

A Comparative Evaluation of Selected Prose by Maarten Maartens

Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie an der
Fakultät Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften der Technischen
Universität Dresden.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is as revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which was received by the “Technische Universität Dresden” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for awarding a Ph.D. and which was defended on December 10, 2004. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Uwe Böker, Prof. Dr. Christoph Houswitschka, and Prof. Dr. Hans-Ulrich Mohr for their helpful comments. The Maarten Maartens Foundation at Doorn, The Netherlands, has been invaluable in granting me immediate and unrestricted access to manuscripts, correspondence, notebooks and other documents still present in Maarten Maartens’ former home. My special thanks go to Mevrouw A. A. Schwartz, Maarten Maartens’ niece, at Loenen aan de Vecht in The Netherlands for her personal encouragement.

I would like to thank my friends for their help in the final stages of the work, of which I would like to mention in name Theo Gorissen and Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos. My gratitude also goes both my tutors at Regensburg University, the late Prof. Dr. Hans Bungert and Prof. Dr. Karl-Heinz Göller. After the sudden demise of Professor Bungert, Professor Uwe Böker at the Technische Universität Dresden graciously offered to take over his office as my first advisor.

I also wish to thank all those whose unerring faith in the ultimate realisation of this doctoral dissertation project persistently bolstered my motivation to proceed with the work, of whom I name in particular: Sabine Hohberger, Anke Hergesell and Alice Rudolf.

Dresden, September 2005

The Critic's first duty in the presence of an authors' collective works is to seek out some key to his method, some utterance of his literary convictions, some indication of his ruling theory.

Henry James

The recognition of a work of art as such is chiefly a matter of tradition, and tradition is chiefly a matter of caprice. Caprice – not of the individual – but of the fate that rules us all.

Maarten Maartens

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INTRODUCTION

“There are two ways of existing for ever, as a living creature or as a mummy. Now in these days of literary activity the continuation of a large number of literary mummies is certain. They will be preserved in their hundreds by biographies, dictionaries, etc. We shall know their names, but how many writers of the Victorian era will remain alive throughout the ages? Half a dozen?”¹

When an author, who has enjoyed a certain degree of popularity for more than two decades, lives through the long dreaded eclipse of his fame, the actual experience will nonetheless be immensely painful. This happened to Maarten Maartens, penname of Joost Maria Willem van der Poorten Schwartz (1858-1915), who was a born Dutchman, yet an English author by vocation. Initially he wrote poetry, but as he was not very successful, he soon embarked upon prose writing with a detective story, *The Black Box Murder*, published in 1889. Throughout the years 1890 up to 1912, his novels and short stories were highly acclaimed by many in the Anglo-Saxon world. Hundreds of reviews testify to that fact. Their general tenor is that Maartens' books were full of power and charm although the subject matter concerned itself with an array of characters who, in themselves, would not awaken interest were it not for the intensely sympathetic and vivid manner in which the author caused them to live. This is proved by the warm appreciation Maartens received in British literary circles and clubs, by the requests for interviews and the invitations to give speeches, and by the lasting friendships he fostered with some of the outstanding literary men of his day. Returning from a visit to Britain in 1893, he says in a letter to George Bentley (1828-1895), his publisher at the time: “I thought I was not going to write again, but my visit has taught me that I have quite sufficiently reached the *literary* world. I had no idea to what extent; I don't fancy I shall ever broaden out.”² Less than a year later, his friend James Barrie (1860-1937) wrote to him: “You come along with something that has doubtless many faults but is literature, has noble ideas as its foundation, and is in the spirit which has made our literature glorious for so many centuries.”³ This was a rather impressive thing for a British author to say about a foreigner writing in English. Barrie's praise echoes the literary appreciation of past generations,

¹ These words were written by Maarten Maartens on the back of a business letter, dated May 2nd, 1889, still extant in the Maartens archive. Norreys Jephson O'Connor used them to open his “Memoir” in the *Letters*; they were also used by editor John Sutherland for the introduction to the preface of *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Literature* (London: Longman, 1990).

² 16 July 1893, *The Letters of Maarten Maartens* (London: Constable, 1930), edited by his daughter, Ada v.d. Poorten-Schwartz, 59, henceforward referred to as *Letters*; George Bentley was the publisher of some of Maarten Maartens's early novels, as well as a friend and literary advisor.

³ *Letters*, 25 March 1894, 89. On Sir James Barrie, see: C. Rudolph, “James M. Barrie”, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (henceforth abbreviated to *DLB*), vol. 10: *Modern British Dramatists, 1900-1945*, ed. Stanley Weintraub (Detroit: Gale Research, 1982), 32-45.

implying that Maartens was not a representative of modernism.⁴ Indeed it would even be too much to say that he wrote novels of transition. Still, there is arguably something transitional in most of his writings.

Elements that pointed towards change – in morals, manners, tastes, convictions – appear throughout Maartens' prose work. Those elements crept in subconsciously, almost surreptitiously in spite of his ultra-conservatism. One might argue as to what extent he was aware of the change ahead, implied in his work. The ambiguity of his attitude is one of the factors that put him on the fringe of the English literary landscape. His work contains traces of both a desire for change and of a fear of where that change might lead. These traces are often hard to pinpoint. On the one hand, as is the case with so many authors of the period, the work of Maarten Maartens is not moulded in a form sufficiently distinguishable in the maelstrom of opposing and intermingling currents. On the other hand, literary traditions of the past make themselves felt in his work. His main characters are sensitive people, morally as impeccable as Hardy's or Gissing's, with a similarly idealistic disposition of mind. As in James, the height of the characters' individual maturity is sometimes achieved by an act of sublime altruism. As in Edith Wharton, however, there are also cases where daughters of newly rich Americans seek to bolster up their lack of social status through marriage with impecunious English noblemen. In all of Maartens' works, we encounter members of the leisure classes – titled or not. Mostly, they seem to be so despicable in their ways that they cannot be depicted other than mockingly and satirically, showing the deplorable emptiness of their hedonist existence. In contrast to that, the main characters live in dread of their instincts, as if a life of renunciation – to the point of rejecting sexual love – were the only way to behave morally. Sexual connotations, if they appear at all, are hidden in the narrative.

Up to 1895, Maartens' novels have an exclusively Dutch setting. Negative criticism from his own countrymen prompted him to enlarge his scope. In the two decades of travelling and writing, roughly between 1890 and 1910, each book he published earned him appreciative reviews outside Holland. These reviews were rather shallow, as it was customary for reviewers to copy from each other. However, as will be shown, there was also real praise from such outstanding writers as Virginia Woolf, Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw and

⁴ See Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 393-496. Cf. also David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Bernard Bergonzi, *The Turn of a Century: Essays on Victorian and Modern English Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Paul Goetsch, ed., *Englische Literatur zwischen Viktorianismus und Moderne* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983); David Trotter, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (London: Routledge, 1993); Daniel R. Schwarz, *The Transformation of the English Novel, 1890-1930* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983); Joengmeen Gye, "Journey into Modern

William Dean Howells. Still, Maartens became less and less convinced that he had made a real and lasting impact. This accounts for the determination with which he pressed his publishers in 1913 for a collected edition of his works. In spite of the protestations, recurrent in his letters, that “M.M.” only marginally interested him, his almost humble plea for some renewed attention from the publishers is an attempt to subdue his fears of being forgotten.

The January 1914, issue of *The Bookman*, edited by A. St. John Adcock, devoted its leading article to Maarten Maartens on the occasion of the uniform edition of his works that were published by Constable in 1914. However, the article could only partially satisfy him: he deemed it too uncritical. It was, in fact, a repetition of the laudatory reviews of Maartens’ books that had appeared at the time of his debut, some 25 years earlier.⁵ His popularity had never been as large as alleged by the article, and the sales of his books had done little to increase his renown. Nonetheless, Maartens sought to draw his American publisher’s attention to the *Bookman* article insofar as it concentrated on his first novel, *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* (London, 1890). In 1930, in a rather watered-down article, Adcock referred to that novel as the story that, in his view, had been so successful in its time that it entitled its author a modest, but permanent, position in English literature.⁶

Maartens’ requested his American publisher, Appleton, to issue a limited edition of the collected works in the United States parallel to the English edition by Constable. When this was rejected, he hoped that there might be a chance, at least, of seeing *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* reprinted. In another letter, he wrote in terms which suggest anything but the indifferent attitude he professed elsewhere:

You see M. Adcock calls it “One of the finest and most impressive of modern prose epics.” Of course an author is a bad judge of his own works, but I still think, judging by the constant letters and appeals I get from America, and by what I have seen happen in Germany, that a certain position – not a popular success, but a small, comparatively permanent, library position might be obtained for ‘M.M.’ [...] I could send you any amount of foreign laudation, but I imagine the American public prefers its own literary critics.

The unpublished typescript of this letter, dated 25 May 1914, is still extant in the Maartens archive. The term “Maartens archive” refers to the collection of papers, letters, documents and manuscripts kept in the library of Maarten Maartens in his estate at Doorn, in the Netherlands. Although the estate is now used by the Slotemaker de Bruïne Institute, a training centre for

Literature: Realism, Naturalism, Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, and Decadence”, *British and American Fiction to 1900*, 9.1 (2002), 165-180.

⁵ *The Bookman*, published by Hodder & Stoughton, started in December 1891. It was a popular illustrated magazine that was published until 1933. *The Bookman* was not a highbrow magazine. Authors and their works were introduced in a general way to a wider middle class readership.

⁶ In *The Bookman* (Oct. 1930).

business, the house is still the seat of the Maarten Maartens Foundation, one of whose main purposes it is to keep the library in its original state. The request for a re-issue of *Joost Avelingh*, referred to in this letter, was turned down and the collected edition sold very poorly. For years, Maartens had been living in dread and anticipation of the approaching war, which he deemed inevitable. Now that it had come, it did not merely crush the remains of a dwindling literary reputation but also, once and for all, the moral principles upon which his entire life had been based. In hindsight, nothing seems more obvious than that he could not have continued to live in a world void of all he had deemed worth living for. A curtain of silence soon shrouded the memory of the man who had received less than a decade earlier an honorary doctorate at Aberdeen University, together with Thomas Hardy. On that occasion he had been described as “one of the most accomplished scholars of a learned people, versed in modern language and literature, acquainted with the minds and customs of every civilised nation.”⁷

Maartens died in 1915, a year after the First World War had started and long before the chain of atrocities ended. His too early death had been hastened by his isolated position and his deteriorating health. Utterly devastated by the absurdity of the feud between England and Germany, the two nations that meant so much to him, he felt obliged to remain silent due to the neutral position of the Netherlands in the conflict. In the ten years after his death, the curtain of silence was only lifted twice. In 1923, the German critic Wolfgang Schumann wrote an introduction to a number of short stories he selected for a German edition.⁸ There is also a critical article by Lodewijk van Deyssel (1864-1952), a renowned Dutch author and critic, on Maartens’ tragedy in verse, *Nivalis*.⁹

Since Maartens had spent most of his early childhood in England, he had a natural ability to express himself in that language. It remains nonetheless remarkable that he did not write his novels in his mother tongue. The choice to write in English naturally created a gap between himself and his fellow-countrymen. There is no doubt that he took the opportunity to do so with an eye on a possible international recognition of his work.¹⁰ A Dutch writer has no chance of becoming known to an international public unless he is translated. An outstanding case in point is Louis Couperus (1863-1925). Couperus is now generally considered the

⁷ *The British Weekly* (13 April 1905).

⁸ *Novellen von Maarten Maartens* (München: Albert Langen, 1923).

⁹ L. v. Deyssel, “Nivalis, a tragedy by Maarten Maartens”, *De Gids* (Aug. 1924), 205-218.

¹⁰ One magazine wrote: “[Maartens] writes in English instead of his native tongue for artistic reasons, as well as for the sake of the larger public. He thinks that Dutch is very fine for higher prose or poetry, but that for lighter literature English is superior” (*American*, 5 May 1895). Maartens is not to be ranged under the label of ‘popular fiction’ current at the period as defined, for example, by Nicolas Daly in his *Modernism, Romance, and*

greatest Dutch realist of his time. While he was still quite unknown, Maartens submitted that budding author's work to the attention of one of Britain's foremost critics, his friend Sir Edmund William Gosse (1849-1928). Some of the novels written by Couperus were translated into English soon after their publication in The Netherlands. By 1900 Couperus was already considered a leading figure in Dutch literature. Gosse wrote:

In 1890, my friend Jan [sic] van der Poorten Schwartz [i.e. Maartens], who wrote excellent novels about Dutch life in English, sent me a story called "Noodlot" (Destiny) by a young Dutchman, who was displaying, as he [Maartens] thought, signal merit. Maarten Maartens, [...] was very anxious that literary relations should be formed between Holland and England. Maarten Maartens, a sensitive prophet, was sure that the young Louis Couperus was going to win a prominent place among his countrymen; what even he did not anticipate was that he [Couperus] would far outstrip all his rivals and become the representative novelist of Holland.¹¹

At about that same time Gosse would not have hesitated to call Maartens the most outstanding figure in Dutch literature of international repute, whereas in 1925 he limited himself to making a few remarks that were not even correct.¹² He wrote for example: "Maartens adored our country [Great Britain] to such an extent that he abandoned his native language to write exclusively in ours." Maartens certainly did not forsake the Dutch or the Dutch language. Most of his settings are in Holland, and he wrote poetry in his native tongue. Gosse's simplifications did not serve Maartens' case; on the contrary, they merely consolidated the misconceptions about the man and his work. Similarly, the well-known critic George Saintsbury excluded Maartens in his estimation of Dutch literature of the period.¹³

the fin de siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), passim.

¹¹ E. Gosse, *Silhouettes* (1925) (rpt. New York: Books from Libraries Press, 1971), 261. Apart from being the definitive biography on Couperus, F.L. Bastet's *Louis Couperus* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1996) offers a complete literary assessment of the Dutch Literature of his time. Most of the works by Louis Couperus were translated into English by various publishers, see Gerda van Woudenberg, "Couperus and His American Readers: Some Notes on the American Translations of His Novels and Their Critical Reception", *Dutch Crossing: A Journal of Low Countries Studies* 36 (1988), 73-92; O. Wellens, "Couperus in de Engelse kritiek", *De Nieuwe Taalgids: Tijdschrift voor Neerlandici* 73 (1980), 191-197; cf. also Johan P. Snapper and Thomas F. Shannon, eds., *The Berkeley Conference on Dutch Literature 1991: Europe 1992, Dutch Literature in an International Context* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993); Seymour L. Flaxman, "Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Modern Dutch Literature", in Francois Jost, ed., *Proceedings of the IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, vol. 1. (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 511-519.

¹² E. Gosse, *The Sunday Times* (8 Jan. 1928). The critic J.A. Russell observed: "Gosse is not to be regarded as a reliable authority on Dutch or Belgian literature, making errors of the most obvious kind in matters of simple fact" (*Romance and Realism: Trends in Belgo-Dutch Prose Literature* [Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1959]), 158. On the situation of Dutch literature around 1900, see G.J. Van Bork and P.J. Verkruijse, *De Nederlandse en Vlaamse auteurs* (Weesp: De Haan, 1985).

¹³ "The work of Maarten Maartens has been mostly in foreign languages, but the novels of Marcellus Emants [...] are very well spoken of, as well as those of F. van Eeden" (*The Later Nineteenth Century* [London: Blackwood, 1907, repr. 1970]), 304.

Maarten Maartens belonged to the old world that existed before 1914. The First World War created an immense gap that he had no wish to survive. As so many of a like mind he had apprehended that the old world had vanished, and that he had vanished with it.

The only doctoral dissertation ever written on Maartens' literary achievement consists mainly of a description of the contents of the novels.¹⁴ Van Maanen noted that there were structural problems in Maartens' method. He even admitted that these required closer scrutiny, but he refrained from going any further in his explorations. As will become evident, his claim that Maartens merely wanted to tell a good story cannot be maintained. Van Maanen's doctoral dissertation was reviewed by Edmund Gosse, but instead of discussing that work, Gosse rather used the opportunity to call Maartens back to mind. He pointed out how strange it was that no detailed study of the man and his work had been published in England. The article leaves one with the impression that Maartens had never been known to the English reading public.¹⁵

While Gosse's own attitude was exemplary of the general lack of interest, it was an unknown Dutch critic who – reviewing the same book – suggested that it would have been better to confine the analysis to one of the best amongst the novels, or a limited number of them. Furthermore one would have to assess the merit of the work by a detailed comparison of that particular work with a specially selected book of one of those authors with whom Maartens had been repeatedly compared on a surface level, such as Tolstoy, Thackeray and George Eliot.¹⁶

After her mother's death in 1924 Maartens' daughter, Ada van der Poorten Schwartz, attempted in several ways to revive the literary fame of her father. For instance, in a series of letters to Kyllmann, literary editor of Constable, she suggested the publication of a selection of aphorisms as well as a choice of short stories. When Kyllmann demurred, she opted for something else: the publication of parts of his correspondence. *The Letters of Maarten Maartens*, with a preface written by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944), and a memoir by Jephson O'Connor, were published in 1930. Quiller-Couch wrote: "I may wish, but dare not predict, that this book of letters, piously collected by his daughter, will at once lift or partially dispel the strange shadow of neglect which critics have allowed to fall across the memory of Maarten Maartens." Ada van der Poorten-Schwartz chose not to publish a number of letters

¹⁴ W. van Maanen, *Maarten Maartens, Poet and Novelist* (Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1928, Ph.D. thesis). There also exists a M.A. thesis by Theo Daselaar: "The Bad Successful Literary Life of Maarten Maartens" (Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984); systematically consistent, it is a general introductory monograph on Maarten Maartens.

¹⁵ E. Gosse, *The Sunday Times* (8 Jan. 1928).

¹⁶ A. G. v. K., *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (3 May 1928).

and to omit certain parts of others. The deletions concerned not only passages of a political or personal character, but also passages of literary purport. Very likely she destroyed most of the original letters Maartens received, as only a small number are extant in the Maartens archive. In most cases though, she made typescripts of the complete letter, including the parts that were left out in the published letters. In her selection, she particularly tried to highlight the bright side of her father's character. She claimed to have selected such parts "as are of literary or human interest", but in reality she stresses her father's personality rather than his literary merits, the polished side of his character, his wit, wisdom and charm, rather than the ruffled edges.¹⁷ Still, one cannot help noticing the increasing gloominess in his later years. Like many, he believed that evil had inexorably prevailed, that one lived in a devil-ridden world for which there was no hope left.

The *Letters* failed to have any lasting impact. With a few exceptions, such as the letters on Swinburne, Keats and Walpole, there was little or no benefit in their publication from a literary point of view. It was no surprise that they did not stimulate critics to deal with Maartens' literary heritage. Still, the preface by Quiller-Couch remains one of the two most serious attempts to determine Maartens' position in literature. Less than two years later and motivated by the publication of the *Letters*, the critic Osbert Burdett wrote a survey called "Maarten Maartens' Novels"¹⁸ Considering the limited space he had at his disposal to discuss sixteen books, Burdett has many good points to offer. He distilled the essence of each of the novels, carefully weighing their strong and weak points, balancing one against the other while simultaneously tracing their general developments. His essay is a critical exploration of Maartens' literary achievement as far as the novels are concerned. As a matter of fact, until 1970 it remained the only examination worthy of the name of serious criticism of any prose of Maartens.¹⁹ Briefly but lucidly, Burdett puts in perspective all those elements that account for the discrepancies, both personally and artistically, in Maartens. However, there are minor errors of fact. Burdett himself is to be counted among those who already had to ransack their recollection of that forgotten author who had died but fifteen years earlier. His article will be dealt with more extensively when comparing its results with our conclusions.

Although critical, the essay by Burdett had no effect in reviving interest in Maartens' work either, let alone that any of these publications, estimable though they were, could re-ignite

¹⁷ "Editor's Note" to the *Letters*, xii.

¹⁸ O. Burdett, "Maarten Maartens' Novels", *Nineteenth Century and After* (July 1931), 113-128.

¹⁹ With the exception of O.W. Tetzlaff's "Effi Briests Holländische Nachfolgerin", *Fontane Blätter*, vol. 2 (1970), 116-119; concerning questions of literary technique, cf. for example Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, "Naturalism or Realism: A Reexamination of Genre in Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest", *South Carolina Modern Language Review* 2.1 (2003), electronic publication.

the ashes of his diminished literary renown. An anonymous critic wrote in the *Week-End Review* that “not even the piety of surviving friends will claim that [Maartens’ work] was of the first importance. But to be at once popular and admired by good judges, and then to lapse into virtually complete oblivion for no ascertainable reason, that is to be a curiosity.”²⁰ Until this day that curiosity has remained. It became the incentive for this study on the literary merit of the prose works of Maarten Maartens.

The few items published on Maarten Maartens since 1930 are short as well as insignificant. Among the remaining papers found in his former home in Holland, there is a typescript of a radio transmission by Schumann, dated 1933.²¹ Four pages of a merely descriptive nature were contributed to Maartens’ work in a study on romance and realism by J. A. Russell in 1959.²² Ten years later Wim Zaal, a Dutch publicist and critic, wrote a series of literary essays in which he ruminates on the ephemeral nature of the literary fame of twelve Dutch authors, amongst whom Maarten Maartens.²³ A mere two other articles of more general interest were published in The Netherlands.²⁴

A critical evaluation of the major body of published prose work as presented in the following is a second attempt – after Burdett and long overdue – to do Maartens justice as an artist. The specific aims of this study required a selection, the purpose of which is to reveal, on the one hand, Maartens’ unique representation of Dutch society and character, and on the other hand, his wide gifts of truthful and poignant observation of the human condition. Those are the qualities attributed to him in the many reviews that appeared during the years of his literary creativity. In Maartens’ work, there are moments when these qualities fuse into a width of scope larger than the Thackerayan ‘satirist-caricaturist’ kind of realism, which Maartens claimed to be his favourite mode of expression.

