming an independent genre from 1826, and a great increase in their production in the course of the nineteenth century.

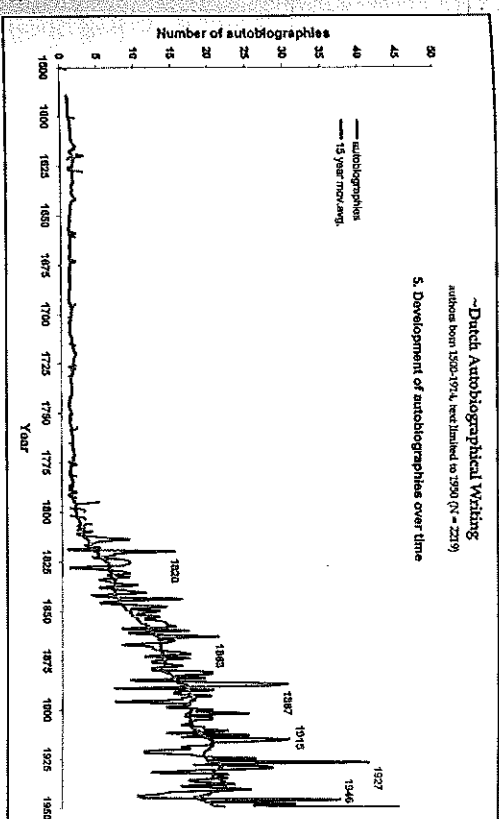


Graph 3

We had also known for some time that ego-documents increased in number as time went on – at least we assumed this was the case. From the time that autobiographical writing became an object of study, this alleged increase is said

<sup>10</sup> R. Dekker, *Childhood, Memory and Autobiography in Holland. From the Golden Age to Romanticism* (London, MacMillan Press, 2000).

to have taken place around 1800<sup>11</sup>. These impressions were based, however, on very limited selections of autobiographies and diaries. Now that we have a nearly complete survey of all the ego-documents produced in the Netherlands, we may conclude that this supposedly sharp rise in production did indeed take place, at least in this small country. The year 1800, when the genre took off, is clearly a turning point.



Graph 4

### Traces of destruction

How reliable are such figures? Clearly, it is impossible to base a survey on random samples of ego-documents. Furthermore, one may well attribute this sharp increase to the age of the ego-documents rather than a growing desire to record events<sup>12</sup>. One simple explanation is that the further back in time one goes, the more likely it is that documents have been lost.

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, P. Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience. Victoria to Freud* (5 vols., New York, W. W. Norton, 1984-1998), vol. IV, *The Naked Heart* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1995); K. J. Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual. Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1978); R. Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); K. Rinehart, "The Victorian approach to autobiography", *Modern Philology* 51 (1954), p. 177-216; J. Hamilton Buckley, *The Turning Key. Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> A. Baggerman, "Autobiography and Family Memory", in R. Dekker (ed.), *Ego-documents and history. Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum, Veloren, 2002), p. 161-173.

As we studied the ego-documents in manuscript form, we began to find more and more traces of destruction – pages torn out, or entire quires or sections missing – since the remaining text testifies to the existence of now-missing pages. A more harrowing discovery was the revelation by some authors that they had produced, for posterity, a censored version of their own autobiographies, based on the diaries they had kept over the years. They had destroyed the original sources without giving it a second thought. Secretary of State August Weitzel is a good example of this practice. His hand-written memoirs are based on information from a long series of diaries kept, without fail, from his earliest youth. Rereading these diaries had been extremely useful to him: “My notes held up a mirror to my behaviour which allowed me to see how easily a mortal soul comes to be pleased with himself.” Furthermore they were so subjective, so age-bound and position-dependent (and often so banal) that in 1870 he decided to make drastic revisions: “the changes and cuts were plentiful, and much that was, in my view, of little significance was left out.” When Weitzel had finished, he plunged into a second round of revisions, and continued over the next eighteen years to revise his diaries in the same way. He then revamped the material and turned it into his memoirs.

