

For more than half a century, the Catalogue of Pamphlets in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library), edited by W.P.C. Knuttel between 1889 and 1920, has been a standard work of reference for historians and librarians. It presents a survey of the most important collection of Dutch pamphlets, and, for that reason, it has also become an indispensable bibliography of Dutch history in the widest sense of the word.

It was only in the eighteenth century that collectors became interested in pamphlets as a separate category of historical literature. The awakening interest in the national past of European countries made people aware that ephemera as ballads, pamphlets and plays were important for the reconstruction of life in earlier ages. Did not these short-lived productions of the printing press contain the authentic voice of earlier generations? Could not a representative picture of public opinion be found in leaflets such as these? It was for these reasons that Horace Walpole, always aware of posterity's judgment and busy quarrying materials to shape and influence that judgment, formed his rows of pamphlet literature, and bound these together in dozens of volumes. Apart from his books and letters and memoirs, these, too, were important as specimina of his age.

As to the meaning of the word *pamphlet*, men of letters offered conflicting opinions. The word itself dates from the Middle Ages, as Samuel Johnson knew. In his Dictionary he pointed to a possible derivation from the French "par un filet", which makes a pamphlet a loosely bound booklet. Other, more phantastic explanations, can safely be ignored — although for fairness' sake it must be stated that the current explanation of the word as offered by the Oxford English Dictionary has not found favour with everybody concerned. The OED (and practically all other modern dictionaries) refer to *Pamphilet* or *Panflet* — the school edition of "Pamphilus", a Latin amorous poem of the twelfth century, the wide popularity of which may have changed the name into a generic one for a certain class of literature. Thus the author of the *Philobiblion* says in 1344 that he prefers small pamphlets to caparisoned chargers. But in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, H.R. Tedder rejected this etymology as "fanciful".

Although this issue cannot be decided satisfactorily, it is worth while to go a little further into the terminological question, which is intimately connected with the business of pamphlets in general. In its original meaning, the word "pamphlet" referred to a short book, either in prose or in verse. In

modern English, "pamphlet" is reserved exclusively for "a prose controversial tract", in which sense it has passed into other European languages. But there is still some uncertainty as to what can legitimately be classed as a pamphlet. Is a pamphlet really just "a prose controversial tract"? Why shouldn't a separately published satirical poem be designated as a pamphlet? Why not call a newsletter on the appearance of a comet a pamphlet, or Milton's *Defence of the Anglican people* of 1651, even though all editions have more than two hundred pages of text? In fact, in Dutch usage pamphlet has a wider meaning than it (usually) has in English or French. This is how Frederik Muller, the well-known Dutch antiquarian bookseller, defined the subject in 1871: "pamphlets are larger or smaller tracts on the political, religious and social events of the day, writings produced to satisfy an immediate and temporary demand and interest, to give quick and provisional information, to support or to dispute measures and views; tracts on all kinds of subjects discusses among the people, the murder of a king as well as that of a child, the decapitation of a Grand Pensionary as well as the elopement of a mayor's daughter — in a word, everything that happens in society at large. This means that many a ponderous tome can be classed as a pamphlet, if written for an immediate demand (and there are many of these), while other and very short works cannot be designated as pamphlets".

It is clear (and everybody agrees) that pamphlets have a topical interest — they supply views or information on current events. Their size, however, remains a moot point: attempts have been made to limit pamphlets to volumes of less than a hundred pages — less than two hundred pages — less than one, two, or three sheets of printing. Of course, many pamphlets were born as thin and typographically unattractive leaflets, as a natural consequence of the hurry authors and printers were in to produce them. But it is a fact that pamphlets do exist that can only be accepted as fine specimens of the printing press or the bindery, and tracts do exist of more than two hundred pages of an undeniably pamphletlike nature. It is therefore safe to follow the conclusion of the Dutch bibliographer D.J.H. ter Horst that external criteria do not apply to pamphlets. By their contents only should they be recognized as belonging to a certain class of literature.

There is a connected problem: in the Netherlands, pamphlets have usually been considered as the private writings of individuals, setting them apart from official publications as placards, ordonnances and such (although

this has never been thoroughly maintained, and all Dutch pamphlet catalogues show more or less numerous exceptions to this rule). But English and French catalogues rely to a far greater extent on these official publications as pamphlet material. Relatively speaking, the Netherlands produced more pamphlets than any other European country — after all, the Dutch Republic was the classical country of freedom of the press, the place where controversial books, prohibited in the surrounding countries, could safely be printed. This means that Dutch catalogues have a much larger number of private controversial writings than France or the German countries, or even Great-Britain, even though freedom of the press was much greater there than in the absolute monarchies on the continent.

These Dutch catalogues were mainly produced in the second half of the nineteenth century, spurred on perhaps by Moreau's *Bibliographie des Mazari-nades* (1850—1851). It was Frederik Muller, mentioned above, who took the initiative, and asked P.A. Tiele to produce a three-volume catalogue of pamphlets gathered by Muller. These volumes were published between 1858 and 1861. Others followed, as is evident from the appendix to the Introduction, which lists all Dutch printed catalogues of pamphlets. The collection of pamphlets in the Royal Library at that time contained some 32.000 titles for the period between the later fifteenth century and 1853. The foundation was formed by the so-called Bibliotheca Duncaniana, the 20.000 pamphlets brought together by the eighteenth-century administrator Joan Duncan. Legated to the family of Orange, this collection was confiscated together with other possessions of Orange following the revolution of 1795, the result of an invasion of French revolutionary troops. Smaller collections were added during the nineteenth century, but a printed catalogue could only be produced when a young theologian, W.P.C. Knuttel, was set to the task. His **persistance and critical acumen** produced the nine-volume catalogue which has now been reprinted and which forms a lasting monument to his name.