Both in method and style, Maartens looked to the past. His style is reminiscent of that of some of the great writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as it assumes a similar detached attitude of benevolent – yet ironic – as well as a slightly aristocratic tone. As in their works, one senses in Maartens a nostalgic retrospection, a vain search for values no longer adhered to at the turn of the century. At the same time, however, there is an awareness of another world to come, signs of change that are not necessarily signs of evil. His daughter could not have put

²⁰ *The Week-End Review* (6 Sept. 1930), Maartens Archive, no pagination; article written on occasion of the publication of the *Letters*.

²¹ Transmitted by the *Mitteldeutscher Sender*, Leipzig, 24 Jan. 1933.

²² J.A. Russell, *Romance and Realism*, 130-134.

²³ W. Zaal, “Maarten Maartens”, in *Nooit van Gehoord! Twaalf Stiefkinderen van de Nederlandse Beschaving* (1969, rpt. Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1974), 96-107.

²⁴ In the *Nieuw Utrechts Dagblad* (31 Aug. 1955), and in *Insight Holland*, n. 21 (1979).

it more aptly or more succinctly when she described her father as “a man with the manners of yesterday and the morals of tomorrow.”²⁵

If he cannot be labelled a modernist, or even a typical exponent of the period of transition in which the larger part of his works was written, there can be no doubt about certain modern tendencies in Maartens. His ideas concern many social and moral issues, embedded in his themes and interwoven in the tissue of the narrative. They anticipate the changes in society, looming on the threshold of the new century even if, formally, Maartens continued to adhere to the traditional methods of the nineteenth century novel.

It is the central question whether Maartens is one of the bulk of late Victorians, possibly still readable from a socially or historically illuminating point of view as, for example, Mark Rutherford (1831-1913) or whether he belongs to those who transcend such limitations, as George Gissing did. No doubt Maartens deserves our attention, not only for his vivid descriptions of a vanished world, but also, more importantly, for his artistic rendering of the human values he sought to convey. He did not always manage to do so in his novels, due to an incongruity between his scope of vision and its form. However, his achievement as a writer of short stories is not inferior to that of some of his contemporaries who were then, as now, considered great writers.

As regards the research material, I was able to obtain immediate access to the manuscripts of the published as well as the unpublished novels and poetry, letters and other documents, still kept in Maartens' former home near Doorn, The Netherlands. Amongst the considerable amount of unpublished material there is the complete manuscript of an early apprentice novel, “The Van Weylerts” (1887). The novel already contains all the Maartensian ingredients we are to encounter in his later books, such as moral dilemmas, the moral degeneracy of the aristocracy and the relationship between man and woman in wedlock. Furthermore there are the unfinished manuscripts of the novels “The Dreamer” (1907), “The Love-Life of Carol Casteel” (1912), and, “The Right to Do Wrong” (1908?), as well as an unpublished play called “The Sin of Hugh Manson”, which is a dramatic adaptation, with an English setting, of his novel *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* (1889). Of the thirty-eight manuscripts of short stories, twenty-three were printed mainly in English magazines, fifteen remained unpublished. As far as Maartens' correspondence is concerned, his daughter Ada van der Poorten-Schwartz probably destroyed the bulk of the originals. According to a note in her literary correspondence, it was her intention to bequeath the letters from James Barrie to the Brotherton Library at Leeds University. However, no such letters are kept there. In that library

²⁵ One of the remarks Ada Schwartz added to the typescript of the *Letters* (Maartens archive).

some twenty original Maartens letters to Edmund Gosse are extant, of which only extracts were published in the *Letters*. The transcripts are in the Maartens archive. Amongst the remaining documents there, some twenty notebooks are particularly worth mentioning. The notebooks, numbered by myself, contain a variety of material of which relevant passages are used in this study.

Initially, it had been Ada's intention to sell part of the Maartens papers to the Brotherton Library. After all, it was her foremost aim to make her father's manuscripts and documents available to the general public as well as accessible to scholars. From the correspondence between Ada and the then Librarian, J. Alex Symington, it does not become clear whether she also donated the Barrie correspondence. At any rate these letters (of which Ada says that there was "quite a little packet") could not be retraced.²⁶

The first chapter opens with a description of the circumstances, which paved the way to Maartens' literary career, followed, in the second chapter, by an introductory analysis of each of the fourteen published novels. These texts are at the centre of interest of this study because they established his reputation. Accordingly, the analysis of his works reveals the assumptions upon which that appreciation was based, revealing at the same time the reasons for his eclipse, so bewildering at first sight. More specifically, this is the first stage of examining – amongst other aspects of his work – the interaction between the moral message and the narrative. It also explores the ways in which moral message and narrative take shape aesthetically at various moments within the development of his work. This chapter also provides a first insight into the problems of narrative method, problems that will be more closely examined in the ensuing two chapters.

The third chapter presents a critical examination of Maartens' approach to the novel as compared to Tracery's. If there is anyone at all, Thackeray is the author whom Maartens considered his master. Maartens greatly admired his method, which inspired and influenced his own narrative technique. Despite inherent weaknesses of that technique, Maartens' artistic originality could always successfully ward off the spectre of imitation. The chapter deals with resemblances in specific areas, namely epic vision, point of view and treatment of character. The result of this analysis will enable the reader to perceive the essential aspects of the very nature of Maartens' literary achievement, laying bare the inconsistencies of method that account for his ultimate failure to sustain a coherent artistic vision.

The fourth chapter is central. It shows that, contrary to his technique of novel writing, Maartens' treatment of the short story is free from such inconsistencies. In his short stories, he

²⁶ "To Norreys J. O. Connor" (7.6.1929), Literary Correspondence, typescript (TS) (Maartens archive).

manages to maintain a narrative distance to his subject matter which guarantees the level of objectivity indispensable to create an illusion of reality: Given wings, his vision takes off all by itself. Maartens published ninety-four short stories, sixty-three of which were published in four collections. Of these four compilations, *Some Women I have Known* (1901) and *The Woman's Victory* (1906), are selected for critical analysis because they deal with relationships between the sexes in the upper classes. In Maartens, this automatically involves a cosmopolitan element, which is absent, for example, in Hardy. *Some Women* and *The Woman's Victory* are set not merely in Holland, but also at the Riviera, in Italy, Germany and England. The remaining two collections, *My Poor Relations* (1903) and *Brothers All* (1909), are not discussed: Similar in method, they exclusively consist of Dutch peasant tales. The twenty-three uncollected stories, which Maartens contributed to periodicals, are not dealt with either as they do not offer any further insights. The same holds true for the manuscripts of the remaining eight unpublished short stories. However, the significance and purport of all of Maartens' short stories were taken into consideration in the general evaluation presented at the close of this study.

As we know from his *Letters* Maartens greatly admired Thomas Hardy. That author's pessimistic vision struck deep chords with his own vision of life, although it did not necessarily manifest itself on a narrative level. Maartens was convinced that the consistency of method with which Hardy recreated, or rather sustained his vision within the organic unity of his novels, could not fail to impress the reader, whether or not his or her views corresponded with Hardy's vision. Maartens' inconsistency of method, however, renders his novels unsuitable for comparison with Hardy's. Had the question ever posed itself, he himself would have been the first to acknowledge the fact. However, as far as the short stories are concerned, dealt with in the fourth chapter, it is arguably another matter. Maartens first collection of stories, *Some Women I have Known*, is fully consistent in method. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944), a renowned writer at the time and an astute critic himself, wrote in his preface to the *Letters* that he considered Maartens' stories at least equal – if not superior – to Hardy's. Consequently, *Some Women I Have Known* are compared to Hardy's *A Group of Noble Dames*, the only collection of stories in which Hardy deals, as Maartens, with women of the upper class. The introduction to Maartens' short story technique and the classification of his stories as a whole is followed by an analytical treatment of each of the twelve stories of *Some Women*. Once their profile as an aesthetic unity has been established, they are compared, in detail as well as in their over-all effect, to Hardy's. Finally in this chapter, a detailed enquiry into *The Woman's Victory* is added because it represents a further

widening of the Maartensian outlook, it in terms of poignancy of thought and stylistic economy rather than in subtlety of tone and rendering of atmosphere.

In the fifth chapter, there follows a general assessment. The appreciation of Maarten Maartens, as well as his eclipse, had many extraneous causes, such as his death during the First World War, the fact that he had become a writers' writer and already deemed old-fashioned in the roaring twenties and simply forgotten. The discrepancy between the appreciation of Maartens in Britain, The United States and Germany on the one hand and his native country, The Netherlands, on the other hand, is not the issue here.²⁷ This study focuses on purely aesthetic criteria. They are particularly at the core of interest in this final chapter, which attempts to put the various aspects of Maartens' method into perspective. By then it will have become obvious that, in spite of its intrinsic weaknesses, Maartens was not merely one of those who – in the words of Henry James – merrily wrote in a 'happy-go-lucky-fashion', and for that reason quickly disappeared from the literary scene.

²⁷ For those interested in the inquiry into its causes, see my study, "Author in Double Exile: The Literary Appreciation of Maarten Maartens" (Regensburg University, M.A. thesis, 1985).

I Maarten Maartens: A Preliminary Survey of the Man and Writer

“The knowledge of our own folly is the worst of reconcilers to our own fate.” *Maarten Maartens*

I.1. The formative years

Maarten Maartens' real name was Joost Maria Willem van der Poorten Schwartz.²⁸ He was born in Amsterdam, on August 15, 1858, second of five children to Dr. Carl Schwartz (1817-1870) and Cornelia van Vollenhoven (1822-1902).

Carl August Ferdinand Schwartz, born at Meseritz, Posen, in Poland, was of Jewish descent. At the time of Joost's birth, his father was already a renowned Christian preacher. The fact that Schwartz had been born a Jew in (what was at that time still) Prussian Poland did not play an important role in Joost's upbringing.²⁹ The father's Christian principles had a far greater influence on his son, although he died when Joost was only twelve; naturally he was raised in the spirit of his father's new religion. Not only did Schwartz' Christian ethics and morality determine his own moral outlook on life: they are also present to a greater or lesser extent in all of his works.

Carl Schwartz became imbued with what he perceived to be the spiritual needs of his own race and consequently gave up the prospect of an academic career in order to become a protestant missionary to the Jews.³⁰ Joost was only six when the family moved to London, after his father had accepted a call there. When Carl Schwartz died in 1870, Mrs. Schwartz returned with her children to the Netherlands. Joost's tutor had suggested that the boy stay in England, as he had shown to possess exceptional learning abilities, offering to teach him without remuneration. From the age of six to twelve he had lived in England, the period in which the natural basis for his future masterly command of the English language was established.

²⁸ The original name being Schwartz, Joost added *Van der Poorten* in 1887, part of the name of his great uncle, Jozua van der Poorten van Vollenhoven.

²⁹ In Maartens' writings however, descriptions of Jews never pass beyond the stage of the type of the usurer, which is indicative of a complex and ambiguous attitude to his Jewish origins.

³⁰ His duties included his taking orders as a deacon in the Church of England, before he offered his services to the London Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews. Under the auspices of that society he worked in Pest (Budapest), Constantinople (Istanbul), Berlin and Prague, before he went to Amsterdam in 1856. Here the wealthy Cornelia van Vollenhoven, descendant of one of the old patrician families in Amsterdam, became his second wife. The biographical facts given here are taken from Theo Gorissen, *Maarten Maartens en het Maarten Maartenshuis* (Doorn: Stichting Maarten Maartens, 1992), 33-53 passim.

After their return to Holland, Joost first went to an Amsterdam Grammar School, but in 1873 the family moved to Bonn. It was an international centre at the time, with an unmistakable cosmopolitan air. Many years later he recollected:

These school years, after all, make a mind, and shape a character far more than the university. They are, besides, the longest period of the longest life. The system of “education” was as absurd then, there, as it is today, everywhere. We learnt immense quantities that I have never needed, or been able to use. Fortunately I forgot, largely. [...] We foreigners were treated with great kindness. In those days I was violently anti-German, from fear of annexation – after the war! – but my German school-friends were amusingly “big-dog-little dog” about that. Only last week Germans who could judge told me that the Germans in “Dorothea” were “the real thing, from the inside.” English friends, by the by, have said the same thing about my few English, for instance in “Her Memory”. I like that more than any other nice thing that has ever been said. Bonn was very international in those days. A society mixture of South Americans, many English, North Americans, Dutch. To this I naturally owe my international, cosmopolitan outlook – with its literary pro and con – increased by the many winters, later, on the Riviera, and much travel. [...] ³¹

The international outlook that he gained in Bonn as well as the travels that he undertook for health reasons is important. They figure largely in the canvas of his themes, which, as caricature, he would express in many of his stories. Still, his years at Utrecht University should not be underestimated: they sharpened his understanding of the intricacies and pitfalls of the practice of law, aspects of which were to become a recurrent topic in his stories. His lengthy travels did not keep him from finishing his doctoral dissertation in the field of Civil Law, and within the academic community he quickly gained distinction as a scholar.³² However, instead of getting more attracted to his subject, law, he was increasingly repelled by the evasions and subterfuges of a great deal of practitioners of the law. His experiences had such an impact that it was to become another recurrent issue in his work.³³

³¹ Maarten Maartens, around 1910, p. 1 (numbered by myself) of a four-page autobiographical type-script recollection found amongst the remaining documents at the former Maartens residence at Doorn, near Utrecht, The Netherlands, in the following referred to as “Interview”. Extracts were quoted by A. St. John Adcock in a general presentation of Maartens’ work: “Maarten Maartens”, *The Bookman* (Jan. 1914), 203-210, here 204.

³² J. M. W. Schwartz, *De Invloed van den Leeftijd in het Burgerlijke Recht* (Utrecht: Diehl, 1882). In Schwartz’s dissertation one already discovers the impact his bad health and his experiences with the medical world had on his thinking. One of the theses claimed that salaries of doctors should be settled by government regulations (Thesis no. 49, p. 349). In this he anticipated one of Bernard Shaw’s essential arguments against the social practice of medicine, which the latter, while referring to Maartens’ satirical novel *The New Religion*, discusses in the preface to his play *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (London: Constable, 1911), 63-64. Critics were increasingly in favour of analyses of contemporary patterns in society, i.e., they were in favour of criticism of society in the contemporary novel (informative, tendential): Goetsch, Paul, *Die Romankonzeption in England 1880-1910* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1967), 432.

³³ As he recollected in the “Interview”, 1: “I learnt nothing at the University but law. Immediately after taking my degree I was called to take the lectures of the professor of civil and commercial law [Prof. Dr. J. A. Fruin] who had fallen ill. [...] I took his place, temporarily, and I wrote a good deal of abstruse stuff about law, histroi-philosoph. [sic] - Roman - in Dutch. It is, therefore, not in complete ignorance that I show my scorn, in my books, for the whole world-old system of chicanerie which goes by the name of “justice”, civil and criminal [...]”

Schwartz had well understood the ways in which legal theory was put into practice and the consequences this could have. Under the pretext of serving justice, the law practice of his day often led to the ruin and suffering of the socially underprivileged and the materially deprived. His general discontent with academic life was understandable for a man who from the outset had had the opportunity to disengage himself from the mediocre conventionality of his surroundings. His entire life up to that point had moulded him into a cosmopolitan personality: How could he ever have felt at ease in the stagnant waters of a provincial university? He found himself at a point where all possible options were available, showing into a future that, in whatever direction he ventured to go, looked promising. Not only did he meet all intellectual and personal requirements, moreover he belonged to the small privileged group of people whose path was smoothed even before they were born. Owing to these circumstances, he possessed the material, social and natural qualifications to be successful in any field he would choose, be it political, diplomatic, or academic.³⁴

In 1883, at the age of twenty-five, Joost Schwartz married his wealthy cousin Anna van Vollenhoven, “as we had always intended to, since my eighth year, her fourth.”³⁵ After a felicitous start, the marriage was darkened by Anna’s more or less permanent psychosomatic invalidity, caused by the birth of their only child, Ada, in 1890. Moreover, his own health gradually deteriorated.³⁶

Although he was the most qualified man for the position, it should not have come as a surprise that he was not nominated to Prof. Fruin’s chair when the latter died in 1885, because the political constellation in Utrecht at the time presupposed the nomination of a liberal candidate. His aspirations being no longer directed towards an academic career, this did not mean that he had any conception as yet of a professional alternative. When he bade his farewell to the university, his initial objective was to restore his wife’s health. It was to be the beginning of a series of pilgrimages to Switzerland, the French Riviera, Italy and Algiers. As time proceeded, these journeys, more or less under doctor’s orders, became increasingly frequent: they had set out upon what was to become a lifelong quest for both of them.

³⁴ Maartens’ unpublished private notes reveal a great deal about his critical attitude toward such phenomenon as class distinction and success of whatever kind, epitomised in a phrase like, for example: “The peculiar characteristic of the nineteenth century is undeniably hypocrisy” (Notebook 2, 28, as provisionally numbered by myself).

³⁵ “Interview”, 1.

³⁶ As will become evident, problems of health did not only determine the nature of their relationship; they would also have a considerable and recurrent autobiographical impact on his fiction.

I.2. Schwartz' debut as a poet

Already during his Bonn years, Joost Schwartz had got extensively acquainted with the great German classics and, naturally, he was particularly fascinated by Goethe, Schiller and Heine. Even if, as a boy, he had been imaginatively imbued with Shakespeare, his first intellectual education was distinctly German. This helps to explain why his first attempts in literature were poetry. How could it be otherwise than that these writers had a strong impact on a young person with a sensitive and romantic nature, a head full of chivalrous notions? No doubt it enhanced his already strong sense of moral responsibility manifest in all of his works.

Schwartz' early letters, written to a schoolmate in England, contain sketches of Dutch life already conceived from a standpoint of literary observation. Right from the beginning his descriptions and drawings give that very particular impression of Holland he was to develop later in his novels and short stories.³⁷

From the earliest papers then obviously English was to be his literary language, even if he would occasionally write in other languages. Commissioned by himself, he had no trouble finding a publisher for his first collection of poems. His sonnets were an imitation of Tennyson, something the reviews commented was still a feasible thing to do, provided it was done with "proficiency."³⁸ In The Netherlands, the renowned and very traditional critic and poet Nicolaas Beets commented: "How favourable his place would be amongst most of our young poets who seem to want to turn poetry into an expression of [...] insanity. [Translated from the Dutch]"³⁹ British reviews were reserved but on the whole lenient, pointing at the Tennyson and Heine influences in spirit and technique.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Letters to Herbert Warren" (1869-1870); the ten manuscript letters – the earliest by Maartens that could be traced – were donated by Ada to the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, simultaneously copies were sent to the Leeds University Library (Literary Correspondence, Oct. 1947, Maartens archive). It was Ada's policy to distribute her father's MSS over a number of libraries; the letters to Herbert Warren do not appear in the *Letters*; see also Preface, 9.

³⁸ J. M. W. Schwartz, *The Morning of a Love and Other Poems* (London: Remington, 1885).

³⁹ Op. cit. Wim Zaal, "Maarten Maartens", in *Nooit van Gehoord! Twaalf Stiefkinderen van de Nederlandse Beschaving* (1969) (rpt. Amsterdam: De Arbeidspers, 1974), 98; Zaal, however, quotes at the same page from an unpublished letter from Beets to Joost Schwartz a seemingly contrary opinion that throws light more particularly upon Schwartz' literary conservatism: "[Tr.:] Your verse is refreshing and encouraging, considering the turn our Dutch poetry is taking" (Manuscript in Maartens archive). Up to the 1880s, ministers and priests had mainly decided what was to be regarded as literature in Holland. However, the traditional values and modes in poetry were thoroughly shaken by the *Beweging van de Tachtig* (1880-1894), a spontaneous resurgence of original poetic creation, see J. C. Brandt Cortius *Het poëtisch programma van Tachtig* (Atheneum-Polak Van Gennep, 1968), 1-13. Nicolaas Beets (1814-1903) is one of the most outstanding representatives of Dutch moralising poetry. Had he not been a staunch friend of his father's, he would most probably not have deigned to comment upon Joost's poems at all (oral information by T Gorissen, see Gorissen (1992).