In the next round of editing, everything that concerned my home life and family circumstances was left out, and what remained was once again cut back and trimmed. Furthermore, my increasing maturity, and the more high-minded viewpoints I had acquired, led me to change the way I judged the past.<sup>13</sup>

It is possible that the figures provide information chiefly on the change in traditions of preservation. After all, the nineteenth century was also the century of the rise of the bourgeoisie, who – in imitation of noble families – started to build up a family tradition which required the head of the family, usually the eldest son, to keep the family archives up to date. We have already seen how the nineteenth-century engineer Adriaan Gildemeester was burdened with family documents, as was the seventeenth-century aristocratic Pieter Teding van Berkhout a century and a half earlier. However, this increasing wealth of documentation does not apply to printed autobiographical texts, which comprise about two-thirds of the database. We are familiar with a considerable number of life stories printed before 1800, but the majority of them were published during the nineteenth century as text editions issued by a later editor. The number of text editions of which the original is lost now stands at 253. Once again, 1800 appears to be a watershed, for that year marks the appearance of the first source publications, after which their numbers grew steadily.

We do not know of any Dutch source publications that date from before 1800. Even contemporary autobiographical texts published before 1800 are scarce, despite the fact that the printing press had been active for several centuries. The earliest autobiographical works printed for commercial purposes are picaresque accounts of conversion, of which we know a few seventeenth-century examples. In the eighteenth century, the ranks were swelled with several autobiographical picaresque novels: the life of Maria van Amrwerpen – a woman who, like many Dutch women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dressed as a man to become a soldier – the adventures of the swindler Franciscus J. Ievens Kersemann and the memoirs of a female Dutch spy at the French court<sup>14</sup>. Surprisingly, these autobiographies proved to be authentic, even though they were perfectly in keeping with the criminal biography flourishing at the time. The early-modern period produced only a handful of authors' autobiographies designed to serve as introductions to their collected works. This method of lending prestige to the author's collected writings became increasingly popular, and fits into a more general tendency to present authors more prominently as individuals, thus making authorship less anonymous. This trend, which became more noticeable throughout the nineteenth century, can be considered one of the roots of the new “celebrity autobiography”, which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century.

This new genre consisted of printed memoirs written by public figures – journalists, writers, artists, actors – who were invited by publishers to tell their life stories, concentrating in particular on all the other celebrities in their circle of friends. Such works, which bore titles like *The People I Have Known* or *Behind the Scenes*<sup>15</sup>, can be considered the forerunners of the autobiographies, so popular nowadays, of pop- and movie-stars. A good example of this is the recently published autobiography of Bob Dylan, which even goes a step further by focusing on the joys – and, more particularly, the sorrows – of fame<sup>16</sup>. Bill Clinton's autobiography, likewise a worldwide bestseller, belongs to another, older tradition – the published memoirs of nineteenth-century statesmen and generals – a genre that emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> R. M. Dekker, G. J. Johannes, L. C. van de Pol (eds.), *De Broedsticht belijne* (Tilversum, Veleoren, 1988), translated into English as *The Tradition of Female Transgression in Early Modern Europe* (London, Macmillan, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989); *Het leven van Fl. Kersemann*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1792); *Mémoires de la famille et de la vie de Madame \*\*\** (The Hague, 1610 [=1710]).

<sup>15</sup> E. Carlsen, *Ik heb ze gekend. Mijn gouden jaren bij het Nederlandse toneel* (Amsterdam, Holdert & Co, 1934); *Hoe men nuw Alberg-Engelman haar leven vertelt en bladzijde uit de geschiedenis van het toneel* (Amsterdam, Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1838); *Abbet de schermen, belangrijke meeuwardigheden en herinneringen van den impresario Jos. J. Schuurman* (Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1915).

<sup>16</sup> B. Dylan, *Chronicles* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> B. Clinton, *My Life* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> National Archives, The Hague, A. W. R. Weitzel Coll., 1, A. W. R. Weitzel (1816-1896).



## Controlling Time and Shaping the Self. Impulses for Autobiographical Writing in the Nineteenth Century

Let us return to the dramatic growth of the autobiographical genre, which, at first sight, seems to confirm the accepted view. However, examination of the structure and content of the ego-documents found thus far has shown the usual explanation to be unsatisfactory. According to the traditional view, the exponential increase in ego-documents after 1800 must be viewed as the result of a growing tendency towards introspection. Nevertheless, the results of all our digging around in archives and libraries do not suggest a linear growth of introspection or a growing tendency towards intimacy. Contrary to our expectations, the number of factual diaries and impersonal memoirs rose more sharply than the number of introspective texts. We found diaries with reader's comments in the margins, life stories which focused on historical events instead of the author's "ego", diaries with indexes and summaries added by later hands. But if indeed the authors were not motivated by an obsession with their inner selves, what was the passion that drove them? In other words, our looking beyond the canon prompted us to seek new explanations. We decided to analyse the material we found from three different angles, all of which are possible stimuli for writing ego-documents and each of which forms a single project.

The first project focuses on the emergence of children's diaries around 1800 and the pedagogical advice books appearing from the eighteenth century onwards. This field of research is the result of an in-depth analysis of one of the earliest Dutch children's diaries we found in the archives: the diary of Otto van Eck, who lived in the last two decades of the seventeenth century. Otto's diary proved not to be a spontaneously written diary but a medium controlled by his parents. Further research revealed that this method of diary-writing was recommended by enlightened educators and put forward as a model in children's literature<sup>18</sup>. Keeping a diary was thought to aid children in developing self-control and to stimulate self-reflection. Parents, for their part, were urged to read their children's diaries regularly. In the meantime, quite a few of such children's diaries – written under parental supervision – have surfaced. Not until

the last decades of the nineteenth century was there a slight tendency towards the *journals intimes* known from literature: diaries containing golden locks and filled with warnings to intruders to suppress their curiosity<sup>19</sup>.

The second project is investigating the interaction between the writing, distribution and consumption of commercially printed autobiographical texts. What were the marketing strategies used by publishers of this specific genre? How did they recruit their authors? How was the genre received in literary magazines, and did it undergo any discernible development? How did the authors recommend their autobiographies, and did they live up to expectations<sup>20</sup>? The results of this research suggest that in the nineteenth century the printed autobiography represented only a small share of the Dutch market for printed matter, though it did compare in size with other genres such as the novel and historical work. Moreover, analyses of newspaper advertisements show that autobiographies were presented as an alternative to novels and as a genre that kept the reader up to date with all sorts of developments in contemporary history, as well as with the public personae that figured in that history. These results confirm the findings of the analyses of reviews in contemporary literary journals. One of the main conclusions is that most of the reviewers did not value introspection in autobiographies, but instead appreciated the genre because of its documentary value for later generations, since it provided eye-witness accounts of a fading past. From 1880 a shift in appreciation made authenticity one of the main criteria for evaluation<sup>21</sup>. These findings are in line with the results of the third project, which focuses on changes in the perception of time and personal historical reflection in both hand-written and printed ego-documents.

In the last-mentioned project we were looking for a connection between the growing popularity of autobiographical writing and the new historical awareness which arose around 1800<sup>22</sup>. The hypothesis that there is a connection between the change in historical awareness and the rise in the number of ego-documents was inspired by Reinhart Koselleck, a German historian of ideas, who observed in the period 1750–1850 – which he termed the *Sattelzeit* – an important shift in historical awareness. This experience of discontinuity was partly due to the enormous power of acceleration behind socio-political and

<sup>18</sup> A. Baggerman and R. Dekker, *Kind van de toekomst. De wonderlijke wereld van Otto van Eck (1780-1798)* (Amsterdam, Wetselbibliotheek 2005). (An English translation of this book will be published in 2008 by Brill Publishers); *idem*, "Sensibiliteit et éducation d'un enfant à l'époque baroque. Le journal intime d'Otto van Eck (1791-1796)", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 68 (2001), p. 129–139; *idem*, "Otto's Watch: Time, Pedagogy, and Diary Keeping in the Late 18th Century", in Andrea Irmel and Michael Winmore (eds.), *Childhood And Children's Books In Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800* (New York/London, Routledge 2006), p. 277–305; A. Baggerman, "The Cultural Universe of a Dutch Child, Otto van Eck and his Literature", *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 31 (1997), p. 129–134.

<sup>19</sup> See also P. Lejeune, *Le moi des demoiselles. Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille* (Paris, Seuil, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> This research was undertaken by Marijke Huismann, a Ph. D. student now finishing a dissertation to be published in early 2008.

<sup>21</sup> "Living history: the reception of autobiographies in three Dutch journals, 1850–1918", in A. Baggerman, Marion Gymnich and Roy Sommer (eds.), *Literature & Memory: Theoretical Paradigms – Genres – Functions* (Tübingen, Narr Verlag, 2006), p. 155–165.