⁴⁰ Two quotations, chosen at random, to illustrate this: "We should have taken him for an Englishman cradled into poetry by too much study of Heine and endowed with a great deal of facility in the light lyrical measures of that seductive poet. As for its matter, it is rather monotonously erotic and melancholic" (*The Pall Mall Gazette* [24 July 1885]); *The Scotsman* wrote that Schwartz had no reason to feel embarrassed, though "the

Reactions to his first literary publication “fell dead with a few shrieks of anonymous praise”, as he recollected.⁴¹ However, publishers were sufficiently interested in the outpourings of Joost Schwartz to accept the two five-act tragedies he wrote within the following year, *Julian* and *Nivalis*.⁴² Not meant to be actually performed, they are both poetic adaptations of antique themes. On the whole, reviews in several newspapers show the same reserved indulgence, with only an occasional critical suggestion. Considering the aesthetic renewal in European poetry in full blossom at that time, it is somewhat astounding to read in the *Glasgow Herald* that Schwartz, in *Julian*, possessed “in a very high degree such poetical insight [...] as will gain for him a distinguished place among modern poets.”⁴³ *The Scotsman*, although writing that its “speeches are too long and rhetorical, and the action comparatively slow and halting”, granted the play its merit for its adherence to the historical truth in such a “poetically consistent manner.”⁴⁴

Nivalis, published some months later, caused an increasing number of journals to take notice of the Dutchman writing English poetry. *The Literary World* (14 Jan. 1887) called it a “work of genuine merit” and the *Westminster Review* of the same month pronounced it to be an “ambitious and, on the whole, successful attempt to depict the struggle between passion and obedience to law.” The discrepancy that often occurs between that which is right and proper and that which is merely lawful, will be one of the recurrent central themes in many of the works of the future novelist, whether it take the form of a conflict between reason and emotion or of legal right versus moral equity. Quiller-Couch correctly observed this about the novels, but it is equally valid for the early dramas: “Always the main interest lies in some spiritual conflict, some battle in which conscience, charity, obligations of gratitude, stern duty, love, hate, superstition – religious, atavistic or both – are involved and take sides.”⁴⁵

music is somewhat thin and monotonous and there is more of lachrymose German sentiment than is pleasing to a robust taste“ (15 Aug. 1885).

⁴¹ “Interview”, 1.

⁴² J. M. W. Schwartz, *Julian: A Tragedy* (London: Remington, 1886); *Nivalis: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1886). They are rather epic dramas than classical tragedies.

⁴³ *The Glasgow Herald* (14 Jan. 1886).

⁴⁴ *The Scotsman* (30 Oct. 1886).

⁴⁵ A. Quiller-Couch, Preface, *Letters*, xxii, henceforward referred to as Preface, *Letters*. Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch (1863-1944) was ‘the quintessential storyteller and at his best in the short story. As a novelist he was ahead of his time in describing shell shock and notable for his defence of women, as well as choosing many of his chivalrous heroes from the poorer classes’ (Smith, *DLB* 153), 255. A versatile man of letters, writing under the pseudonym ‘Q’, he was knighted in 1910 and became Edward VII Professor of English at Cambridge in 1912. See J.H. Stape, and Owen Knowles, eds., *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), xxviii. Maarten Maartens is not mentioned in A.L. Rowse’s biography *Quiller-Couch: A Portrait of ‘Q’*, London: Methuen, 1988. It was not until nine years after Maartens’ death that a lengthy critical article on *Nivalis* was published: the only thoroughly serious criticism on Schwartz’ poetry ever written, by the renowned Dutchman of letters, Lodewijk van Deyssel: “Maarten Maartens’ Treurspel *Nivalis*”, *De Gids* 3 (1924), 205-218. A general review, by the same author, on the works of Maartens appeared in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, No. 2500 (9 May 1925), 18.

Schwartz continued to write verse. In 1888 he published *A Sheaf of Sonnets*, and the number of reviewers casting an eye on his work again increased.⁴⁶ Although they tended to be less indulgent, the superficial approach behind the generally favourable mood of these reviews is striking. Joost was aware of this. He knew he was still judged leniently, partly on account of the fact that he was not only an outsider seeking to gain entrance into the literary establishment but, moreover, a foreigner expressing himself in the English language. To a certain degree this was understandable and only natural, but already it foreshadowed the persistent lack of serious criticism from which Schwartz afterwards, as novelist under the pseudonym Maarten Maartens, was to suffer. These sonnets, overburdened with thought, lack in emotive force and melodic lightness. The reason for this is that Schwartz' poetry reveals an increasing preoccupation with ethical, religious and individual problems, in a way foreshadowing the psychological insight and realist observation of the forthcoming novelist.⁴⁷

I.3. Maarten Maartens' exceptional position as an artist

Amongst other things, this chapter deals with the discrepancy between public acclaim and professional esteem that accompanied Maartens for the most part of his career, as well as the rapid oblivion that befell his name since his death in 1915. Which were the circumstances that paved the way to his international literary career and subsequently gave shape to it? The answer will help to explain the second discrepancy, persistent during Maartens' lifetime: his reputation as an artist in Britain, the United States and Germany on the one hand and the almost complete disregard of his person and work in his own country, The Netherlands, on the other.

Until the close of the century, Maartens collected many newspaper comments, reviews and notes on his works, the large bulk of which he arranged in albums.⁴⁸ The albums that contain these clippings, as well as many loose ones, are deposited at random in boxes in the Maartens archive. In most cases these clippings were sent to him overseas by Romeike, a foreign

⁴⁶ J. M. H. Schwartz, *A Sheaf of Sonnets* (London: Remington, 1888).

⁴⁷ There were able contemporary critics who perceived the poetic imagination beyond the layers of thoughts and ideas these verses carried. In a letter to Schwartz, the poet George Macdonald (1824-1905) wrote: "I recognized the strong poetic element in you at once [...] That you are a poet there is no doubt" (TS, 6 June 1889, Maartens archive). Maartens repeatedly stated that he felt he was really "a poet at heart", e.g. "Interview", 1.

⁴⁸ The collection also contains the reviews from 1885 till 1888, the period in which he published his two volumes of poetry, *The Morning of a Love, and other Poems*, and *A Sheaf of Sonnets*, as well as his two tragedies, *Julian* and *Nivalis*. These works appeared under his real name of J.M.W. Schwartz. When the author started to publish prose under the pseudonym of Maarten Maartens, no critic or reviewer ever made a connection between the novelist and the quondam poet. He continued to collect the many newspaper-clippings, that were sent to him. From 1898, the year in which *Her Memory* saw the light, he lost interest in them.

company that specialised in that particular service. There are hundreds of them, appearing all over The United States and in several Western European Countries, newspapers and magazines a number of which have now long been out of existence. Unfortunately no page numbers were added to the excerpts, which explain why no such numbers appear in the consecutive bibliographical data of those quoted. It shows the great interest Maartens took in the appreciation of his work abroad. As he resided outside the country in which the reviews were published, he had little other means at his disposal. One can only speculate why hardly any such reviews dating from the period after 1900 are actually present in the Maartens archive. Fact is that his interest in the reactions on his books gradually diminished.

Maartens' position in literature between 1890 and 1914 is quite exceptional. Even if the name of Joseph Conrad instantly comes to mind, Conrad moved to England and became fully integrated there, a step Maartens never took. What makes his case so exceptional is that he was born in Holland and remained his whole life there, while he wrote almost all of his poems, plays, novels and short stories in a foreign language. Even if the moral message of his works transcended by far the regional boundaries of their settings, his own external situation – geographically as well as thematically – meant that he basically remained an eccentric, an outsider to whatever community whose attention he sought and that took notice of him. The twofold discrepancy would cling to him until the end of his days. According to Osbert Burdett this may have had a negative impact upon the quality of his work: “[T]he various gifts of which he was master share that want of fusion which is reflected in his own life.”⁴⁹

All that followed from 1890 onwards, the year of the publication of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, must be seen in this light: The promising start of his first novel in Britain and in the United States encouraged him to proceed on the track he had chosen. He knew he was liked because he provided his overseas readers with a picture of the many-chequered Dutch microcosm that fascinated them. However, his books not only had an intriguing way of doing just that, apart from providing information about The Netherlands; they also dealt with a whole range of things outside that little country. From a very particular and unexpected angle, his contemporary readers were presented with a thorough view of many social aspects of the late nineteenth century.

The experience Maartens continually gathered during his travels found expression in all of his books. It accounts for the relaxed air of leisure that permeates almost all he wrote. It was understood and loved as the charm of the writer, himself a cosmopolitan citizen of Europe. Although always written in a satirical and humorous vein, all this was of great value to the

⁴⁹ Osbert Burdett will be dealt with more extensively at the end of this chapter.

quality of his novels, cultural documents of the manners and morals of the period. Maartens soon became highly respected as a man of profound intellectual and aesthetic ability by the established authors and critics he encountered. There can be no doubt that those who took a closer look at his works understood that he sought to describe, in his own peculiar way and regardless of the many Dutch settings of his books, the ethical and social standards of civilisation in general. As Arthur Quiller-Couch remarked: “he was an artist of high distinction who held the secret of popularity and could yet despise the idols of the market-place.”⁵⁰

However, these words were written in 1930, at a time when Maartens’ star had long eclipsed. The British critic Norreys Jephson O’Conor wrote in his memoir to that same volume of letters: “Maartens exemplifies the cosmopolitanism, the internationalism with which the world has been increasingly preoccupied since the war. [...] In his attention to the social questions of his time, in his concern with psychological problems, he also foreshadows modern interest.”⁵¹ It is difficult to say whom amongst Maartens reputed acquaintances knew that in many respects he was also a man ahead of his time. This is clear, however, from his books rather than from his correspondence. Apart from Quiller-Couch, he frequently exchanged confidences upon life and letters with other distinguished fellow craftsmen in Britain, such as James Barrie and Edmund Gosse, occasionally with Thomas Hardy. He published his fourteen novels and four volumes of short stories in Britain, The United States and Germany (Tauchnitz) in the original English versions.⁵² Finally, a collected and uniform edition of his novels and short stories was issued by Constable in 1914.

Maartens gained a certain degree of distinction in the English and German-speaking world, but the veritable critical attention he hoped to receive was never granted him. In fact, he was permanently in a position of double exile. Excluded as he was from the actual British literary scene by living in a foreign country, his illusion to be a part of it was but of brief duration. In his own country, experience had soon taught him to expect no kind of appreciation whatsoever, and soon he refrained from any such expectations; the Dutch reaction (as far as it went) being unequivocal in its rejection.⁵³ It was the English appreciation upon which

⁵⁰ Preface to the *Letters*, xv. On Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, see Michael Douglas Smith, “Arthur Quiller-Couch”, in *DLB 153: Late-Victorian and Edwardian British Novelists*, ed. George M. Johnson and William B. Thesing (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), 247-255.

⁵¹ Memoir to the *Letters*, xxvii.

⁵² They were all translated into German during Maartens’ lifetime. The well-known Tauchnitz Edition, in Leipzig, continued to reprint part of Maartens’ works in the original at least up to 1933. Only the short stories did not appear in German in their entirety, but as two selections of the four existing English collections.

⁵³ In order to illustrate the contrast between Maartens’ quasi non-existence in Holland and his reputation elsewhere, the following quote was taken from a letter, by a certain Mr. James C. Young. As collector of books for a library of contemporary authors, he asked Martinus Nijhoff, one of the foremost Dutch publishers, for a list

Maartens had put his hopes that would ultimately prove the more painful one, as it was essentially based on a one-sided interpretation of his works. Even so, the isolation in Holland, partially self-willed, cast a lasting and deep shadow upon his life and work. At first, his reputation grew, not only in the English-speaking communities, but in other European countries as well.⁵⁴ The misprision by his own countrymen was caused by the situation into which he had manoeuvred himself: he wrote about his own country, while living there, for a foreign readership. It is unlikely Maartens ever assumed that the hostile attitude would pass: however unjust, the over-all feeling towards him prevailed that he was, as it were, exposing their dirty laundry to the world. His situation as an artist had grown into an embarrassing and a complicated one. He was never to possess the certain comfort an artist must enjoy, who is part of the community reflected in his art. As Maartens might have put it himself, using a Dutch idiom in English: he had fallen between two stools.⁵⁵ He represented a difficult case for critics. All of this meant that nobody sufficiently identified with Maartens' achievement to make an effort at critical scrutiny, making a first step towards establishing his position in literature. Consequently, it meant almost total eclipse soon after his death, and explains, in another phrase by Quiller-Couch, the "strange shadow of neglect which critics have allowed to fall across the memory of Maarten Maartens."⁵⁶

I.4. The critical appreciation: Britain and the United States

As Maartens recollected in his "Interview", his years in Bonn were the beginning of his cosmopolitan breeding and orientation, his understanding of the points of view of other nations and their peoples, reflected in his novels and short stories. On the occasion of a return visit to Bonn, Schwartz made the acquaintance of Reginald Stanley Faber, the only Englishman he knew at that time (1887) who held connections with literary circles in England.⁵⁷ Knowing that Schwartz saw himself first of all as a poet, Faber nonetheless wrote

of the best Dutch living authors. The list he received did not contain Maartens' name. In reply, the American expressed his astonishment: "Maartens is by far, of all the Dutch authors, the best known in America and the most appreciated. He certainly is entitled to the highest place in your literature and cannot possibly be left out of any list which would include nearly two hundred authors" (29 Dec. 1909, Maartens archive).

⁵⁴ A mere three novels were translated into Dutch, of which *God's Fool* was translated twice, in 1895 and 1974. Due to its immediate success, *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* was brought out in a Danish, an Italian and a French version.

⁵⁵ This could have been a typical 'Maartensian' expression, translating Dutch expressions almost literally to keep the *couleur locale* as, for example, "A strap under the heart", the title of the first chapter of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*.

⁵⁶ "Preface", *Letters*, xv.

⁵⁷ Reginald Stanley Faber (1848-1908), Honorary Secretary of the Huguenot Society of London (1886-1908), President of the Bibliographical Society (1905-1906). Maartens dedicated his second novel, *An Old Maid's Love* to him as a "recognition of kindness in the past and a plea for future friendship." In the "Interview",

to him repeatedly, urging him to write a novel in English. While he was staying in Paris, Schwartz read a popular detective story, which incited him to write one himself. Subsequently he wrote *The Black Box Murder*, a detective story technically quite unlike the fashion of the period.⁵⁸ The unusual psychological intricacies of the plot partly explain why Schwartz did not find a publisher. The typical Maartensian plot structure is already recognisable in this first story: a story carried forward not by external facts, but by psychological motives. Oddly enough, this was not observed by an anonymous reviewer who wrote: “Of its sort this is a capital story. The only defect [!] is that the reader gets to suspect who is the real murderer long before the man who discovered the murderer has his suspicions thoroughly aroused.”⁵⁹ This quite clearly illustrates the conventional expectations in this sort of story: What he considers a defect is in reality, a major asset, by which it distinguishes itself from the usual sensational detective stories of the day.⁶⁰ *The Black Box Murder* was pirated in the United States, and a German translation appeared soon afterwards.⁶¹ Many years later, the renowned Dutch critic Lodewijk van Deyssel wrote that *The Black Box Murder* was considerably superior to the best known English and American detective novels: “*The Black Box Murder* is such a masterpiece of clustering and unravelling of obstacles, such a flawlessly precise and logical tissue of hypotheses, conclusions and solutions, perfectly and nobly written, that this novel may be said to surpass considerably the best known English and American detective stories.”⁶² Although written in English, *The Black Box Murder* has been called the first Dutch detective story.⁶³

Even if *The Black Box Murder* marked Schwartz’ debut as a novelist, his first book in the proper ‘Maartensian’ way was *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, which appeared in the same year,

he refers to his correspondence with Faber. Yet none of this was printed in the *Letters* nor are any letters extant in the Maartens archive.

⁵⁸ *The Black Box Murder* (London: Remington, 1889); published anonymously at his own expense. The detective story that had inspired him was *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*, “by the New Zealander, Fergus Hume, (1886), which sold a quarter of a million copies in a year” (*The Stanford Companion to Victorian Literature*, ed. John Sutherland [London: Longman, 1990], 182).

⁵⁹ *The Glasgow Herald* (9 Nov. 1890).

⁶⁰ Van Maanen assumed that, at the time, readership was not able to perceive the psychological substructure in *The Black Box Murder*: “The expert novel reader of today would probably have suspected the amiable clergyman from the first, but the 1890 public was not yet so double-eyed [...]” (*Maarten Maartens, Poet and Novelist* [Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1927]).

⁶¹ “Interview”, 2; *Der schwarze Koffer*, transl. E. Becker (Stuttgart: n.p., 1892).

⁶² *De Groene Amsterdammer* no. 2500 (9 mai 1925), 18; transl. from the Dutch; Lodewijk van Deyssel, pseudonym of Karel Johan Lodewijk Albertingh Thijm (1864-1952), was one of the most illustrious *Tachtigers*, a spontaneous resurgence of original poetry in The Netherlands between 1880 and 1894; see for example: J.C. Brandt Corstius, *Het Poetisch Programma van Tachtig* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 1968).

⁶³ See <<http://www.crime.nl/auteurs/maartens.html>>, a site that is maintained by the “Nederlandstalige misdaadauteurs”. It was not before 1900 that the first crime story written in Dutch was published by P. Tesselhof Jr., *Het geheim van den rechercheur* (ibid.).

1889, under the pseudonym of Maarten Maartens.⁶⁴ *The Dundee Advertiser* wrote: “For originality of plot, keenness of observation, subtlety of analysis and vigour of language, this story is far ahead of many of our recent British novels.”⁶⁵

In this novel and in all those that followed, the descriptions of worldly events, of nature and people give the impression of a fusion of social documentary, history and caricature. Still, the basic interest lies in the moral conduct of the heroes and heroines, as well as in the author’s power to visualise his characters both socially and psychologically. Maartens is a realist who, as he put it, gave an account of life “as seen through a temperament.”⁶⁶

Without doubt, Maartens’ novels primarily brought him a readership interested in the traditional plot structure, in which unpredictable intrigue emerges from the psychological motives of the characters, gradually revealed through subtle observation.⁶⁷ To a foreign reader however, his formula to treat such topics was odd and quite exceptional. From the beginning, the Dutch scenery in his stories as well as the awareness that their author was a Dutchman himself had a positive impact upon their reception. Due to the larger cultural and geographical distance, the scurrility and complexity of the Dutch micro-society were particularly attractive to readers in the United States. This interest is reflected – both in its distinctive quality as well as in its restriction – in a comment on *My Lady Nobody*, by none other than William Dean Howells who considered the book “valuable as a picture of Dutch life we know so little, rather than as the development of the human comedy or tragedy on any novel side.”⁶⁸ Another, more general comment by Howells corroborates this typical American taste for Maartens: “Oddly enough, though there are no German novelists to speak of, there are very good Dutch ones. Maarten Maartens, who writes in English, is perhaps the first of them; and he is my favourite novelist while I am reading him.”⁶⁹ Note the significance of the last remark, “while I am reading him”, implying that Maartens’ books merely provide momentary entertainment.

Many years later, in 1904, Maartens would write to his wife that Howells had told him his descriptions of Holland made him go there with his family, and that others had told him they

⁶⁴ Published by Remington & Co, London; translations soon followed in German, Dutch, French (abbreviated version), Norwegian and Italian; an American edition appeared in 1890, published by Appleton, New York, who was to publish all of Maartens’ works in the United States. Schwartz selected “Maarten Maartens” as a pseudonym “merely because it was an alias with a Dutch look that English readers might possibly be able to pronounce” (“Interview”, 2).

⁶⁵ 27 Sept. 1890.

⁶⁶ “Interview”, 2.

⁶⁷ See for example Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), cf. also Thomas B. Tomlinson, *The English Middle Class Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

⁶⁸ *Harper’s Weekly* (26 Oct. 1895).

⁶⁹ *Munsey’s* (April 1897), in *W.D. Howells as Critic*, ed. E. H. Cady (London: Routledge, 1973), 272.

were going there for that reason, too.⁷⁰ However, it was due to this same view that Maartens was entrapped in a web he was creating for himself: Before anything else, his readers would always look for picturesque details of the Dutch social scenery. This was amusing, even touching, as in the paintings of the famous Dutch painters they knew, such as Potgieter, Frans Hals or Vermeer. Accordingly, reviewers' reactions in popular newspapers were favourable. From the outset, the problems concerning Maartens' reception were caused by the very oddity of his position. His initial success prevented him from seeing there might be any harm in that. He wrote in such a way that his grasp of the reality that surrounded him was satirical and amusing. The aspect of amusement in the Thackerayan manner, as we will see, was of great importance to him.

Looking back on his career in the "Interview", Maartens avowed that he financed the publication of *Joost Avelingh* himself, as he had equally done with *The Black Box Murder*. The years that had passed enabled him to judge his own reception more soberly than one would gather from his correspondence, more than a decade earlier.⁷¹ He now merely stated that the book "caught on more or less."⁷² After *Joost Avelingh* had smoothed Maartens' path towards first recognition, he now became more widely known with the success of *An Old Maid's Love* (1891), the book he dedicated to Faber, the man who had first encouraged him to become a novelist. Henceforth, an increasing number of reviewers would not refrain from comparing Maartens with established literary reputations and contemporary fellow authors. The following example illustrates the general tendency:

Mr. Maarten Maartens, like Mr. Barrie, is a master of the art of literary picture painting. He gives us admirably drawn sketches of the cramped life of a small Dutch community; he demonstrates, in fact, much the same power of vivid portrayal as Henrik Ibsen shows in his social plays. [...] We are shown, as we are shown in Ibsen's plays, that the purest ethical ideals, when crystallised into codes and canons, may work as much mischief, moral and material, as licentiousness itself; all this is achieved in the easiest and simplest of manners.⁷³

Maartens soon began to be known by others with a literary reputation, or who were involved in matters of literature. Faber had first introduced him to George Bentley, the London publisher. At the time, Bentley had refused to publish *The Black Box Murder*, but now, after the promising start of *Joost Avelingh*, he became Maartens' first publisher with *An Old*

⁷⁰ "That is the American and English view", he added (unpublished letter to his wife Anna, TS, 15 May 1904, Maartens archive). Howells visited Holland in 1898.