<sup>22</sup> The research for this part of the project was undertaken by myself in conjunction with Dr. Jeroen Blak, Joke Kuyvenhoven and Gerard Schulte Nordholt.

economic-technological developments<sup>23</sup>. This led to the awareness that the present does not automatically result from the past and that the future – a new word in the Dutch language – lies open. Thus the enormous rise after 1800 in the number of ego-documents may have been caused by an increased need to bridge the gap between past and present. In order to test this hypothesis we subjected a great number of nineteenth-century autobiographies and diaries to detailed examination, looking for evidence of such watershed experiences in historical consciousness and concentrating on passages dealing with time, memory, technology, education, language, customs and daily life. We devoted special attention to summarising passages, which began to appear more frequently at the end of texts, and to “second thoughts” in which an author, or his or her descendants, comment on earlier writings. One of the first aspects we analysed was, of course, the authors’ express reason for writing and what they had to say on this subject.

### Changes in the perception of time and personal historical reflection

Writings from the early-modern period are completely lacking in remarks about possible differences between the past and the present. The first example of explicit intent to document a given time for posterity was found in a diary kept by a Jewish money-changer in the period 1740–1752, on the threshold of Koselleck’s *Sattelzeit*, though the diarist was certainly unaware of this. One of his reasons for keeping a diary was to react to a tax riot, since he was convinced that “as long as the world still exists... there will never be another time like these past twelve years”<sup>24</sup>. An Amsterdam clerk who began to keep a diary in the same period did so in order to “describe the events of my time, so that for the rest of my life I shall be able to read again about the wonderful times I’ve seen and experienced”<sup>25</sup>. More than fifty years later, the Dutch statesman Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp expressed it differently, calling it “une époque si mémorable”, but the message was the same. He began his memoirs in 1813, when Napoleon was driven out of the Netherlands. A captain in the merchant navy explained that he had written his autobiography, published in 1872, as an aid to future generations in comparing their own times with the past<sup>26</sup>. Such motives are

much more plentiful after 1750, but even more important is the dearth of information from the preceding period, all of which goes to show that research into the development of ego-documents in the nineteenth century cannot be limited – no matter how far one stretches the long nineteenth century – to an analysis of all the sources from the period in question. In order to determine what is new, it is necessary to analyse all previous ego-documents.

Another new development in nineteenth-century biographies which might point to a modern historical awareness is the increasing interest in the historicity of people and their customs. Writing his life story in 1892, a former governor-general of the Dutch East Indies characterises one of his predecessors as a civil servant “of the old school”<sup>27</sup>. The autobiography of a Haarlem teacher, born in 1778, contains an account of old-fashioned table manners, in particular one that was current in his childhood, namely that one was not supposed, while eating, to lean on the table with one’s left hand, nor use this hand to pick anything up. Interestingly, too, the word “old-fashioned” crops up with increasing frequency in the course of the nineteenth century.

A third novelty in ego-documents written in the second half of the nineteenth century are feelings of nostalgia, or wistfulness – a typically modern sentiment – meaning the longing for a period irrevocably past, the realisation so beautifully expressed by L.P. Hartley: “The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.”<sup>28</sup> The historian Peter Fritzsche situates the origin of nostalgia in the last decades of the eighteenth century: the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars are said to have triggered this emotion. The people who lived through this “Umwertung aller Werten” (re-evaluation of all values) felt “stranded in the present” – the title of Fritzsche’s book. Often, as a result of these upheavals, they became exiles, and this exacerbated their feelings of alienation and isolation. This was the fate of the French man of letters François René de Chateaubriand, Fritzsche’s star witness, whose autobiography is saturated with melancholy<sup>29</sup>.

Dutch autobiographies are generally less florid. After all, not everyone is blessed with Chateaubriand’s literary talent. We had to read between the lines to discover feelings of nostalgia or to deduce them from the pilgrimages they undertook to the places of their youth, where little remained the same. The fact that these feelings of nostalgia are expressed more strongly as the nineteenth

<sup>23</sup> R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 366.

<sup>24</sup> University Library Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, no. ROS. 486, The diary of Abraham Chaim Braathard (Hyman Harrogs) (1699–1786).

<sup>25</sup> Royal Library, The Hague, MS 71 A 8-12, The diary of Jan de Boer (1694–?).

<sup>26</sup> National Archives II, Van Hogendorp Coll., aanv. 1913, inv. 50-52, the diary of Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp (born 1762).

<sup>27</sup> National Archives II, Coll. Loudon, 1, James Loudon (born 1824).

<sup>28</sup> J. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. XVI. On historical consciousness since the Renaissance, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> P. Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 2004).



century progresses could be related to the late industrialisation of the Netherlands in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Thus the prominent Dutch clergyman and politician Otto Helding (1804-1876) describes in his autobiography published in 1881, his journey to a number of places often frequented in his youth: "how wistful I became, recollecting those times long past; everything had been forgotten, nothing was living in that wonderful past, but raced ahead like the express trains that now pass by Pálzdorp and Kleef, flying past all that was once so delightful, calling to all of you: go on, go on, faster, forwards!"<sup>30</sup>

A fourth new development in autobiographies which I should like to touch upon here is the increasingly important place occupied in these stories by childhood memories. As stated earlier, this had to do with new educational ideas, but it could also have been connected with the distance authors perceived, while writing, between their past and present persona. To make their youth comprehensible to the younger generation, a lot of explaining was necessary; indeed, this was the reason given by nineteenth-century autobiographers for their long digressions. Some of them took so long to commit their childhood memories to paper that they died before getting around to describing the later stages of their lives. Others consciously chose to confine themselves to their childhood days. As shown earlier by the graph, youthful recollections became an independent autobiographical subgenre in the nineteenth century.

Autobiographers, growing old in a period strange to them, had much to explain to themselves, and were often forced to rack their brains to come up with the necessary answers. It is striking that the workings of the memory became an increasingly important issue in nineteenth-century ego-documents. We also see an increasing tendency to employ associative aids during writing: authors taking sentimental journeys to the places where they grew up, for instance, as well as travelling in their imagination. Childhood recollections were structured by attaching them to different rooms in the parental home or to objects evocative of memories, such as Marcel Proust's "madeleine" cakes. Diaries, of course, were even more effective in stimulating the memory, and a number of them seem to have anticipated this need. Their entries were intended as aides-mémoires, to be read in the future in order to relive one's youth. We know that many diaries actually performed this function, because the diaries of 30 authors have been preserved, and many of the other authors reveal in their autobiographies that they had kept diaries in the past.

The most interesting difference between early-modern and modern autobiography is the different way of thinking about development. Inasmuch as early-modern autobiographers mention their childhood, their memories serve to

foreshadow later developments: pietists, for example, had an instinctive affinity for the true religion from their youngest years, poets wrote in verse from the moment they could hold a pen, humanist scholars demonstrated as students a love of the classics. The events of their lives did not change these authors fundamentally. Their characters were established at birth, and this notion cannot help but call to mind the early-modern paintings of children portrayed as miniature adults. Not only an author's character but also the author's fate was decided in the cradle. To be sure, a seventeenth-century tradesman discusses his childhood memories, but they functioned only as an omen. His lot in life had been clear from infancy: disaster would befall him constantly. Reading further, we see that this proved true: "for the beginning shows how it will end".<sup>31</sup> He thus expresses a cyclical consciousness of time which, according to Koselleck, will make way after 1750 for a future-oriented, linear, developmental perspective, a sense of humankind's ability to shape itself and its world. The last idea is to be found in almost all nineteenth-century autobiographies. With more or less circumlocution, authors reconstruct the plot of their lives, presenting it as a process whose outcome was not predetermined: they were moulded by their upbringing, their teachers, their friends and acquaintances, historical events and their careers. One such self-made man was Samuel Müller, who relates in his autobiography the story of his intellectual education and development, thus telling the story of a poor boy who managed to become a professor at the Remonstrant seminary.<sup>32</sup> Another gives a detailed description of his career, in which he rose from office clerk to factory manager. This achievement was attributed to his ability to remain firmly focused on the future<sup>33</sup>, a virtue which self-made men propagated in their autobiographies as crucial to their success in life.

This broadening of time and space in the human consciousness can also be seen in a different and far more fascinating form, namely in the messages sent by autobiographers and diarists to future generations – their "message in a bottle". A Hague mirror-maker, for instance, wrote on the first page of his 1802 diary the following message for future readers: "If you, future inhabitants of The Hague, read about this era with surprise, then you will stare in amazement at the disasters that were our lot."<sup>34</sup> He thus anticipates the strangeness of his life in the eyes of future readers. An Amsterdam merchant, penning his autobiography at the age of only 32, says that his recollections are not yet interesting at the time of writing, but he has written them down anyway to cheer up future generations. A Frisian revolutionary edited his diary in exile in order

<sup>31</sup> J. Blak (eds.), *Memorial of my life levenswijzinghe* (Tilversum, Veldoren 1999) [= R. Dalket and G. J. Johannes (eds.), *Egdocumenten* 16] : Hermanus Verbeek (1621-1681).