⁷¹ See *Letters*, passim.

⁷² "Interview", 22.

⁷³ J. S. Little, *The Library Review* (May 1892), 131.

Maid's Love in 1891.⁷⁴ In the following years, a friendship developed between them, in which Bentley became Maartens' critical councillor, discussing some of the novels in process. *God's Fool* had not yet been published, when he wrote on account of *The Greater Glory*, the book that was to appear next. Bentley warned Maartens against the threat of losing his impartiality in the treatment of his characters:

The book gives me an idea of being more carefully begun than continued, partly, too, your love of the Baron makes writing about him and his delicately etched wife more pleasing to you, than the depicting the lower character [sic] of the Count, but independently of this the 2nd and half the 3rd volume drags. [...] The real interest centres in three characters, the Baron, his wife, and Father Bulbius. Therefore necessarily follows that Vol 1 is the most interesting. [...] If you could see your way to re-write the story, or at least 2nd and 3rd vols [...] you might have as strong a story as *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* or *An Old Maid's Love*. As it stands now it is inferior to these in power, and in interest, and would I think be generally deemed a falling off [...].⁷⁵

After re-writing his manuscript of *The Greater Glory*, it was published by Bentley in 1894.⁷⁶ Another of Maartens' durable friends in Britain, James Barrie, congratulated him on as what

⁷⁴ Bentley wrote to Maartens: "I must write to you to say how gratified I am to be the publisher of so excellent a novel. I have enjoyed it most thoroughly. It has a quality now much more rare than formerly, namely humour. The characters are diversified, the incidents arise naturally, and that of the making of the will is a delightfully humorous one [...] I feel sure that the English public, (slow at first) will soon rank you among the few authors on whom they can count for real and reasonable pleasure' (11 May 1891, unpubl. MS, Literary Correspondence, Maartens archive). Bentley's words clearly rank Maartens as a traditionalist, which was particularly true at this point in time. But such remarks, however encouraging they must have been to the author, are a premonition of his eclipse years later. One is involuntarily reminded of Oscar Wilde's observation that the "public dislike novelty because they are afraid of it. It represents to them a mode of individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses" (*The Soul of Man under Socialism and Prison Writings* [1891], ed. Isobel Murray [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 19). Maartens' earnings were not as astronomical as alleged by the Dutch press, not even in those first 'heyday' years. This is shown by Royal A. Gettmann in his study of the Bentley publishing house, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960): "On 11 October 1890 George Bentley and 'Maarten Maartens' entered an agreement which provided for a payment of £200 on the signature of the contract, 6s. royalty on each copy of the original edition after 900 had been sold, 15 per cent royalty on a two shilling edition" (116) and "[w]hen 'Maarten Martens' [sic] in 1895 asked for a royalty of 1s. on *My Lady Nobody*, he was informed of some facts about his preceding novel, *The Greater Glory*: 737 copies had been sold and £159 17s 8d had been spent on advertising. [Source in footnote: Letter from R.K. Johnston to Schwartz, 6 April 1895, British Museum Add, MSS. 46, 647]. George Bentley explained that the net produce of 1000 copies of a six-shilling novel was £180 and that £50 for royalty, a minimum of £80 for advertising, and approximately £125 for other expenses could mean only one thing for the publisher – a certain loss" (123); see also John A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (London: Athlone, 1976).

⁷⁵ 2 June 1892, *Letters*, 35. The following comment was prefixed by the editor: "This letter about *The Greater Glory* has been selected from many others of a like character to show the helpful interest taken by George Bentley in the development of M.M.'s literary art. [...]". There are no such letters extant in the Maartens archive. Maartens, aware of his handicap of being without sufficient critical feed-back, demonstrated his gratitude towards Bentley in a letter to Edmund Gosse: "Whatever may be the advantages of my isolation, there is one great drawback, that no sensible man ever speaks to me about literature, unless he be dead, or at least in contemporary print (when he is often biased, as you will admit). Stay, I have one admirable exception, George Bentley, my continuous correspondent, who takes the trouble actually to read all my books before publishing and who has induced me, to my initial vexation and lasting gratitude, to completely re-write the one now in hand" (10 Dec. 1892, *Letters*, 43). On his friendship with Bentley, see the obituary Maartens wrote after Bentley's death: "The Late Mr. George Bentley", *The Bookman* (July 1895), 104-105.

⁷⁶ *The Greater Glory* (London: Bentley, 1891). From July 1893 onwards, it appeared as a serial in *The Outlook*, a Christian family paper in New York.

he called “the best novel since *Tess*”, adding: “I fancy few will dispute this is your best book”, of which “the most fascinating thing is the gentle charm that makes itself felt quietly so that it creeps over you almost unobserved.”⁷⁷

The conservative *Review of Reviews* selected *The Greater Glory* as its “book of the month”, praising Maartens as a realist who dared to go against the grain of the current fashion in literature that was firmly in the clutches of naturalism: “Maarten Maartens shows society as it is, with men and women, good, bad and different. He is an artist, but a Christian one, who seeks to extract from things as they are not that which is impure and enervating, but all that can ennoble and invigorate.”⁷⁸

Other friendships of importance for the promotion of his literary reputation, dating from that period, are with Mr. and Mrs. Gosse, “at whose house”, he later wrote, “I have met almost all the great dead and the famous living of my day.”⁷⁹ To another lasting acquaintance, the critic William Robertson Nicoll, he wrote after a visit to England: “I wish you would give me a brief par in *The Bookman*, to the effect that I had left England, most deeply impressed by the goodwill of my brothers of the pen, and that I had said to somebody that I had received more kindness from strangers during this fortnight than in the 34 years of my previous existence or anything else you deem suitable.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “From James Barrie” (18 Feb. 1894, unpublished TS, Maartens archive); there are no originals of any James Barrie letters in the archive, only type-scripts of forty-two letters, chronologically numbered. In Ada’s view as editor, some may have dealt too extensively with literary criticism, reason why she may have selected only a few for publication. Another reason may have been that she deemed them too personal. In another, early letter to Bentley, Maartens mentions a letter he had received from the editor of *The Bookman*, letter in which he latter referred to James Barrie, “whom I have never met, and who says that his enjoyment of *God’s Fool* has been tempered by the depression of knowing that he could never write like that. Now isn’t it nice of him to say that?” (*Letters*, 8 Feb. 1893, 47). The letters from Maartens to Barrie were all destroyed (“Ada v.d. Poorten-Schwartz to J. Norreys O’Conor”, TS, Maartens archive).

⁷⁸ *The Review of Reviews* (March), 1894.

⁷⁹ “Interview”, 2. As the years passed, Maartens sustained his literary links with Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), but his attachment to Gosse’s wife was of greater significance: “To my book *A Question of Taste* I owe a life-long friendship with Mrs. Edmund Gosse” (“Interview”, 2). Their friendship deepened; it was of a more affectionate and personal nature; see *Letters*, passim. In Evan Charteris’ biography on Gosse, there is a possible clue to some of the august personalities Maartens referred to in the “Interview”. Charteris mentions Maartens, together with Henry James, George Moore, W.B. Yeats and Max Beerbohm as amongst those personally familiar with the style of social gathering and literary conversation at the Gosse residence, Delaware Terrace, London. Three of Maartens’ letters to Gosse were also published here: *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse* (London: Heinemann, 1931); cf. also Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *Letters of Max Beerbohm 1892-1956* (London: John Murray, 1988).

⁸⁰ 10 July 1893, *Letters*, 57. As many of the contemporary reviews commenting regularly on Maartens, *The Bookman* was not a high brow magazine. Authors and their works were introduced in a general way to a wider middle class readership. Often, a selection of the reviews was simultaneously published in the United States. Nicoll was one of Maartens’ friends and correspondents, ample evidence of which is given in the *Letters*, passim. He was the founder and the editor of *The Bookman* until his death in 1923. In his monography, *Forging Ahead* (1939) (New York: Cooper Square, 1973), Wilfred Partington deals with the friendship between Nicoll and Edmund Gosse (71-81) as well as with Nicoll’s editorship of *The Bookman* (97-113). This book is an early example of a work, dealing with the period, in which Maartens is not once mentioned. Ultimately he would remain an outsider to the literary scene. The special issue in *The Bookman* was by A. St. John Adcock, with a picture cover and a leading article ([Jan. 1914], 203-210). More details on *The Bookman* and other serials, such

After having been discussed a number of times in magazines on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, Maartens received his first lengthy eulogy in *The Graphic*, by M.H. Spielmann. Although in expressing his admiration for Maartens' picturesque and satirical descriptions, that critic did not differ in essence from the others, he went further than the bulk of them, pointing out that the essence of Maartens' novels lay not in the author's moral and spiritual concept of life but, more generally, in the universality of their depiction of the human condition as such. In fact, Spielmann's observations reflected in attitude as well as understanding the enthusiasm of many a German review:

Maartens' knowledge of the human heart appears to be instinctive – he feels more that he can have suffered and has consciousness of far more than he has experienced. He touches on our frailties with tender sympathy or ridicules them with gently irony, reserving for vice and meanness the keenest of his shafts, for cruelty and oppression his hottest anger, and for irreligion his lustiest blows. Though his novels are wholly written for the sake of the plots they unfold and are neither “problem books” nor fin de siècle sensations, there is in them psychological interest of an uncommon order.⁸¹

The Gosses, Barrie, Nicoll and Bentley were amongst those with whom Maartens took up regular correspondence. On account of his wife's illness, he was not in a position to remain in London for more than a month spread out over the year.⁸² After the publication of *A Question of Taste* in 1891, he was elected an honorary member of the English Author's Club.⁸³

As a matter of course as it seemed, Maartens had gained himself a reputation. For a number of years, reviews continued to reflect the American and British enthusiasm, particularly for his straightforward and yet picturesque narrative.⁸⁴ It is the more astonishing that reviewers never attempted to explore the potential they claimed to detect in Maartens' works. Whatever may have been the circumstances – lack of time, of space – they never did. Neither, therefore, were

as *The Graphic* and *The Academy* in Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), passim.

⁸¹ 5 Jan. 1895. The article was simultaneously published in *The Bookman* and in *Harper's Bazar*, New York. Spielmann made the typical mistake with regard to Maartens, namely to allow himself some casual remarks Maartens – presuming that he scrutinized the review – cannot possibly have corroborated: “He loves his country, for all that he rallies it time after time and again on its climate, its language, its size, its indifference to literature”. Neither in his prose (published or not) nor in his notebooks one single remark could be found where Maartens speaks disparagingly of the Dutch language. In the early 1890-ies, Spielmann and James Pinker, Maartens influential literary agent, were both members of staff of the illustrated weekly *Black & White*. Contact with Maartens is likely to have been established from this connection: see James Hepburn, ed. *Letters of Arnold Bennett*, vol. 1: *Letters to J. B. Pinker* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 22.

⁸² See *Letters*, passim.

⁸³ The only other honorary member was Emile Zola. Maartens also became a member of the Athenaeum. In 1894 he accepted the honorary membership of the New York Author's Club. The only other European member there was R. L. Stevenson. In 1905 Maartens received, together with Thomas Hardy, an honorary degree at Aberdeen University; see *Letters*, 93 and 299.

⁸⁴ It was above all the typical “Maartensian” crowded canvas, reminiscent of a Bruegel picture, that press reviews continued to acclaim for years. As the collection of extracts kept in the Maartens archive shows, in Britain and the United States alone there were a large number of newspapers and magazines regularly reviewing new publications. A great deal of which, of course, were re-prints from other sources or almost identical adaptations.

they aware of any intrinsic weaknesses. Maartens also was, after all, a foreigner writing about foreign things. More likely even, they were simply not in the habit of taking a closer look at whatever they were supposed to review. Consequently, superficial statements as the following are frequent: “Conscientious both as to the matter expressed and as to the manner of that expression, scrupulous in his effort to maintain a high standard of purity and distinction in the use of English, and eager to permeate all his work with the afflatus of a dominant moral idea, he may broadly be ranked with two such representative writers as George Eliot in England and Edouard Rod in France.”⁸⁵

One of Maartens’ contemporaries, the French moralist Alain (1868-1951), shrewdly observed the general changes in the modes of thought of the period. He wrote that it was a “kind of offering to heaven to laugh about all things on earth, which suited the superficial mind – that is to say, to almost all – much more than the serious diabolical (in the Faustian tradition) who directed one’s attention to the need for justice in the world.”⁸⁶ These words illustrate the problem that may well have decided the fate of an author in as exceptional a position as Maarten Maartens, as both these characteristics determine his outlook. The novels that followed *A Question of Taste* show a gradual shift towards more vehement moralistic convictions based on the author’s own religious principles and convictions. Although Maartens never entirely abandoned the struggle nor his hopes, it becomes increasingly difficult to find, in his works, traces of his faith in the goodness of the world, a world he had so often dealt with in his particular humoristic fashion. As the humour gradually fades, an increasingly austere struggle against the evils of the world takes its place.

The Boer War, at the turn of the century, changed his already gloomy disposition into a permanently pessimistic frame of mind. While the sales of his books gradually declined, a crucial stage had been reached which, in a letter to Quiller-Couch, he called his “private Ichabod”, the departure of his glory:

Popularity, journalistic fame, sales – what I might call the Besant and *Bookman* ‘success’ business – the Royalty of ‘royalties’: all this is to me less than dirt beneath civilized feet. I could not, without an appearance of affectation, express to you my contempt for the public taste, the ‘panem et circenses’ howlers of our Juvenal-days. But, unfortunately for me, I am not sufficiently of your inner circle to have a right to torment you with my private Ichabod. But what any fastidious writer of the intrinsically unpopular class most naturally desires, is to make some sort of mark, amongst a particular sort of people.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ W. Sharp, “Maarten Maartens”, *Library of the Best Literature: Ancient and Modern*, vol. XVI (New York, 1896), 9359.

⁸⁶ Emile Auguste Alain, *Propos* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1956), 175 (tr. from the French by H.B.).

⁸⁷ 11 April 1901, *Letters*, 200.

Maartens was torn between pride on the one hand and fear on the other. In the course of time he had but grown more aware of the dilemma of his double isolation. Helpless, he observed the position he held at the fringe of literary life like a man would watch ebb tide: slow and inexorable in its retreat. If he had previously been tempted to believe in his readers' appreciation of his books as opposed to the unreasonable rejection by the Dutch demonstrated by his Dutch fellowmen, this was no longer the case. His fear becomes apparent in the exaggerated attitude of regarding himself as a writer of the "intrinsically unpopular class"; this in spite of the popularity he still enjoyed, as well as in his acute sense of being generally excluded from all things that really mattered on the literary scene.

On several occasions, his overseas friends advised him to leave The Netherlands and definitely to settle elsewhere, preferably in England, as that seemed most appropriate to his situation.⁸⁸ From a social point of view, such an emigration might have turned him into a happier man, but apart from the fact that urgent domestic reasons prevented him from taking such a step, Maartens probably realised that it could put his already frail literary reputation even more in jeopardy: It may be conjectured that, after all, it was precisely because of his exceptional position – foreign and yet so familiar – that he retained his stand⁸⁹ However that may be, it certainly was not but a mere coincidence that, in England and America, the sales of Maartens' books began to diminish with *Her Memory* (1898). The British response to the new novel was not so appreciative as had been the case with the previous books. Up to this point, his readers had enjoyed his work because of the Dutch picture it presented, and expected him to continue in that manner. *Her Memory* on the contrary faced them with the challenge of accepting an entirely new standpoint: Maarten Maartens, a foreign writer, suddenly assumed the position of an Englishman, presenting them with an image of English life. This may account for the reluctance on the part of the British press to pay due attention to the real issues at stake in the book.

Years later, comparing *Her Memory* to Maartens' 'Dutch' works, the critic A. St. John Adcock used the opportunity to summarise the general British attitude, essentially unchanged throughout the years. British and American readers simply preferred the Dutch storyteller to the psychological realist:

⁸⁸ See *Letters*, passim, in particular those to and from Mrs. Gosse and M.H. Spielmann.

⁸⁹ No one less than Lodewijk van Deyssel is the rare exception of a renowned man in Dutch letters who repeatedly referred to Maartens and took an interest in his work. His first reference can be found in a review or rather a tirade of a French novel titled *Purification*, by a Dutch author, Michiel Reepmaker. Van Deyssel wrote: "I bet thirty thousand florins that our illustrious Reepmaker said to himself: Watch this Maarten Maartens and his growing fame in England ('I can't leave it. Wonderful. Delicious!'), equally watch the profound Byvank whose book about Paris has been published in French – I'm going to do in France what Maartens did in England"

Fine novel as it is, *Her Memory* will not rank beside his great Dutch stories. His pictures of English and German people and scenery may be true enough, but he is always at his best when his imagination is playing familiarly under the sober skies over the flat, mist-haunted, sombrely beautiful landscapes, among the humours, the business and pleasure, the stolidities, the idiosyncrasies, the dour passions and vices and homely virtues of his own people.⁹⁰

In a letter to Maartens, Edmund Gosse profited from the occasion to give his own views on the state of English literature at the time and – being, like Quiller-Couch, a conservative – to vent his resentment of naturalism.⁹¹ With regard to Maartens, Gosse’s reaction is significant, as his reputation as a critic was unquestioned in non-avant-garde literary circles. He may therefore be said to reflect the frustrations of the generation of writers who felt increasingly disheartened, cut off as they were from the latest developments on the literary scene. As in the case of Quiller-Couch, prejudice against naturalism somewhat impaired his critical instinct as, for example, in his appreciation of *Her Memory*:

I think you have caught the tone of the sort of English society you depict wonderfully. It is like the real thing: it is not like what passes in all our society novels for the real thing. I was greatly struck by the eloquent chapter on the Riviera, which I thought both brilliant and solid. The episode of Eveline and the painter is excellent.⁹²

The downward tendency persisted with the books that followed *Her Memory* while at the same time they increasingly provided the opportunity to discover the universality of many issues at stake in an international setting. Those who read Maartens had by now grown familiar with his very own home-turf, the Dutch scene. Now that he ventured to leave that ground it seemed, ironically, as if his books ceased to be interesting to a foreign readership. The opinion expressed years before by an English review with regard to *Joost Avelingh* was still valid:

If the author had written on purpose to show English readers what the people of this country [i.e., Holland] are like, he could not have done better; and we like them none the worse, finding them indeed very much like old fashioned provincial English folk in many ways of their thinking and feeling. Naturally, it should be so.⁹³

(tr. from the French by the author), in *De Scheldkriteken*, ed. H.M.G. Prick (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1979), 256. The article first appeared in *De Kroniek* (1895).

⁹⁰ “Maarten Maartens”, *The Bookman* (Jan. 1914), 203-210, 209; the article appeared on the occasion of the publication of the collected edition of Maartens’ works (London: Constable & Co, 1914).

⁹¹ Cf. Boris Ford, ed. *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 6: *From Dickens to Hardy* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1980). For further developments cf. vol. 7 of *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 7: *The Modern Age* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1980).

⁹² 27 Dec. 1898, *Letters*, 168. He went on to say: “Never before, I am convinced, has literature, taste, intellectual probity of every kind been at so low an ebb in this country. God has lost patience with us all at last, and has smitten us with taste-blindness and style-deafness, so that we like nothing but what is faded or vulgar, and can hear no voice unless it is cracked.”

⁹³ *Illustrated London News* (19 July 1890). The English reader who enjoyed in *Joost Avelingh* its nostalgic evocation of an intact rural community might have been reminded, for example, of Thomas Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), subtitled “A Rural Painting of the Dutch School.” Quoting a village scenery

From their different points of view, *The New Religion* (1907) was favourably acknowledged by Bernard Shaw and Virginia Woolf. Shaw called it “a scathing and quite justifiable exposure of medical practice”⁹⁴ Maartens subtitled the book “A modern novel” because of its treatment of this – as well as of other – contemporary issues. From an aesthetic point of view – i.e. Virginia Woolf’s – it is hardly surprising that she could not take it seriously as a modern novel in any way. Maartens hardly attempted to satirize new tendencies in the technique of novel writing; in this satire, he was merely referring to the actuality of the issue at stake. On the other hand, the modernism of the period also encompassed a spirit of playful change, which is also present in the novel.⁹⁵ Whatever may be its ultimate purpose: first and foremost, *The New Religion* was meant to be read as a burlesque comedy with grotesque overtones, to be enjoyed for their own sake. Wealth of narrative, in syntax as well as choice of vocabulary creates an unprecedented ‘atmosphere of absurdity’, as Virginia Woolf conceived it. She commented on Maartens’ narrative that the invective of *The New Religion* against the humbug of the medical profession took too ludicrous a turn to be still effective as social criticism. Yet she equally pointed at the charm emanating precisely from that persistent piling up:

The satire of the earlier chapters was after all directed against the solid bodies of doctors and faiths, and it was possible for Mr Maartens to inspire them with rigorous rhetoric [...] but now the connection with things that are shaped somewhat after the fashion of life is blown aside, and Mr Maartens indulges a delightful irresponsible mood which neglects all the missions and charges nobody with the disagreeable duty of abolishing shams. Can we believe, for example, in the doctor who, to refute the germ theory of disease, swallows a tinful of tubercles and calls his daughter ‘Microbe d’Amour, my cabbage, she infecteth nobody? But it is amusing. Again, shall we conceive a millionaire endowed with sufficient imagination to cruise among the Aegean islands in search for a prophet with miraculous powders that either cure or kill you? But the story is one of the most charming in the book. At last we are entertained with a wild jumble of the different creeds in conflict, issuing from the lips of valets, and ladies’ maids, and sea captains; and the babble of petroleum pills, biblical texts, and auto-suggestion is the exhilarating effervescence into which all the sense and satire of the book boil over. We have not

from this novel in his analysis of descriptions of village life, Andrew Enstice emphasises their “rich and welcoming warmth [...] that establishes early the nature of such homesteads. House and garden and outbuildings mingle in light and sound to suggest the inseparable functions of home and work in the setting”, *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 38; also see Anne Smith, ed., *The Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Vision Press, 1979). In terms of Britishness, Maartens’ novels do not comply with the criteria of the ‘regional novel’ as stipulated, for example, by Liz Bellamy, “Regionalism and Nationalism: Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott and the Definition of Britishness“, in K.D.M. Snell, ed., *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54-77.

⁹⁴ In his preface to *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (London: Constable 1911, rpt, 1947), 62. For particularities concerning the issue at large: Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹⁵ As expressed, for example, in the views of one of the minor protagonists, Dr. Russett Junior in his pessimistic vision of the future (vol. II, 10). From the huge quantities of research done on modernism and its impact on the novel in particular, noteworthy, by way of introduction, see Daniel Schwarz, *The Transformation of the English Novel, 1890-1930*.

believed in the loves or diseases; nor have we profited by the satire; but we have been very much entertained, and wit and fantasy are good, call them what you will.⁹⁶

On various occasions, the case of Maarten Maartens was compared to that of his contemporary, Joseph Conrad, a foreigner as well on the British literary scene. Considering all the facts as they have passed before us, it may be regarded an honourable weakness however, that Maartens did not have the courage, like Conrad, definitely to bid farewell to his homeland. Conrad established himself in England and remained there for the rest of his life. He was integrated in British society and he wrote of Poland and her people only autobiographically, by way of recollection.⁹⁷ At first sight, a comparison between Maartens and Conrad lies at hand, but when looking into them more deeply, their individual cases are too unlike by any standards. Still, it helps to clarify the reasons, which prevented Maartens from merging into English literature as had been accomplished by Conrad.

In the same year *The New Religion* was published, Maartens visited the United States, following an official invitation to attend the opening of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg. Obviously he enjoyed the reputation that had established itself in the course of the years in that country: Not only was he invited to deliver a public speech there, but he was also received by President Roosevelt at the White House.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “The New Religion”, in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1: 1904-1912, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 148 -150 (first published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 Sept. 1907); Woolf’s quotation is taken from “The New Religion”, vol. 1, 129. Corroborating the views of one critic, Derik Hudson, of what was *en vogue* at the time of publication of *The New Religion*, one can see that authors as different as Shaw and Woolf were attracted by it: “The entertainment value of Edwardian Literature was remarkably high, and it extended to the level of political propaganda”: “Reading”, *Edwardian England, 1901-1914*, ed. Simon Nowell-Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 305-326, here 308; see also G.C. Harpham, “Time Running Out: The Edwardian Sense of Cultural Degeneration”, *Clio* 5 (1976), 283-301; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder c. 1848 – c. 1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament 1895-1919* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986); Anthea Trodd, *A Reader’s Guide to Edwardian Literature*. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

⁹⁷ In his letters to J.B. Pinker, his (as well as Maartens’) literary agent, Conrad twice refers to Maartens: “My gout must be watched – whatever Martin [sic] Maartens may think [...]” (7 Jan. 1908), and: “I am undergoing a systematic treatment by a doctor who has volunteered for the task and has been already twice down in his car to have a look at me. Even that imbecile Dutchman, what’s his name, could not find an interesting motive there [...]” (15 April 1909): Frederick R. Karl., ed., *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15, 216. A believer in science, Conrad was apparently irritated by Maartens’ satire on the medical profession as exposed in *The Healers* and *The New Religion*. Very likely it was one of the reasons why he disliked any comparison between himself and Maartens. Another reason may have been that Maartens, like himself, was a foreigner who wrote in English. Yet in contrast to Maartens who had stuck to his own culture, representing it in his fiction, Conrad had done all he could to integrate totally in English society. A comparison with Maartens might then indicate that he was still not as fully integrated as he would have wished. That Maartens was also of Polish extraction, moreover, of Jewish origin like himself, was certainly unknown to Conrad. He must have been incensed by comparisons as in *The Eastern Daily Press* (6 Sept. 1930), and *The Weekend Review* (23 Sept. 1930), merely drawing upon the exterior similarities between the two authors.

⁹⁸ The after-dinner speech at Pittsburg has not been preserved, but the text of Maartens’ address at the Peace Congress held at Carnegie Hall, 15 April 1907, was reprinted almost in its entirety in the *Letters*, 254-258. Amongst the literary men Maartens met in The United States where the critic Van Wyck Brooks, Edward Sheldon, dramatist, the poet John Hall Wheelock and W.D. Howells; see Editor’s remarks, *Letters*, 252.

The Price of Lis Doris (1909) was Maartens' own favourite amongst his books. For that reason he took a special interest in its reception, especially because his latest volume, *Some Women I have known*, a collection of short stories, had been relatively ignored both by the reading public as well as by the press. Soon after its publication he wrote to Mrs. Gosse:

The reviews of *Lis Doris* have been superfine. But I have never yet had a real 'critique' in English. I have in French and German. I mean a real article by a literary man. Not just a half-a-crown-the-half-dozen notice. Nicoll wrote to me that a newly published book, called *The Preacher and his Work* says: 'every preacher should have on his shelf Goethe, Schiller and Maartens.' That is the funniest bit I have *ever* had [emphasis in the original]. Why Goethe? or Schiller? Of course the moralist Maartens is plain enough.⁹⁹

Obviously any reference to the preacher in his work was distasteful to Maartens, aware as he was of its degrading impact on the aesthetic value of a literary work.¹⁰⁰ Particularly in his later period, Maartens pretended a certain indifference to the reception of his work, as he sought to ward off the negative impact on his mental state, due to the diminishing sales of his books. However, he cared too much not to feel somehow encouraged by whatever positive response he received, such as this comment on *Lis Doris*: "One can scarcely praise too warmly its variety, its insight, the breath of its canvas, the glow of its colors. The movement is swift and sure, the wit keen, the worldly wisdom ripe and rich. In a word, it is the work of a master, done to its smallest detail in masterly fashion."¹⁰¹ However, in the long run, such continuous laudatory esteem could not compensate for the lack of professional criticism. As the years passed, it had but made him more sceptical as to the actual significance of his success. As an artist, always to doubt the aesthetic value of one's work must have been painful. If the sales of his books were an indication of value to go by, they were now definitely down. First and foremost therefore he would have preferred aesthetic perusal of his works by some fellow

⁹⁹ 28 Nov. 1909, *Letters*, 284-285. Maartens refers to the following edition: *The Preacher and his Work*, by a Preacher (London: Passmore & Alabaster) [1901], second ed. As far as the French criticism is concerned, Maartens may have referred to an article which appeared years before in the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse* no. 150 (June 1891), 589, by Paul Gervais. In this article Maartens, "qui vient de se révéler au monde comme un psychologue de premier ordre, doublé d'un moraliste", is placed – too favourably again, but not altogether implausibly – between Dostoevski and Paul Bourget as a novelist, to the disadvantage of the latter. However, this is a Swiss article. As regards the French reactions on Maartens, it is best to quote his own words to A. E. Borel-Malapert: "Si je n'ai pas écrit beaucoup, c'est que j'avais un peu honte de toute la peine que vous avez prise pour mon oeuvre. Ne vous dérangez plus, *je vous en prie*, puisque les Français n'en veulent pas" (*Letters*, 26 Dec. 1913, 342).

¹⁰⁰ Many years earlier, one severe critic had not even spared the 'gods' in putting his terms: "Truth is never immoral – it is the suppression of truth that is immoral. Condition is that the author should be aware of his artistic vocation and that he should never present himself as a scientist (Zola), nor as a preacher (Tolstoy, Dostoevski), nor as a thinker (Eliot, Augusta Mary Ward)" (D.F. Hannigan, "The Artificiality of English Novels", *Westminster Review* CXXXIII [1890], 263). Suggested in so much nineteenth century fiction, the analogy of the artist with a priest lays at hand: see Bo Jeffares, ch. 5, "The Artist's Tragic Temperament", in *The Artist in Nineteenth Century English Fiction* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), 103-130, particularly 107-108.

¹⁰¹ *The New York Times* (Feb. 1910).

artists or reputed critics, instead of the many generally appreciative reviews, no matter how much at times they may have flattered his hopes.¹⁰²

After having read Maarten Maartens' latest book, *Harmen Pols, Peasant* (1910), Thomas Hardy wrote to him from his home in Dorchester: "The way in which you have lifted the veil inch by inch in revealing the lives of the chief characters shows in my opinion real art. Of the personages Harmen and his mother interest me most. I think you might have been a little more explicit about the mother's past. However, what the reader most deeply feels is the atmosphere of the scene – as it were the very smell of the soil."¹⁰³ It was praise that came from an authority who was at the time indubitably regarded as one of the masters of realism in English literature. Yet it could not alleviate Maartens' disappointment with the reactions in general: "Nobody has touched on the real sore point in my book *Harmen Pols*, i.e. Christ's attitude towards the mother", he explained, "only a lot of uncoloured or discoloured praise."¹⁰⁴

Remarks such as these constitute a kind of self-criticism rather than a complaint about the lack of serious interest from the critics. Perhaps Maartens preferred to ignore the appreciative side to the review because, from his point of view, readers obviously did not understand the message he had sought to communicate. Very touchy as he was, he impulsively deemed *their* short-sightedness. Ultimately his critical insight told him of course that in writing his book, he must somehow have missed his mark. Notwithstanding, the "very smell of the soil" is indeed overwhelming in the descriptions of nature in *Harmen Pols*.¹⁰⁵ They surpass his depictions of

¹⁰² It is not only ironical that the only detailed criticism in the analytical sense was written by a Dutchman, L. van Deyssel long after Maartens had passed away. Surprisingly, it concerned none of Maartens' prose works, but his tragedy *Nivalis*: In *De Gids* (Aug. 1924), 205-218.

¹⁰³ *Letters*, 26 Oct. 1910, 291-292; published also in Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate, eds., *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-1988), iv, 127. Norman Page observes that 17th century paintings are amongst the things that "are more than echoes, exerting a profound shaping influence upon [Hardy's] mind and art", 'Preface' to the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy* (Oxford University Press, 2000), viii; cf. also Norman Page, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background* (London: Macmillan, 1986), and Hardy's autograph letter is one of the very few still present in the Maartens archive, Doorn. As has been said, often Maartens' scenes evoke the picturesque vivacity of 17th Century Dutch painting. For the bulk of research dealing with Hardy's infatuation with the magical impact of landscape and setting see, e.g. Tim Armstrong, *Haunted Hardy: Poetry, History, Memory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Paolo Betta, "La poetica del Paesaggio Geografico: La Brughiera in *The Return of the Native* di Thomas Hardy", 359-375, and Francesco Marroni, "Thomas Hardy, gli Oggetti e i Paradossi della Visione: per una Lettura di *The Sunshade*", 377-396, in Giovanna Silvani and Bruno Zucchelli, eds., *Poesie e Memoria: Scritti in Onore di Grazia Caliumi* (Parma: Facolta di Lettere e Filosofia), 1999.

¹⁰⁴ "To Mrs. Edward Robinson", *Letters*, 1.1. 1911, 293.

¹⁰⁵ In Maartens' autobiographical story "The Facts" (*The Illustrated London News* [25 Dec. 1911], 24), the first person narrator, his *alter ego*, avows: "I was glad to get right into the work and I made good progress. It was a novel I was writing, a story of low life. All the people in it behaved with a brute frankness, developing themselves naturally, I think, not over-sensitive, not over-virtuous, with a good deal in them of the healthy animal. It was quite bracing to smell the smell of the farmyard about them, to hear them say common-place –, common sense things. I read my work over and over and over and was pleased with it". The book referred to is *Harmen Pols, Peasant*.

the Dutch heath in *Lis Doris*, the work in which he had already shown an entirely new – and awe-inspiring fascination for the beauty of nature in his homeland. It seemed as if Maartens, by then in his fifties, ill and gradually losing his eyesight, was struck – in a suddenly accelerated process of awareness – by aspects of the Dutch landscape he had apparently never before noticed with the same intensity of observation. Being under their spell, his descriptions became the more impressive as they were depicted with the intensity of the senses of a man who had begun to let go his hold of life. Paradoxically, they seem to confirm the steady growth of his resignation: As the inner man with his hopes and memories fades, the hitherto unrealised splendour of nature becomes the more perceptible in his writings.

Surveying the works by Maartens in the order of their publication, the critic Burdett stated, however, that, after *Lis Doris*, it would be “a descent to dwell on either *Harmen Pols* [...] or the tale of the repentant adulteress in *Eve* [1912], Maartens’ last novel.”¹⁰⁶

Aware of the lack of comprehension of his works on a deeper level, there was his growing fear that he had not managed a breakthrough in English letters. Added to other difficulties that preoccupied him, it was the main cause of the depressions that burdened his daily existence during these last years. If he had ever been impressed by the sales and praise of his books, those sales had by now shrunk to negligible numbers, and the praise had long ceased to blind him. The persistent lack of critical response to his work led to occasional outbursts of self-deprecation, to the feeling that his work was no good after all, since those able to judge never actually bothered to do so.¹⁰⁷

Significantly, the Anglo-American reception virtually stopped with the perfunctory obituaries published at Maartens’ death in 1915. Even if on an increasingly modest scale, critics in Germany went on reviewing books by Maartens, as his publishers continued to reprint some of the works for some twenty years.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Burdett, 127. Having come to the close of his already lengthy article, it seems as if Burdett had to be brief for reasons of space rather than that – as he suggested – some of the novels were not worthy of more attention.

¹⁰⁷ The growing atmosphere of resignation is above all reflected by the correspondence and the notes written between 1910 and 1914. There is an example of such a self-deprecatory attitude in a letter to Edmund Gosse (17 April 1911) in which Maartens expressed his disappointment with the quality of much of the contemporary literature he was recommended to read: “Mine eyes are often dimmed by grief that I had to pay 4/6d. for the trumpery pleasure. It was by such an act of – such a leap into the (much belauded murk) that I got my Victoria Cross.” The letter was omitted from the correspondence by the editor of the *Letters*. At any rate this quotation proves that there were moments of self deprecation in which Maartens considered his own work no more than ‘trumpery pleasure’, the Victoria Cross which he never received being the metaphor for the idle praise bestowed on his work. “I don’t know about my book [*Eve*]”, he wrote in another letter to the same addressee, also omitted from the *Letters*: “I have passed into a curious phase of indifference regarding M.M. I imagine it is the result of the extreme extremes of disillusionment and approval” (1 May 1912; both TSS extant in Maartens archive, Doorn).

¹⁰⁸ See Bibliography 1.2.4. and 1.2.5.

I.5. The critical appreciation in Germany

British and American readers of Maartens' novels had always concentrated their attention on Maartens' humorously descriptive narrative and satire. Actually they never passed beyond that surface level of understanding. Maartens had always been aware of the lack of serious criticism from the start, and it saddened him for the most part. Still, the initially promising response to his books encouraged him, overwhelmed and flattered as he was. In view of the exceptional position, which he himself had opted for after all, the Dutch hostile attitude should perhaps not have taken him quite so much by surprise. At any rate, it rendered the moral support he received from abroad necessary. The fact that his novels were gradually all translated into German initially boosted his self-esteem, even if sales remained low.¹⁰⁹

"In Germany", he said himself, "with whose modes of thought I am perhaps in closer union – the beautiful translations issued by Messrs. Ahn brought me very real satisfaction."¹¹⁰ Some years later, in 1912, when the gradually diminishing sales of his books had left him in no misunderstanding about his impending eclipse from the literary world, he wrote to Nicoll:

The Dutch hate me for the "light and love, which – according to the Germans – I have poured out over their world". It is all very natural; I belong to the German cast of author – the foreign, in any case: of which you had only a brief, and exotic, burst in your romanticists – Shelley-Byron-Keats. If the latter kind can get through, and out of life, un-murdered, by themselves, or others, they may truly pause, at the latter end, and humbly thank God.¹¹¹

Although it is not our first priority to elucidate the position of Maartens within the larger European framework, something must be said about the reception of his works in Germany. It not only reveals aspects of the author as he saw himself: also, he was appreciated and read

¹⁰⁹ English versions of all the novels, with the exception of *A Question of Taste* (1891), were regularly published and distributed all over the European continent in the internationally renowned Tauchnitz Collection of British Authors, Leipzig.

¹¹⁰ "Interview", 2. Albert Ahn, Maartens' German publisher, sent him the following numbers of sales showing a steady decrease over the period 1896-1900:

Year	<i>God's Fool</i>	<i>Joost Avelingh</i>	<i>An Old Maid's Love</i>
1896	627	262	
1897	179	116	204
1898	108	102	86
1899	76	55	46
1900	50	25	25
Total	1040	560	361

Taken from a letter by, 6 April 1901 (unpublished TS in Maartens archive, Doorn).

¹¹¹ 25 Jan. 1912, *Letters*, 306. Interestingly enough, at the very beginning of his "Interview", Maartens states: "My intellectual education is distinctly German" (1). On the status of the writer in England in the 19th Century, see Uwe Böker, "Schriftsteller und Schriftstellerthematik in der Englischen und Amerikanischen Literatur zwischen 1830 und 1860", *Neohelicon* XII 2 (1985), 287-315, particularly 287-293, as well as his

there for quite different reasons. They demonstrate how the prism of perception of one and the same work of art may vary according to a different readership, not only illustrating the different angles from which a literary work may be appreciated, but also throwing a light on the moral standing and mentality of that other readership. As we have seen above, Maartens identified with the English rebels in the German romantic tradition insofar as they had been castigators of the collective mentality of their people in spirit, temperament, and moral attitude. However, these authors had not, like Maartens, actually isolated themselves from the community they criticised by writing about them in a foreign language and for the outside world. They still wrote for their fellow countrymen in the language they had in common; on the whole it remained a domestic affair. After a lapse of time, anger and irritation had toned down. Readers got accustomed to their criticism; in fact they even desired it, not to say it amused them. The time came when they would no longer feel threatened or betrayed. In spite of all, they realised and felt that these writers were of their own kind.¹¹²

The appreciation of his books in Germany came closest to the kind of understanding Maartens had aspired to, ever since the publication of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. A deep affection for his home country, Holland, lay at the bottom of all of his half-mocking and half-detached observations. His imaginative rendering of human characteristics, which he deemed universal, the strengths and foibles of his own people, basically enabled him to take a ‘tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner’ attitude. Yet he was not an artist of passive resignation, humbly awaiting the moment when God would ultimately redeem all the sinners in his books – and outside them.

Even if the critical value of the German reviews and articles is of disputable quality, at least their authors acknowledged, on the whole, that the ethical and moral principles in Maartens’ books appealed to them. Few, again, were the publications that were “not just half-a-crown the half-dozen”, merely praising Maartens for his picturesque descriptions.¹¹³ Still, while going through them, one has the impression that his work was drawn indeed into the sphere of the important literary and aesthetic issues of the day. Such is an early article by a critic named Leon Keller, one amongst those Maartens likely had in his mind in a letter to M.H.

“Künstler und Künstlerfunktion: Thackerays Pendennis im Kontext des Statuswandels von Schriftsteller und Man of Letters”, *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, 24 (1983), 131-147, especially 137-138.

¹¹² Cf. A. Quiller-Couch, Preface, *Letters*, xviii-xix. Beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would require scrutiny of Maartens’ poetry and drama – an extensive enterprise in itself – to elucidate the bond with the German romantic tradition referred to by Maartens.

¹¹³ As to the ways in which moral principles are embedded in the narrative, see: William J. Scheick, *Fictional Structure and Ethics: The Turn-of-the-Century English Novel* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1990).

Spielmann.¹¹⁴ Long before Quiller-Couch stressed the point in his preface to the *Letters*, Keller had observed that Maartens was a realist at the core:

With his superior humour he distinguished himself very favourably from our and many a French naturalist. All the time we laugh with him about the mistakes and weaknesses of Koopstad society [*God's Fool*]. His depiction of people and objects is precise up to the finest detail; the Dutch characteristic atmosphere is authentic and strong, and we don't have the unpleasant sensation, as with Swift and sometimes Thackeray in similar contexts, that Koopstad could just as well be Vienna, Berlin or London.¹¹⁵

Ironically, it was a German critic who pointed out the sore point in the Anglo-American reception. In his view those poignant descriptions of the Dutch scene occupied the centre of the stage so overwhelmingly and engulfed readers so deeply in its activities and intricacies, that they were inclined to become oblivious to the notion that the rigid social, materialistic and religious principles were by no means exclusively to present Dutch standards. On the other hand, it might be argued that Maartens paid the price for his own artistic credo. "It is like me, in the midst of my pessimism, to go on thinking that good art, popularised, would be popular."¹¹⁶ Possibly, it meant a superficial approach to his material by the artist: the audience was likely to correspond accordingly. Keller no doubt was aware of the universal quality in Maartens, yet what he deemed a strength, i.e. the depiction of a unique Dutch microcosm, was in reality a weakness. Unintentional neglect on the part of the average reader paved the way to a misconception that would ultimately be of permanent disadvantage to an appropriate appreciation of the works of Maarten Maartens.