<sup>32</sup> University Library Amsterdam, MSS coll. XIT B 23, Samuel Müller (1785-1875).

<sup>33</sup> Delft Municipal Archives, MSS Aanwinsten, box 7, no. 13, F.W. Braat (1822-1886).

<sup>34</sup> The Hague Municipal Archives, Or. Verz. MSS 373.492, Nicolaas Baake (1781-1816).

<sup>30</sup> O. G. Helding, *Leven en arbeid* (Utrecht, E. J. Brill, 1881), p. 21-22.

to send it to his parents, so that they could see "how many sleepless nights full of sorrow and misery" he had endured during the revolution of 1787. This accompanying letter dates from 1788; he kept the original version of his diary and a copy of the letter to his parents, but not without embarrassment and not without feeling the need to post a second letter 60 years later. This time it was addressed to an anonymous readership who would peruse his writings in future: "Anyone reading this document after my death must realize that I was only 20 at the time, a young man without any experience, who thought he was on the right track to save his mother country, with no thought of reward for himself. Revolutions silence reason – it is passion that rules."<sup>35</sup> In essence, three eras intersect here: the perspective from which the author views events in 1788, the perspective from which he looks back on this period in 1829, and the perspective of readers in a far-off future. This tendency of autobiographers and diarists to project themselves into an unknown future and to view their lives in retrospect is a new phenomenon. It is not to be found in every nineteenth-century ego-document, but it is entirely lacking in the work of early-modern predecessors. In fact, all nineteenth-century ego-documents can be seen as accounts written by travellers in time.

Indeed, the plot of these biographies is change, development and contrast: changes in child-rearing, education, politics, science, lifestyle, morals, clothing, religion, town planning and transport. While nineteenth-century autobiographers thematised the differences between past and present, they also historicized their own personality, which had been moulded by the world around them.

## Les écritures de soi dans une perspective transculturelle. Pistes de recherche en Allemagne<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Ulbrich

**E**n Allemagne le champ de recherches sur l'écriture de soi s'est établi depuis bientôt deux décennies<sup>2</sup>. La recherche sur l'écriture de soi s'inscrit dans un renouveau de l'histoire culturelle allemande qui s'ouvre à l'interdisciplinarité et aux contacts internationaux, et pratique un échange soutenu avec toutes les disciplines qui ont affaire à l'homme et à ce qu'il produit, comme l'ethnologie, la critique littéraire, la philosophie, les *cultural* et *gender studies*. Cette nouvelle histoire culturelle s'intéresse prioritairement à la perception et à l'interprétation que l'homme a de lui-même. Dans cette perspective, les écritures de soi apparaissent comme une bonne porte d'entrée vers la vie intérieure ; ils ouvrent un accès aux systèmes de valeurs et de représentations<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Je remercie Christophe Duhamelle, Philippe Bürgen et Christiane Kohser-Spohn de m'avoir aidée à traduire le texte en français.

<sup>2</sup> Pour un exposé plus ample voir : Claudia Ulbrich, « L'usage historiographique de l'autobiographie », dans Robert Dion, Frances Fortes, Barbara Havercroft et Hans-Jürgen Lauth (dir.), *Vies en récit. Formes littéraires et médiatiques de la biographie et de l'autobiographie*, Québec, Éditions Nora Bene, 2007, p. 139-156 ; Gabriele Jancke, Claudia Ulbrich (dir.), *Vom Individuum zur Person. Neuen Konzepte im Spannungsfeld von Autobiographietheorie und Selbstzeugnisforschung* (Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung, vol. 10), Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2005. Voir aussi : « De individuo a persona. Nuevos conceptos analíticos entre la teoría autobiográfica y la investigación de auto-escrituras de vida », *Cultura Escrita et Sociedad*, n° 1, 2005, p. 84-91.

<sup>3</sup> Le nouvel intérêt pour ces sources s'exprime par exemple dans la série « Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit », créée en 1993.