On the one hand, he was charmed and encouraged by the praise he received, yet on the other hand, the steady stream of superficial and laudatory reviews could never lull him into artistic self-indulgence. On the contrary: it sharpened his tendency to critical introspection and artistic vigilance: "The strange thing about an art-worker (as you know well) is that he can never be sure of his own limitations, never quite sure what possibilities might be in him, all unknown to himself; but of the past, he can form some estimate, and when such a worker is pleased with what he has done already, I – well, let's be aware of him."¹¹⁷ With regard to *Joost Avelingh*, Keller said on another occasion, that its dramatic conclusion granted this novel "a central place as a document of our time, next to Ibsen's best plays."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ "I cannot, without making a fool of myself, defend my own literary reputation (they say openly, when pressed, that the English are no judges of literary work; but, then, how about the Americans, the Germans, etc?)" (*Letters*, 2.5.1895, 99).

¹¹⁵ "Maarten Maartens", *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna (9 Feb. 1894).

¹¹⁶ "To M.H. Spielmann", 26.6.1904 (unpubl. MS, Maartens archive).

¹¹⁷ "To M.H. Spielmann", 6.1.1895, *Letters*, 96.

¹¹⁸ Beilage zur *Allgemeinen Zeitung*, No. 113 (1897).

Such exaggerated judgements were even exceptional for German reviews. Even if their effect is – more often than not – impoverished by a tendency to adulation, they persist in the recognition of the spiritual appeal that emanated from Maartens' work: "With its great humour that is so seldom, and its fusion of tragedy and comedy, there has not been created, for some time, a book as important as *God's Fool*. It is a good and noble book, a pure and proud creation."¹¹⁹ A few months later, another reviewer was audacious enough to compare *God's Fool* to Dostoevski's *Idiot*. He stressed that Maartens, as opposed to Dostoevski, had managed to stay clear both of French naturalism and Slavic pessimism.¹²⁰ In the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of 11 February 1896, five newly published English novels were compared, amongst which Hardy's *Jude The Obscure*, a work the reviewer thought less highly of than Maartens' *My Lady Nobody*.¹²¹ In 1897, Adolf Bartels wrote that he considered Maartens "the most excellent living representative of the German spirit in world literature" whom he wished to be "of the strongest influence on our youngsters." – "But at the most they will imitate his manner," he added.¹²² More than sympathy, there is sheer enthusiasm in these German reviews. Whatever one may say about their critical value, they show that Maartens' German readers found something in his books deeper than the charms of his *couleur locale*.¹²³

With the publication in 1898 of his short novel *Her Memory*, Maartens fictionally left the Dutch microcosm to embark upon the scene his cosmopolitan upbringing really called for. Eight years had passed since *Joost Avelingh* had seen the light; a development in Maartens' outlook had taken place, in which his frequent travelling as well as the hostility he had encountered in his own country had a considerable share. In *Her Memory* there is not the

¹¹⁹ Avenarius, *Der Kunstwart* (April 1895).

¹²⁰ E. Kühnemann, *Das Magazin für Literatur* (13 July 1895).

¹²¹ C.C. Schardt, "Aus der Englischen Romanliteratur". He calls *My Lady Nobody* a "real and splendid novel". The other books selected were: *The Master*, by Israel Zangwill, George du Maurier's *Trilby*, and Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan*.

¹²² *Der Kunstwart* (Dec. 1897) (tr. H.B.). With shorter or longer intervals, the *Kunstwart* published articles on Maartens: a general survey in Feb. 1910, an obituary notice in Sept. 1915, and Maartens' last novel *Eve: An Incident of Paradise Regained* was discussed in the Feb. 1918 issue.

¹²³ In contrast to his own country, Holland, where some of his books appeared in a Dutch translation. They were hardly appreciated for their wit and humour, let alone that they were acclaimed for their spiritual values. The Dutch translation of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, appeared in 1895, five years after it was published in Britain. *The Greater Glory* (1895) and *God's Fool* (1896) were the only others that followed. Soon after the first negative reactions had toned down, in which envy and prejudice had some part, interest in Maartens virtually ceased to exist. Throughout, the *Letters* show that Maartens, strongly affected by the Dutch attitude, tended to exaggerate its impact. Each emotional outburst on his part equally reveals, however, the importance the issue carried for him personally. It went quite against his principles to strike an attitude of defence publicly. A exception is the opening notice to his fifth novel, *The Greater Glory*: "Holland is a small country, and it is difficult to step out in it without treading on somebody's toes. I therefore wish to declare, once for all, and most emphatically, that my books contain no allusions, covert or overt, to any real persons, living or dead. I am aware that great masters of fiction have thought fit to work from models; that method must therefore possess its advantages: it is not mine. In this latest book, for instance, I have purposely avoided correct descriptions of the various Court Charges, lest anyone should seek for some feeble coincidence. Such search, after this statement, would be deliberately malicious. I describe manners and morals, not individual men."

slightest trace of Dutch scenery, manners and morals. Scenes and characters evoke an atmosphere that is European as well as English. From now onwards Maartens' setting will be increasingly European.¹²⁴ Even if they did not explore many issues in detail that were at stake in Maartens' tales, British and American reviewers began to take notice of their universality. Although they pay their tribute to the author's artistry in his manner of giving literary shape to these issues, on the whole their response was not essentially different from the way in which, fifteen years earlier, his poetry had been received. After all Maartens had done to draw their attention, he was still a foreigner who was therefore to be treated encouragingly and with politeness while at the same time he should be taken too seriously. The appreciation of his work never attained the degree of warmth and involvement that the Germans had demonstrated from the beginning. They had perceived that there were moral and ethical principles beyond his wit and humour which, in their turn, showed the comedy of tragic things, and the tragic element in all that is comical: They appreciated the way in which he "revealed, with half contempt, one's own sweet self-pitying, always in his peculiar comical vein, the sub-acid satire seldom degenerating into cynicism, and the humour never into buffoonery."¹²⁵ After *Die Neue Religion* was published in Germany, Maartens wrote to W.R. Nicoll:

I am glad to see that the German press, in connection with the very fine translation of *The New Religion*, almost unanimously tells the doctors to be glad of the book. The few prominent English papers, and American, also took that tone. And, curiously, no book of mine has been so sympathetically received in Holland! All things come round? Perhaps the Dutch will some day stop abusing me. I do not know about England, where, I imagine, it attracted very little notice.¹²⁶

At about the same period, Maartens received a letter from his British literary agent, which shows that he cannot possibly have been in any misconception as to the real state of affairs in

¹²⁴ Feeling very isolated in his home-country, he attempted to extend his literary and social connections outside The Netherlands, particularly in Britain, where he made the acquaintance of Swinburne whom he visited, accompanied by Gosse. Later, Gosse was to make use of Maartens' portrait study of Swinburne in his biography on that illustrious exponent of the English *fin-de-siècle* spirit. Henry James is credited with the introduction of what became known as the cosmopolitan theme in literature, see E.G. Edel's five-volume biography of *Henry James* (London: Hart-Davis, 1953-1972).

¹²⁵ That at least on one occasion a taste for revenge got the better of Maartens is proven by his remark on Dutch literature in *A Question of Taste*, ch. I, 23. It was assumed that Maartens attacked Dutch literature, but as is obvious from the over-all contents of the book, he merely criticised a certain, utterly negative, attitude towards it.

¹²⁶ 24 Jan. 1909, *Letters*, 277. Generally, German translations of Maartens' novels, all published by Albert Ahn in Berlin, appeared about a year after the original English version. As the literary correspondence shows, Maartens' attempted from about 1910 onwards to make a similar arrangement for his books to be in the hands of one publisher, in preparation of a uniform British edition. His publishers had been Bentley, Heinemann, Macmillan, Methuen and Constable. After years of negotiations, the latter finally realised the project in 1914.

England.¹²⁷ It seems only natural that he increasingly concentrated his hopes on Germany. After “his latest book” had been published, he could hardly have been misled by the optimistic tones only too frequent in the reviews still being sent to him from either side of the ocean.¹²⁸

In Germany at any rate, where Maartens was now mentioned in several histories of literature, the situation seemed more promising. Yet these accounts are not much different from the weekly reviews and newspapers: also they spent too big a part of space available commenting upon Maartens’ exceptional position rather than on his books.¹²⁹ Whenever these were being discussed, there was a persistent tendency to concentrate on the earlier novels, in particular *Joost Avelingh* and *God’s Fool*, the books that, as it seemed, had almost too quickly furnished Maartens with a certain reputation. Towards 1910 he was remembered and respected mainly for the novels written during the first years of the eighteen nineties. When he published his first collection of short stories in 1901, he was already past his zenith. Maartens himself was not unaware of the fact. There are hardly any references to the stories and comparatively few reviews. From the outset they were either ignored or denied to possess an intrinsic value of their own.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, Maartens continued to publish many short stories in magazines.¹³¹ Although he ignored the short stories, and in spite of his exaggerated praise in general, the German critic Anton Lohr managed to resume typical Maartensian qualities adequately. Considering Maartens an exponent of European rather than exclusively of English letters, he had grasped their possible significance on a level unequalled by American and British reviewers: “His subtly ironical way with all things alive, yet never without affectionate care

¹²⁷ “Constable tell me that they have about 2000 volumes of your different books, and that with the exception of ‘Dorothea’ they do not sell” (“from J. B. Pinker”, 1.4.1909). In another letter, less than a year later (31.1.1910), Pinker informed him that the sale of *The New Religion* in America had practically come to an end (unpubl. MSS., Maartens archive).

¹²⁸ The number of books actually sold was quite insignificant throughout, even for *God’s Fool*, still Maartens’ most popular novel. Macmillan reported the diminishing tendency : 61 copies in 1908, 62 in 1909 and 43 in 1910 (cf. Notes on the sales of his books sent to the author by the publishers, Maartens archive). From 1910 onwards, there was a steady decline of Maartens’ books on all markets, the German included, as testified by a letter from Tauchnitz to Maartens (15 Feb. 1910). There is a similar message by Ahn, even if he pointed out the increase in sales of Maartens’ last books, particularly *The Price of Lis Doris*, published 1909 (16 Jan. 1912; MSS in Maartens archive).

¹²⁹ See e.g., Leon Kellner, in *Die Englische Literatur im Zeitalter der Königin Victoria* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1909). Kellner ended his lengthy comment: “Maartens is a unique phenomenon in literature, and one is unlikely to encounter so quickly again the full blend of romance and irony, always set in a spiritual tone, of this writer. The story of the blind half idiot [*God’s Fool*], and the novel about the catholic baron [*The Greater Glory*] who, in his natural reliance on his own principles, becomes the victim of a ruthless opportunist, are unparalleled in the English Literature of our day”. From our point of vista it is easy to see the superficiality of such comments, ultimately impediments to a more diversified approach to Maartens’ achievement. When Kellner’s book was published in a revised edition in 1921, only six years after Maartens’ death, he was already no longer mentioned.

¹³⁰ Constable wrote to Maartens with regard to *My Poor Relations*: “Frankly, for some mysterious reason, the British Public will not buy stories” (6.3.1905, TS in Maartens archive).

¹³¹ These stories have remained uncollected up to this day.

for them, has a peculiarly touching effect. He is exciting and entertaining while demonstrating at the same time a passionate interest in all contemporary issues. It is obvious that presently this great artist is as much part of European as merely of English literature.”¹³²

Still, Maartens was amongst those having to grapple with the aesthetic and moral standards of the recent Victorian Age. At the same time, the quotation above illustrates the fact that these enthusiastic – rather than critical – German reviews nonetheless perceived that Maartens, in spite of the retrograde elements in his works, belonged to the generation of authors who managed to surmount part of them. Whether politically, socially, culturally or morally, there was a difference, as also reflected in the following remarks by another German critic, R. M. Meyer:

The tragic condition of those among us who are insignificant, of the poor in spirit: It has become a favourite theme amongst renowned authors of the more recent past, ranging from Flaubert to Brett Harte, from Dostoevski to the Dutchman Maartens. It is in accordance with the democratic tendencies of our day to emphasise such issues, preferring to avoid the sensational even in the selection of its material.¹³³

In his introduction to a selection of short stories, one German critic tried to give reasons why he believed that Maartens was entitled to a place not only amongst the outstanding writers of his day in the genre, but to be in the company of those whose reputation would extend into the coming generations.¹³⁴ Schumann’s aim was to show that Maartens belonged to the category of authors whose creative power stemmed from a profound emotional energy as the source of their individuality. He claimed that Maartens was not the sort of artist to share the market place with others in the fervour of their momentary frenzy, restlessly pretending to have found the new concepts and values to go by. As a result, these authors believed they were entitled to reject all attitudes that diverted from their own. Maartens was the kind of writer who sought to cast his own light upon questions that had preoccupied mankind in all civilizations and would continue to do so for a long time to come. According to Schumann he did not only do this in a truly individual manner, but, beyond that, it was the pursuit of a very personal calling.

Typical of the Germans, Schumann too is no exception in his tendency to overrate Maartens’ significance, thereby sacrificing part of the critical purport of his message. While hardly being able to put Maartens’ achievement into critical perspective, at least his observations have the

¹³² *Geschichte der Englischen Literatur*, vol. VI: *Das Zeitalter der Königin Viktoria* (München: Verlag der Jos. Kösel’schen Buchhandlung, 1911), 322-323.

¹³³ *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, vol. II: *Die Deutsche Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Georg Bondi Verlag, 1921), 301.

¹³⁴ W. Schumann, ed., *Novellen von Maarten Maartens* (München: Albert Langen, 1923). Albert Ahn having only published the novels, this was the first collection of short stories to appear on the German soil, in a German translation, by Eva Schumann. Soon after, in the same year, Reclam, Leipzig, published another selection of three stories by Maartens in Eva Schumann’s translation: *Die Komödie eines Verbrechens*.

merit of putting, for the first time, the emphasis upon the short stories., With their international settings, they are even more than the novels exceptional in presenting a European scene independent of national boundaries. Although Schumann abstained from setting out his reasons in detail, he perceived Maartens' objective point of view in all of these stories. The modern style suited the acuteness of his observations, assuming a natural maturity without ever lapsing into mere descriptive, but sapless, narrative. Schumann perceived qualities in Maartens' short stories, which surpass the level of mere description of the manners and morals of his day:

In these stories, there is such affectionate care for the humoristic and human aspects of other nations which one but seldom encounters in English literature, and which – with their *penchant* for the darker sides of the human psyche – rather-reveal an Eastern European influence, as in “The Fool and the Idiot,” and “Silly”. Everywhere a supremacy of intelligence produces an ironical smile that knows of the indispensability of traditions and moral conduct and of their ineffable weight as constituents of a community. Above all there is the benevolent smile of the author who detects the forces of prejudice in all deeper religious sentiment and who knows they are intrinsic to its nature, without ever lapsing into the passionate, liberating mood of Ibsen, for example.¹³⁵

At the time when Schumann's selection was published, in the aftermath of the First World War, Western civilisation was engulfed by even stronger doubts concerning its principles than before. The above quotation is but a brief extract of the eulogy he bestowed upon the art of Maartens. In the light of the ongoing political and social change in Europe he too was aware of the difficulty of reintroducing an author with a status as exceptional as Maartens'. It now seemed that the interest in Maartens had lit up but for an instant, only to eclipse when the war came, terminating the brief period of his gradually and increasingly withdrawing from the public eye.

While deliberating upon some of the conventional characteristics of Maartens' prose, he noted a truly revolutionary element at core: the social intentions underlying the novels and, in particular, the short stories. He was convinced that Maartens' message would find its way to the generations of the future. Both a religious and a revolutionary element were at the root of Maartens' art. It explains why Maartens felt “in closer union with German modes of thought.”¹³⁶ Long before, revolutionary and religious aspirations, blending or opposing their

¹³⁵ “Introduction” to the *Novellen*, 8. Schumann continues with his eulogy for several pages (8-12) in which, apart from Ibsen, he refers to Thackeray and Swift, authors to whom he considers Maartens to be indebted. He says that Maartens' laconic ingenuity reminds him of Shaw, whose social and philosophical antecedents were, however, of an entirely different order. Consequently, Shaw's writings were more explicit in their political appeal. With regard to Maartens' indebtedness to Swift and Thackeray, Schumann is not explicit; obviously he refers to their pre-eminence as satirists and moralists.

¹³⁶ E.g., “Interview”, 2.

forces according to the issue at stake, had formed the nucleus of German philosophical and literary traditions.

Some years later this view is corroborated by Quiller-Couch, pointing out that a peculiar blend of the puritan with the romantic distinguished Maartens from many another realist. Although solidly concealed behind the satire, this blend was at the root of his strong moral conscience. They were the qualities in his work that particularly interested the Germans, readers and critics alike. In his synthesis of humour and scepticism, with its romantic, idealistic and moral implications, Maartens formed a link with the German tradition. Also, he combined the psychological interest of the realist with an old-fashioned concern for perfect prose, one of the traditional aesthetic criteria imperilled by the wave of naturalism, which absorbed the continent.¹³⁷ Towards the second half of the Nineties, it was obvious to many critics that the taste of the public had undergone considerable change. Still, academic research had taken too much for granted that Victorianism was giving way before the onrush of the twentieth century.¹³⁸ For most readers as well as critics, the desire persisted that the novel represent a blend of the real with the author's ideal.

¹³⁷ As doubts concerning a just world arose, the traditional concepts of the novel began to be questioned. Particularly in France, this epitomised in debates about naturalism, see for example: Charles Beuchat, *Histoire du Naturalisme*, 2 vols (Paris: Correa, 1949); Aleksandra Gruzinska, "Naturalism in France", in Hyung S. Cho, David F. Siemens, Jr. and Shirley E. Williams, eds., *Naturalism: Its Impact on Science, Religion and Literature* (Phoenix, AZ: Canyon Institute for Advanced Studies, 2001), 93-100; for Holland, see: Freddy De Schutter, *Het verhaal van de Nederlandse literatuur*, vol. 2: *Verlichting, Romantiek, Realisme-Naturalisme, Multatuli en Gezelle* (Amsterdam: Pelckmans, 1994); Romain Debbaut, *Het naturalisme in de Nederlandse letteren* (Leuven: Acco, 1989); Guus Houtzager, *Hollands naturalisme* (Utrecht: Knippenberg, [1982]); Ton Anbeek, *De naturalistische roman in Nederland* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1982).

¹³⁸ Cf. Becker, "The Victorian Conscience", quoted by Paul Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 68.

II The Published Novels

“It’s like me, in the midst of my pessimism, to go on thinking that good art, popularised, would be popular.” *Maarten Maartens*

II.1. Schwartz’ debut as a novelist: *The Black Box Murder* (1889)

The Black Box Murder is really the first Maartensian novel ‘in disguise’, not only because it contains the rudiments of a love story that has its share in the motives of the protagonist for his crime, but because it may be regarded as a preparatory study to all the forthcoming case-studies of conscience: It is his conscience that urges the murderer, Austin, to ultimately commit suicide. The first person narrator revels in lawyer-like deliberations, increasingly thrilled into a compelling fascination for the murder case. This is so consistently done that we are lead to believe we are dealing with a lawyer who is particularly interested in all the psychological intricacies of his case. This is epitomised in the phrase: “Philip Harvey was the man who had done the deed, and perhaps Harvey alone, and yet could he be said to have done it?”¹³⁹ The psychological analysis mentioned before continues to capture the reader. Towards the middle of the book, all elements have been fully re-assembled as to an apparently watertight case. The solution he has found seems so evident that he cannot believe it himself; hence his urge to continue the analysis.

The Black Box Murder is a preliminary study, not merely where conscience is concerned: the plot contains elements that will be more fully and organically applied by the author of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. In that novel the hero, Joost, is abused by his uncle, in a similar way as the aunt’s cold-hearted treatment of her nephew in *The Black Box Murder* (126). Baron van Trotsem, Joost Avelingh’s uncle, goes to the notary to “alter his will” – a crucial moment in the plot (in retrospect) – so does Austin’s aunt, going up to London for the same purpose (274). A key that drops to the floor, the origin of all the mischief, is the fatal moment that constitutes the crux of the plot (275). In both stories, a combination of elements need only a coincidence – here a key dropping, there a man gasping and grasping for breath – to unleash the unavoidable sequence of events.

¹³⁹ *The Black Box Murder* (London: Remington 1889), page numbers added to the text in brackets refer to the only edition that ever appeared, by Remington & Co. The book that gave Schwartz the impetus to the writing of this crime story was *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) by an “obscure young Zealander, Fergus Hume [...] when it was published in Britain, a year later, it was phenomenally successful and made Hume’s name as a leader in the exciting new field of detective fiction” (John Sutherland, ed., *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Literature*, 182, 313).

Maartens' two "possessions", as Quiller-Couch called them, the "hatred of 'religiosity' cloaking itself as religion" and a "hatred and contempt of all medical 'specialists'" are already present here.¹⁴⁰ As in *Joost Avelingh*, and in many other instances later on, the practice of criminal law is presented as a strategy to "bully or cheat the accused into confessing his crime" (34), leaving the accused hero ultimately no other choice but to feel guilty. The other recurrent theme is Maartens' frustration with doctors "obstinate in their opinion" (213). In the testimony given by the servant Sally to the private detective about the two visiting women, we have the earliest stylistic example of Thackeray's influence. It smacks of Mr. Yellowplush:

Yes, the two ladies had stayed there three weeks, and was haffable; only the holder one did'ate to ring twice, and used to get into the most hawful tantrums, has if a poor girl 'ad four legs to'er body. No, there didn't use to come very many people to see'em, 'cos they didn't know many people in Southend; but a hold lady came wunst, what looked fearful cross, with white 'air and a wicked hold face' – there, there, my good Sally, the old lady is dead; *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, you know – 'and the two gents as was allus a-coming. (116)

II.2. Entry into the Dutch microcosm: *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* (1889)

The Sin of Joost Avelingh was Maartens' first novel about Dutch life: a microcosm with its general ethical problems of moral conscience.¹⁴¹ This, however, does not explain its immediate success in Britain and the United States, even if psychological problem plays and novels were very popular at the time. The success was mainly due to the author's fresh and unique rendering of a vision that soon became established as the typical Dutch Maartensian scene.¹⁴²

Ethical questions and their consequent problems of conscience appear in some form or other in all of Maartens' novels and short stories. The plot of *Joost Avelingh* evolves on the basis of such a moral dilemma. It concerns a man who refrains from helping another human being at a crucial moment in his struggle for survival: An intervention by Joost might have prevented his uncle's death. The question whether or not he is morally guilty spurs the plot. The moral of

¹⁴⁰ Preface, *Letters*, xxiv.

¹⁴¹ *The Sin of Joost Avelingh: A Dutch Story* (London: Remington, 1889; Constable, 1914); abbreviated henceforth as *Joost Avelingh*.

¹⁴² The success of *Joost Avelingh* prompted Maartens' American publisher, Appleton, to introduce their *Holland Fiction Series*. They called attention to "Mr. Edmund Gosse's description of the new literary movement in Holland, which will have the best possible representation in our series" (from Appleton to MM, unpublished literary correspondence, date unknown [1899?]). Amongst the novels published were *Footsteps of Fate* (1891) and *Eline Vere* (1893) by Louis Couperus.

the story: it is not enough to be considered not guilty by human legislation: one has to come to terms with one's own conscience.

The Dutch novelist W. van Maanen who wrote a doctoral dissertation on Maartens, presents him throughout as a spokesman of Christian ideals. Thus Joost is guilty “not in the eyes of the law, but in the eye of heaven.”¹⁴³ Although this is in accordance with Christian doctrine that judges all human acts, it distracts from Maartens' postulate – clear in the case of Joost as well as of the heroes and heroines of his ensuing novels – that guilt is first and foremost a matter of private counsel with oneself. Only after thorough introspection, leaving man unable to pardon himself, God's redeeming hand descends.

The Sin of Joost Avelingh is the first full display of the types of people who appear again and again: as embodied shapes with a set of characteristics. The strength of Maarten Maartens – as the author is now wont to call himself¹⁴⁴ – lies in his clear-cut and concise portrayal of these types. Consequently, they immediately stick to the reader's mind. There is Jetta's mother for example, Mrs. van Hessel, the parson's wife, the middle class woman “who habitually found all opinion unreasonable but her own” (10). From the very outset, there is something aphoristic in his observations that gives them a general significance. Mrs. van Hessel is intolerant and narrow-minded enough to consider herself a V.I.P. in the community, and expects to be considered as such by the others. She is not a woman one will ever feel to have known intimately, but rather to have known her only as one gets acquainted with one's neighbours after some time. This counts for the many figures in Maartens' novels that are supposed to play but a minor part in the story. One can never get any closer to them, biased as they are by the one or two dominant views their limited life experience has provided them with, and which find their expression in corresponding habits. The author is determined to show that his typified characters all frantically stick to what they have got, implying that this is a human quality that is generally true, in some form or other, for all of us.

Pride, keeps these people going, more than anything else perhaps because there is not much else to go by in these lives, terribly determined as they are by class conventions. Dirk van Trotsem is a perfect specimen of the upper-class gentry, a “hard-headed, not too soft-hearted old fashioned country gentleman, with an immense idea of the greatness of his race, and of himself as its representative, but not otherwise of noticeable vanity; a good landlord because a

¹⁴³ Van Maanen, 45; the same theme is treated in dramatic form in Maartens' unpublished play “The Sin of Hugh Manson”, which he wrote after having been encouraged to dramatise *Joost Avelingh*. The undated play that has an English setting, was written around 1895-96, the period in which Maartens began to introduce English settings.

¹⁴⁴ Pseudonym chosen because of its unmistakably Dutch sound while still perfectly easy to pronounce by English-speaking readers “Interview”, 2.

so conscientiously painstaking one.”(21) As in Thackeray, the names (here “Van Trotsem”) are often emblematic, carrying the one predominant trait: ‘trots’ is the Dutch equivalent of ‘pride’. More than mere pride is hinted at: the suffix ‘me’ implies numerous connotations that go with the upper classes: wealth, breeding, social status etc. This remains unknown to English readers unless the author adds an explanation, as he did occasionally, in a footnote.

Jonkheer van Asveld has a set of attributes typical for the degenerate gentry: “He was very stupid and boasted of his stupidity, he was very impecunious and lived on his debts and his losses at play.” (45)¹⁴⁵ The title of chapter VII (“The claims of rank”) is ironical: When Van Asveld visits his uncle, appealing to their allegiance of rank, this is only a means to disguise the fact that he is pleading for money. It shows how profane a materialist Van Asveld is, always ready to “sell himself” for money when the chance occurs, as opposed to Van Trotsem who – imperturbably class conscious – holds on to the old aristocratic values. To Van Asveld, however, his ancestral name is purely an access to cash. He is a hypocrite who cloaks his greed under respectability in order to manipulate and work on his uncle. The latter certainly perceives his scheming, yet promises help: on behalf of the rank of Van Asveld, being a member of the family is reason enough – he cannot help himself. As examples of harshness and ruthlessness of character, and in odd contrast to the extreme forms of politeness they exchange (59), they remind one of Mr. Deuceace and his father, again, in Thackeray’s *Yellowplush Papers*.

Maartens would continue to present many types in his minor characters, of whom it is obvious that, even if they are mostly Dutch, they could just as well have been English or French, provided they are presented as types in their correspondingly cultural setting. However humorously and satirically, he nonetheless presents an image of the Dutch people, with their rigid and fastidious prejudice and conventions that was hitherto unknown to the outside world.

The creation of the main characters departs from an entirely different principle. It is not limited to a few dominant attributes that sharply outline them; on the contrary, they revolve around a central idea. They possess a dominant emotional or moral quality rather than that they can be defined by a mere predominant character trait.

Joost Avelingh is the first in a series of characters whose emotional disposition strongly determines a moral outlook on life. This dissimilar point of view causes an irrevocable and immense discrepancy between the minor and the major characters: The minors are entirely embedded in the social world surrounding them and, considering the way Maartens perceives

¹⁴⁵ “Jonkheer” is the Dutch equivalent for the German “Freiherr”, the lowest rung on the nobility ladder.

that world, it can hardly be rendered otherwise than in a satirical manner. For that reason one will hardly encounter any minor characters in the novels that are painted without satire or without at least a touch of irony. Those major characters, on the other hand, live in an isolated emotional state from which they experience their surroundings and, although these surroundings continually impinge on their emotions, they ultimately seem to remain strangely unaffected by them. The world in which the minor characters are embedded, however, does not function as supplement to the emotional perception of the hero; the two worlds do not really affect each other; they remain apart, each taking an equal share in the novel.

As a rule, the author's basic point of view does not change: he is on the spot, describing what he sees. In turning from the description of a minor character towards Joost, he instantly swerves from satire to psychological realism when he seeks to render his hero's mental state. As will be explored in Chapter III, the method he applied to achieve this, he also gleaned from Thackeray: a hardly perceptible flow from authorial analysis into indirect speech and vice versa. The dialogues between the minor characters are mostly comical in accordance with a narrative mechanism involving the types. Where these dialogues concern the hero himself, however, we witness scenes of exceptional dramatic intensity. Here is an example of such extreme emotionality, taken from Chapter VIII, entitled "The claims of love". The suffering, the appalling, utter despair of Joost in the confrontation with his uncle could not have been rendered more simply, and yet more acutely. His uncle has just refused to give his consent to his marriage to Agatha, now or at any time. This method – from narrative description to a kind of indirect speech, and hence to direct speech – generates the increasingly dramatic effect:

He was altogether unstrung, moved in the very depths of his nature. It was not a moment to weigh his words or even to fully realise them. He had a vague idea they were not very dignified. What of that? Agatha's happiness was worth the sacrifice of a little dignity. His love was all so young, and sweet, and tender, he could have cried like a girl that morning and not been ashamed of his tears. The old baron winked his eyes, and spoke very gruffly. "It is your happiness, after all, which I seek, Joost," he said. [...] Joost made an impatient movement with his bent head. "Damn you, can't you believe me?" cried the Baron fretfully. "You would make a cart-horse lose patience. You give up Agatha from this moment, do you hear?" Joost again shook his head without lifting it. "Do you mean to say you ignore my wishes?" Joost rose to his feet. His face was very calm and white with suffering. "Sir," he said in a firm voice, "I shall ride over to Mynheer van Hessel today, as I was on the point of doing when you sent for me. I shall tell him what has passed between us, and I shall ask him to let me marry his daughter when I am twenty-three." "Do", said the old man, trembling with passion, "and tell him from me that, if you marry Agatha Van Hessel, you shall never, living or dead, have another penny of mine." "I will, sir," said Joost calmly. "Do", shrieked his uncle, "and come back for dinner, and give me van Hessel's answer."(65-66)

The reader's interest is not allowed to lag, even if the author persists so long in leaving certain questions unanswered: Why does the baron want his nephew to study medicine against his will? Why does he refuse his consent to the marriage? Why does he take him to Madame de Montélimart, the old lady in the lunatic asylum? The whole scene brings a haunted place to mind, Poe-like in its eeriness and evocations of the mysteries of all the people who had ever lived there. Why does Joost not at least enquire about her identity? Like Joost, the reader senses that there is a secret, but it is momentarily eclipsed by the clash between these two electrified poles of high strung emotions: Joost and his uncle. Then the baron calls for his "chaise" to begin his fatal ride. It concludes Part One, entitled 'Before'. The end of this long retrospect puts us back at the beginning, and it is only now that the "Introduction" gains its full significance: the logic consequence of the circular plot movement.

The second part puts us instantly *in medias res* of Joost's new life. Almost ten years have elapsed and, having inherited his uncle's fortune, Joost has now become an important benefactor for the part of the country he aspires to represent as a politician in the future. He is now married to Agatha van Hessel. Agatha is Maartens' first female character, the first of a series of women imbued in many respects with the author's concept of the ideal wife. To a large extent this also turns her into a type, but on a higher, more abstract, idealistic plane: the type of the devoted and gentle wife, forever waiting upon her husband, soft, understanding and patient; in short, the purpose of her life is forever to please him: "She could not bear anyone to think there was anything Joost could not do." (98) At first sight she is very much like Thackeray's Amelia in *Vanity Fair*. Unlike Amelia, however, Agatha is not portrayed with a subtle ironic touch. Maartens takes his heroines earnest, as he always will. As she is one of his 'serious' people, i.e. one of those who embody his ideas, there is no room for irony. However, the concept is more complex, deepened by the other side of Maartens: his psychological realism. The following quotation proves that a man's response to such female devotion is equally significant. It shows how they fuse and then modify each other, not without implying the discrepancy existing between man and woman. It is hinted that, as a woman, Agatha's desires by far surpass the conventional limits of the good wife:

Her beauty had developed into fuller matronhood as the years went on. He had never loved her for that beauty only. He had loved her for her goodness, her sweetness, her purity, all that goes to make a good woman lovable, and he loved her for them still. He would do anything – that struck him – to give her pleasure; any sorrow of hers was a deep grief to him also. He had espoused her, fully, loyally, with his heart for ever, but his mind's life, the deep strong current of his thinking soul, flowed up to her, babbled round her, and flowed past. She gave him more – who can doubt it? She gave him what a woman can – her all. And she was happy, though with a lurking suspicion that she might be much happier still. (133)

Incidentally, the male-female discrepancy is emphasised by authorial comments. While providing a frame within which Joost and Agatha are observed, they equally touch upon the marital status of women, a question which was increasingly moving into the centre of public interest at the time of the publication of *Joost Avelingh*.¹⁴⁶

That such an “ideal” woman like Agatha should have her doubts does not comply with the author’s idealist concept of his female heroine. As if by a refreshing impulse, the psychological realist in Maartens supersedes the idealist when he reveals these doubts. This happens when we have advanced well into the second half of the book. The author now concentrates on the problem of Joost’s guilt. It is no longer merely the underlying motive: In view of the impending lawsuit against him, following the suspicions surrounding his uncle’s death, that question has become an actuality, the main theme, a public issue discussed by everyone.

The trial itself (Chapter XXII, 179-193) demonstrates the author’s knowledge about the proceedings in Dutch courts. There is harsh social criticism in its presentation as a mechanism whose parts interact in such a way that the results must run counter to the establishment of the truth. Evidently the author is drawing from his own negative experience with the world of jurisprudence while he was a student of law. Very likely his persistent preoccupation with the inherent ruthlessness of the legal system accounts for some of his exaggerations.

Within the narrative testimony of Agatha’s persevering determination to stand by her husband, there is a sudden interjection of doubt: “Oh, mother, if he were guilty, it would be unbearable.” (203) Now that Joost is on the verge of collapse, Agatha intervenes by a heroic effort to save her husband. She helps him to perceive that his attitude was righteous, in spite of his incapability of action – paralysed as he was at that particular moment when his uncle needed his help. Passion is in her words, the passion of a woman’s perseverance to fight for her ideals. The convictions behind that passion are so convincingly rendered because of the authors’ power to identify with his heroine. It is of such intensity that there is none of the author’s shadow beyond: she acts entirely by dint of her own convictions. In contrast, her

¹⁴⁶ On the New Woman around 1890: Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (London: Methuen, 1979); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetics* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1986); Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configuration of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Teresa Mangum, “Style Wars of the 1890s: The New Woman and the Decadent”, in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 47-66; Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); A.R. Cunningham, “The ‘New-Woman Fiction’ of the 1890s”, *Victorian Studies* 17 (Dec. 1973), 177-86; Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Lyn Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Woman’s Novel and The New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992).

brother Kees – incidentally, like Maartens, a lawyer – is but the author's mouthpiece to display his knowledge of (and, hence, frustration with) the Dutch legal system.

Even if such a procedure might be considered questionable from an aesthetic angle, it is preferable to direct intrusions by the author himself, which, on the whole, occur too frequently in his novels. Simultaneously the author astutely uses his plot device to create the impression of a society guilty as such, implied not only by Joost's attitude, but equally by all those involved in some way. The growing conviction of guilt in Joost's mind and, subsequently, his strange behaviour, seems to entangle him increasingly in a web of isolation, torn asunder from his surroundings. It bolsters the community in their all too willing prejudice against him. This occurs for instance at the dinner party at the Van Hessels. Joost's strange reaction to the praise bestowed upon him there vividly recalls to the mind the weirdness of the situation of Hamlet seeing Banco's ghost at the banquet. (115) Another example is Joost's encounter with Van Asvelt. While they walk home together in the cold winter night, Van Asvelt complains about having lost his share of the Van Trotsem legacy. Joost's immediate indulgence to make up for his financial losses cannot but stimulate Van Asvelt in assuming Joost's guilt. (126)

Thematically speaking, it is not really possible to trace a line of development in Maartens from novel to novel. All his themes are present from the outset as it were, even if his scope gradually widens due to his growing cosmopolitanism in some of the ensuing books. In a sense they are all autobiographical, because the narrator's mixture of warm-hearted and testily cynical observations of human life reflect the author's temperament and attitude. They are also meant as a warning signal to the reader: Maartens anticipated a lack-lustre civilisation, with its anonymous and increasingly materialistic tendencies. We are dealing with a personal vision of the world very much "seen through a temperament", as Maartens described it himself, a world in which people are basically good, but cut up into more or less grotesque silhouettes by life's scissors, patterns of moral decline. Rather have they grown into the shape in which they are stuck, as a matter of course, mechanically, as if prescribed by their nature, rather than that they have had to adapt themselves to external pressures. Not so the hero, Joost in this case: The author as psychological realist presents the world seen through the temperament of his hero, Joost. The 'classical' term 'hero' is appropriate to define Joost, because he does not so much act as that he represents an idealised human being imbued with qualities and a conscience that in our experience of life surpass those of most mortal men.

Even if the author is either unwilling or unable to sustain the hero's point of view throughout, that point of view is noticeable at recurrent intervals. The concentration on the hero's mental and emotional state of being keeps the outside world at a distance, as a flat, a vague general

abstraction that seems to have little effect on him. On the other hand, the impact of that outside world is so much the bigger on the minor characters: whenever they appear, the narrator's standpoint swiftly changes. He now turns into the observing realist, focussing on the very facts, which before had had the mere function of creating a background against which Joost's psyche gradually took shape.

How determining those facts can be in the life of such a minor character is shown, for example, in the case of Jan Lorentz. He is the type of the honest and ambitious young man, whose aim in life is a decent existence made possible by hard work, preferably with the help of a proper and self-respecting country girl. But life's hazards throw him off the track: a typical example of the standard realism of the day. The crucial antecedents in the lives of these types are duly reported. They are not depicted as a scene in retrospect, as was the case with Joost. The narration of their backgrounds is as brief as it can be, enough to enable the reader to understand why so much misery came about as, in this case, in Jan Lorentz' life. It is what might be called *explicative* realism: Circumstances can drive a man to actions his conscience utterly disproves of, but in the process of which conscience itself is contaminated by these very circumstances.

From *Joost Avelingh* onwards, all of Maartens' novels are initiation novels in the sense that the main characters develop from a state of naive innocence into a state of worldly disillusionment. This development affects their deepest self although, ultimately, it does not change the destiny allotted to them. In some form or other, they all testify to the author's belief in a reality other than that of perceivable facts. Spiritual rather than religious, it does not take the shape of an actual emotion, but is a reflection rather of the hero's various emotional states. The contrast in depiction between major and minor protagonists requires a complete change of perspective.

Although there is abundant action in *Joost Avelingh*, the hero's battle with his own conscience is at the core of the plot, reaching its apotheosis in the chapter called "Avelingh against Avelingh" (218). The following pages consist of pure psychological realism: Joost grows into maturity oddly enough *not* as the ultimate catharsis of being unjustly accused, but as a consequence of his own confrontation with himself. He believes that his incapacity to act – or reluctance when he should have acted, or simply his human weakness – caused a degree of guilt that is unpardonable by God. The fault, then, "was not his, but God's" (222). The battle one has to fight – any battle – is ultimately the struggle with one's own conscience.

In the subsequent chapter, shades of the same idealism manage to permeate the portrayal of the minor character Jan Lorentz. Similar to Joost Avelingh, Jan Lorentz, by avowing his

perjury, clears his own conscience and lives more peacefully afterwards, even in prison: a bad conscience simply does not pay.

Maartens constantly projects his own idealism into his main characters. His minor characters on the other hand are mostly puppets in the Thackerayan sense, that is to say he observes them realistically, with much wit and humour.¹⁴⁷ Questions of conscience of a higher ethical order are not at stake here. This juxtaposition of the characters reflects the opposing sides of the author's scope: On the one hand the conscience of his main characters imbued with idealism, and the realism of mechanical conventionality reflected in his types on the other hand. This opposition is extreme in Maartens himself, to the extent that it is hard to imagine how he could have kept it outside his fiction – rather is his fiction an attempt to come to terms with it.

Beginning with his very first novel, *Joost Avelingh*, this principle of juxtaposition of characters is the pivot of Maartens' narrative method, which has far reaching consequences for his art as a novelist. The British critic Osbert Burdett perceived the line of development from Schwartz' poetic attempts to his novels from *Joost Avelingh* onwards, describing Maartens' idealism as “a combination of ideal sweetness and Puritan gravity, due to the influence of Tennyson and Browning.” Pointing out that the “subject and the attitude bear some resemblance to Hawthorne's”, he once more referred to puritan aspects in Maartens' scope. Stating that “the construction and the telling are akin to Thomas Hardy's”¹⁴⁸, he likely referred to the similarities in retrospective plot-structure. Had Burdett looked into these matters more closely, he would have discovered that the methodical problems he merely hints at in Maartens' novels have their origin in the aforementioned discrepancies of perspective.

Joost Avelingh is nearly complete as a Maartensian novel in terms of the choice of recurrent themes. In the following, the subsequent novels will be discussed insofar as they elaborate upon those themes, or extend their range.

¹⁴⁷ As Thackeray, most strikingly, in *Vanity Fair*, passim.

¹⁴⁸ Burdett, 115.

II.3. Introducing the Foreigner: *An Old Maid's Love* (1891)¹⁴⁹

Already in Maartens' next novel, *An Old Maid's Love*, there occurs a distinction that puts the character discrepancy dealt with above in jeopardy: At first, Miss Suzanna Varelkamp, the old maid, is a prisoner of her limited scope due to her cloistered upbringing. Accordingly, she acts in a mechanical and conventional way. All the time we have the author's delicate irony at our disposal to make us feel and savour her limitations. Given her strong principles and corresponding strong will though, we do not feel that Suzanna lives, like Joost Avelingh, in a secluded world turned upon itself. Her morals are thoroughly pragmatic, adapting themselves to life's requirements. This, however, is not to say she is not a highly moral person. In contrast to being depicted as a pent-up case of conscience, as with Joost Avelingh, Suzanna wears her morality on her sleeve. She is one of the rare Maartensian main characters who do not linger within the confines of the author's idealism, but who is presented in the manner of Thackeray: with all her human limitations, and an attitude to life in which conscience does not take absolute precedence over all other considerations, however strong a position it may hold in the execution of her daily duties. When the French woman intruder, Mme. de Mongelas appears on the scene, Suzanna's conviction that she has to save her nephew by all possible means from the claws of that foreigner draws her out of a ridden-by-habit existence to perform acts that, in a sense, make her heroic.

The creation of Mme. de Mongelas introduces the new theme of cosmopolitan worldliness as opposed to the naivety of Dutch provinciality, personified by Arnout. Slightly hurt after an accident with carriage, Mme. de Mongelas is taken to Susanna Varelkamp's home by that lady's nephew, Arnout, who lives there as well. She instantly takes a fancy to the young handsome Dutchman, whereupon she decides to prolong her stay beyond the time of her recovery. Arnout's infatuation with the French woman draws him out of the secluded naivety of his youth. This Miss Varelkamp is unable to prevent, as shown effectively in the 'bird-scene' (Chapter XV), where the two worlds are dramatically and hilariously epitomized in the 'battle' between the two women. Mme. de Mongelas desires that Arnout should save a wounded bird from a tree, thereby risking his own health, and his aunt summons him not to:

¹⁴⁹ Maarten Maartens, *An Old Maid's Love* (London: Bentley, 1891). In spite of similarities in theme and characterisation, it was not Maartens' novel that inspired Arnold Bennett to write *The Old Wives' Tale*, published in 1908. Yet his reflections concerning his method could have been Maartens': "It is an absolute rule that the principal character of a novel must not be unsympathetic, and the whole modern tendency of realistic fiction is against oddness in a prominent figure. I knew that I must choose the sort of woman that would pass unnoticed in a crowd" (Preface, vi). Cf. also Newman Flower, ed., *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, vol. 1: 1896-1910 (London: Cassell and Company, 1932).

The Frenchwoman half rose from her couch with a suppressed cry. Then, before Suzanna could realise her intention, she had thrown herself towards the window as best she could, painfully wrenching the already dislocated foot. Whatever one might think of her airs and graces, there was no doubt that this woman could bear bodily suffering. What cared she at the moment? Her eyes were blazing with passion and fierce resolve. "He shall have it!" she gasped. But Suzanna was too quick for her. The old lady ran round to the window. "You shall not ask him," she said. "He would be fool enough to attempt it. He shall not risk his life for such a trifle." For a moment they faced each other. The grey Dutchwoman, erect and resolute, with one hand on the sash; the French beauty in her laces, supporting herself with difficulty against the window curtains, her delicate features distorted with anger and pain. They looked into each other's eyes. And each felt that here were powers well-matched – eager fury and quiet strength. They recoiled from each other, as he pauses to test his armour that meets a foe worthy of his valour. They recoiled for one moment, each feeling it were best to turn back in time. (116)

Suzanna bridges the gap between the major – and minor characters in another respect. There is no trace of the suspicion, as with Joost Avelingh, that we are in fact dealing with the author's camouflaged idealism. As a character, Suzanna is well proportioned in the sense that she has a share in all of the author's assets: irony, humour, realism and idealism. Oppressed by questions of conscience, her reactions are not out of balance with all the other ingredients of the story. There is not that sense of disproportion we had with Joost Avelingh. Suzanna is provided with an unexpected occasion to practise what is half-consciously brooding in her mind: how to get rid of Mme. de Mongelas at any price. It seems that she is enough in despair, even to the extent of poisoning her, but the ultimate answer to that question is left unanswered. As in *Joost Avelingh* there is the unconscious desire for attack and revenge and the occasion suddenly offers itself, leading up to an action that would otherwise certainly not have taken place. The deed itself is therefore not entirely conscious.¹⁵⁰

In *An Old Maid's Love* Maartens' set of types is considerably extended: watch the splendid opening of Chapter XXVI, where the type of the Englishman is introduced. Arnout has eloped to Paris with Mme. de Mongelas. His friend Jakob te Bakel, a priest, has just arrived in Paris to persuade her to let Arnout return to his native country:

He had to wait for a few moments in the reading room. Of course that room held the inevitable Englishman, close shaven and well brushed, with his check suit and crimson neck, swallowed up in a deep leather chair and a copy of yesterday's *Times*. Jakob had never seen a live Englishman. There are people still abroad, in out-of-the-way-corners, who never have. He eyed him with considerable curiosity, having always heard so much evil of the race: He thought he had never come across so clean a creature before. He arrived at the conclusion that the man was sent out as an advertisement, like all things English, of somebody's soap. (242)

¹⁵⁰ However innocently it may be treated here, as a 'storm in a tea cup', Maartens' motive – the ambiguity of the problem of personal guilt, provoked by circumstance and moral responsibility – anticipates what is to become one of the central questions in twentieth century literature.

Maartens fully revels in his types in scenes like the drawing-up of the will by Mevrouw Barsselius (254), which makes one think of the vulture-like gatherings around Mr. Featherstone's sickbed in *Middlemarch*. However charming in themselves, such digressions unfortunately detain the plot more than their modest contribution to it allows for. The scene is presented in every detail, and we have gone through some hilarious pages before we arrive at the point where the notary himself gets impatient (258-259). This is but the end of a lengthy introduction to an unforgettable scene, impressive and outlined sharply enough to be printed separately as a short story. The type-description of the Vicomte de Mongelas, towards the close of the novel, is masterly done.¹⁵¹

An Old Maid's Love was an immediate success, again because of Maartens' unassumingly ironical and elegant way of revealing pictures of Dutch life to his Anglo-Saxon readership. He shows, from another angle, the moral dilemma of someone who acts under great strain and on the spur of the moment. Unlike in *Joost Avelingh* the incident is not the pivot of the story. Here, that pivot is the introduction of the foreign character, whose presence throws the Dutch domestic landscape, usually a drowsily peaceful place, into a state of great confusion. Beyond the rendering of their individual traits, the two women revolving around the hero Arnout Oostrum are juxtaposed as typically Dutch and French. As such, Maartens anticipates one of his later, central themes: the Dutch microcosm confronted with the 'outer' world.

II.4. Benevolent satire blossoming: *A Question of Taste* (1891)

Maartens' next book, *A Question of Taste*, differs in particular from its two predecessors in that the author is more concerned with his main character from an inner psychological than from a moral standpoint, whereby the Dutch framework remains intact.¹⁵²

With a mother making him so comfortable a home, Joris Middelstrum, a man in his mid-thirties, did not have much choice but to remain a bachelor. When the mother dies, the son goes through a period of quiet inner distress. Only then he becomes aware of the position his mother's life-long pampering has put him in. What follows is a slow and belated rebellion against his situation.

Van Maanen called it "a simple story of a simple bachelor told in a simple way" and he suggested that "the frame of a short story might have sufficed for the portrait of the rather

¹⁵¹ Despairing what to do, Juffrouw Varelkamp has come to see the impoverished aristocrat to seek his assistance in removing his wife from Arnout. Her unexpected visit throws him entirely into confusion. Suzanna has to wait for him in his shabby salon while he finishes his toilette (393-394).

¹⁵² Maarten Maartens, *A Question of Taste* (London: Heinemann, 1891). Originally, Maartens had titled the book *Mayonnaise*.

uninteresting government official.”¹⁵³ Van Maanen apparently considered *A Question of Taste* no more than a trifle, as he did not deem it worth to devote more than a page to it in his doctoral dissertation. Burdett made no comments at all on the book, apart from wrongly calling it Maartens’ next novel after *Joost Avelingh*. Yet there is more to be said about this first novel that is only half the usual size required by the author.¹⁵⁴ Compared to its predecessors, it is noticeably concise, thereby gaining in consistency of interest. It leaves one puzzled to read Van Maanen, when he says that it “would seem that Maarten Maartens is not at ease with his subject, that he is experimenting with little faith in the issue of his experiment.”(58). Regardless of the frequent lapses into matter-of-fact realism, the satirical tenor of the book is generally unbroken. The interest in the main character is sustained almost throughout, simply because there is neither more to be told nor put onto its simple canvas. One can easily visualise Joris Middelstum in the modest Dutch setting, with no wealthy people travelling abroad or foreigners appearing suddenly and disturbingly upon the rustic scene. Alongside the narrator we smile at this middle-stream type of government official, imprisoned in the greyness of his daily bureaucratic mechanism of routine. Yet at the same time he is so thoroughly human in his fragility, a man whose life-long dependence on his mother persistently kept him at a level of helplessness as far as his ability to socialize with others is concerned. More than any of the preceding characters and of many to come, Joris has the distinction of character Maartens aimed for: somebody the reader feels to have known personally.¹⁵⁵ This is the secret of character: to possess individually distinctive subtleties of temperament while at the same time giving a sense of a type of person generally existing as a particular social species.

We reach the climax of the book in the chapter called “Mayonnaise”: Ada, acquainted with Joris and on the lookout for a husband, serves him the meal that is to decide her fate. The wager is that she succeed in making a mayonnaise as delicious as the one his dearly departed mother used to make. She fails, but the magnanimity of his reaction, when he nevertheless proposes to her, is truly impressive. Up to the very end the reader is left in doubt as to her choice of husband: Joost or Anton. She might marry for the wrong reasons, and it is only at the very last moment that she marries the right candidate for the right reason. This ‘storm in a tea cup’ climax is the more effective due to the very modesty of the setting (120-132). The satire is evenly dispersed, so that the reader automatically assumes the narrator’s standpoint,

¹⁵³ Van Maanen, 57.

¹⁵⁴ The average size in the Collected Edition (1914) is 500 pages with an average of 300 words per page; *A Question of Taste* contains 240 pages.

¹⁵⁵ “To M.H. Spielmann”, *Letters*, 6.1.1895, 96-97.

unassumingly observant and benevolently mocking. Only once this unrippled tranquillity is disturbed by an authorial outburst that puts the reader's complacency momentarily in jeopardy. We are enjoying the benevolently satirical narrative of Alfred Romeyn, specimen of the romantic poet, living entirely out of touch and concord with the surrounding social environment, when suddenly that account turns into what is clearly the author's own scorn:

He wrote articles in several newspapers and reviews. For these he received, to use an inelegant and graphic expression, more kicks than halfpence, there being no country in the world in which literature is so hopelessly in disgrace and disgust as in Holland. It is not very highly honoured anywhere, perhaps, but nowhere else does it expose its enthusiasts to such depths of poverty and insult. The social position must be beyond all reproach of the daring individual that would venture to stretch out his fingers and touch as pitchy shrine. (61)¹⁵⁶

From time to time, exaggeration helps to re-establish the distance to the scene that is necessary in satire.¹⁵⁷ Often in Maartens, his extreme matter-of-fact satire strips social conventions to the bone, showing what they boil down to: money and class, being 'taken care of' and 'respectability'. In the eyes of the nobility as well as of the bourgeoisie there is nothing else to aspire to.

As so often, a particular type of person is illustrated emblematically by their name. In this case 'Middelstum' instantly evokes 'middelstroom', the Dutch for 'midstream'. By phrases

¹⁵⁶ No doubt Maartens vents his long pent-up frustrations here, misjudged and mistreated as he had felt ever since he published *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. As far as his own social position is concerned, one must bear in mind that he was of Jewish descent. Even if this certainly had had a negative impact on his reception, his view on the status of the author in Holland in general was nonetheless distorted by his own experiences. Nowhere did Maartens ever give any reasons to explain why the position of the author should be worse in Holland than in any other country. The minor authors of the period who wrote 'artist' novels, sought to convey the artist's craving for integration in society, unable as he was to cope with the stigma of being an outcast, see Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 435, also for a list of such artist novels. *A Question of Taste* is not an artist novel in this sense, but it reflects the same attitude with regard to the artist, i.e., the artist in the book as well as, autobiographically, the artist Maarten Maartens.

¹⁵⁷ An example is the letter written by one of the minor characters. It concerns a request put by Ada's uncle to her mother for a possible marriage between his daughter Sibylla and Ada's brother Alfred: "Dear Sister in Law, Sibylla has been asked in marriage by two eligible young men of this town within the last nine months. She tells me one was a grand gentleman, which I dare say is true, as he has no occupation. The other was a hop-merchant, and if she had taken him, I should have laid down my head in peace, for the two businesses would have united splendidly. But Providence decreed that it should not be so, for Sibylla wouldn't have him. She tells me she has made up her mind to marry your Alfred, the very last man I should have chosen for her. She barely knows him, and I dare say, when she sees more of him, she will change her opinion. And if she doesn't, I suppose there is no more to be said. I therefore have a proposal to make. You can come over with Alfred and stay here for a couple of months – he can't come alone – and, if Sibylla sticks to her decision, you must stay altogether. Should Sibylla take Alfred, he will enter the brewery at once. The engagement would last some time, as neither Sibylla nor I are anxious to part. Not that we should part, for we should all live together. Don't let Alfred reckon too surely on his good fortune, as I still trust Sibylla will understand that she ought to make a better match. I shall expect you by the first of next month; that gives you three weeks to pack up. Your loving brother-in-law, Ignatius Boksman, Brewer.

P.S. – This invitation does not, of course, include your daughter, whom you will have the goodness not to bring, as Sibylla dislikes her exceedingly. I dare say she can stay with some of her probably numerous friends.

P.P.S. – Is there no question as yet of your daughter's engagement? She is four months older than Sibylla, who has already had several offers." (*A Question of Taste*, 154-155)

beginning with “Like most...” or “As is the case with most people...”, the narrative frequently underlines that aspect of Joris as the average civil servant. Joris remains nonetheless at the centre of interest for his own sake as a human being: circumstances and propensities have clearly made the man the way he is. The author does not imbue him with anything alien to his personality as conceived by the reader. Take, for example, his initially rational and unemotional way of becoming interested in the girl, Ada. The way it gradually buds into real affection for her comes from within him. At the same time this novel, too, is a process of initiation, enabling Joris to react against his past and liberate himself from a lifelong devotion to his dear departed mother.¹⁵⁸

As Maartens tends to rely more on dramatic dialogue, descriptive passages of clear-cut realism are relatively seldom. In general, a little more of the narrator’s presence would have been of benefit to the novels. In *A Question of Taste*, dialogue and description are balanced. They testify of a perfect blend of humour and psychological observation. The story contains all that is needed to create a complete illusion of reality. It evokes a Thackeray in a more modern style, but with the well-known ingredients preserved and well poised: irony for the hero, and satire for all the other participants in the comedy, including the sarcasm with which a ‘type’ like Mevr. Romeyn, (the ‘tough mother’) is rendered. That there are also, for the first time, some passages of sarcasm which impair the author’s objectivity is a problem to be dealt with extensively in due course.

As Maartens’ novels gain in scope as well as in length, he increasingly has difficulty balancing out his characters evenly within the larger framework. His concentration on the main protagonist and the mere caricature-like depiction of his other people are better proportioned in the shorter novels, such as *A Question of Taste*. Here, the author manages to keep his main character at the centre of interest, both as a character and as a caricature: both in his private as well as in his public aspects. Joris is an engrossing character in spite of his humdrum appearance. The balance between realism and satire enables the reader to identify with Joris emotionally while at the same time it allows him to smile benevolently at his dependence on conventions.

¹⁵⁸ To what degree his inner rebellion to that past has advanced becomes obvious on the occasion of Joris’ birthday. His maidservant has decorated the little table as it used to be done by his mother. The high-strung narrative that prepares the way to the dramatic clash between them is a typical example of Maartensian clear-cut realism, see *A Question of Taste*, 194-197.

II.5. Christian ideals crushed: *God's Fool* (1892)

Maarten Maartens' next novel, *God's Fool*, presents a further development in his blending of benevolent satire with psychological realism.¹⁵⁹ It is now evident that character perception in the novels of Maarten Maartens offers a thread by which to pursue their course. From a certain angle *God's Fool* could also be called a “novel without a hero” because of Elias Lossell's inherently lessened state of consciousness: he is partially deprived of his senses. At the age of nine Elias Lossell, the eldest son of a wealthy businessman, incurred a head injury in an accident caused – not entirely involuntarily – by his stepbrother. Although of less impact to the development of the plot than in the preceding novels, the accident, right at the beginning of the story, is yet another instance of the ambiguity of motive that we first encountered in *Joost Avelingh*. Besides being deaf, blind and ‘vocally challenged’, Elias is also touched in the head.¹⁶⁰ As the shadows over his clouded awareness deepen as he matures, there is a deepening intuitive lucidity in this blemished angelic creature. For this reason his mental state rather than his often mentioned Aryan physique (i.e. broad shoulders, muscular body, blond curls) permeates the story. Elias Lossell rarely speaks, his monosyllabic utterances are invariably elementary. The one exception where he quite succinctly expresses his wishes and his brother deliberately misunderstands him, is a pivotal point in the story.

Maartens grappled with (what he considered) his problem of rendering a character lasting. It was his ardent wish that his characters should seem as life-like, as real as possible. This he considered to be one of the novelist's supreme goals.¹⁶¹ As far as his own achievement up to that point was concerned he now put his hopes on Elias. Maartens doubtlessly intended to portray his hero in stark contrast to the surrounding and all-pervading mediocrity reflected by most of the other characters. It is, therefore, a case of spirituality versus vulgar materialism in which the hero is an over the top projection of the author's idealism. We do not know enough of Elias to conceive of him as a living presence. The specific ramifications of Elias as a

¹⁵⁹ Maarten Maartens, *God's Fool* (London: Bentley; Leipzig: Tauchnitz 1892); page numbers in the text refer to the Tauchnitz edition; due to the euphoric tenor of the initial reception, particularly by German reviewers, this novel persistently kept its aura of being Maartens' masterpiece. It eventually led to the publication of a new translation in Holland: Maarten Maartens, *De Dwaas Gods* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1975); the attempt at reintroducing the author to a new readership failed.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Vocally challenged’ as politically correct Americans are wont to put it nowadays, meaning that instead of forming sentences he can only utter groaning sounds interspersed with single words.

¹⁶¹ *Letters*, 6.1.1895, 96-97. According to Goetsch, in his study on the novel of transition, the novel became the medium for the immediate expression of a subjective point of view on life, on the world. This determined its fascination and, lastly, its plausibility. He quotes Galsworthy, who wrote that art in general acquired a quality of mystery more needful to it even than finality, since the mystery that wrapped a work of art was the mystery of its maker, and the mystery of its maker was the difference between that maker's spirit and every other spirit, cf. “Meditation on Finality”, *English Review*, III (1909), 538, quoted in *Romankonzeption*, 84.

character preclude the very goal the author had in mind. More than anything else we are inclined to think of him as a living spirit. Hubert and Hendrik on the other hand, his two stepbrothers, are not more than types of the social class they are meant to represent. As it happened, *God's Fool* was, more than any of the preceding works, acclaimed for its idealist dimension as well as for its detailed Dutch framework.

Maartens dedicates his book to “ALL MY FELLOW-KOOPSTADERS in the four vast quarters of our mean little globe.”¹⁶² It is not his purpose to focus on the Dutch in particular, but merely to present a picture of human life as he sees it, beyond that as an illustration of his own vision of mankind: a universal humanity in Dutch clothes as it were. It would be highly amazing if Maartens had stuck to his assumption that his ‘fool’ had sufficient contours to continue to ‘exist’ as a well-rounded character in the reader’s imagination. On the contrary: none of Maartens’ characters is more of an abstraction, not only in terms of idealist principles but in a physical sense as well, in spite of the recurrent references made to his perfect body, which are oddly in contrast to his physical and mental inabilities. Even Elias’ appearance at his brother’s wedding, in a conventional evening dress, cannot disrupt his angel-like radiance:

That evening-dress which the Dutch still commonly wear at weddings and which is not nearly so unbecoming, after all, as some enthusiasts would made us believe (the man who looks like a waiter in a white tie, will look like a groom in a red one), that evening dress, which, like most other much-maligned evils, survives all attacks, sat easily and not ungracefully on Elias’s massive frame. The fair curls fell in a bright flood over his shoulders, and the beard – no razor had ever touched it – now lay soft and silky on the manly chest. His golden fairness wrapped the blind man’s head in an aureole of sunlight; he walked erect, with a tranquil purity over his features, and, as he turned to take his seat in the half circle of relations which Dutch etiquette groups around the two principal personages, his sightless eyes shone forth in all their fathomless unconsciousness – as cloud-veiled lakes of dark transparency – upon the Alerses and the Lossells and all their roots and fruits and branches, upon Koopstad, moneyed and mercantile, majestic, meritorious and mean. (Vol. 1, 262-263)

The interest lies in Elias’s capacity to *feel* life, to feel the essentials rather than think them; his power is visionary in the sense that, by feeling, he perceives what *is* beyond the merely visible. His life in the dark therefore, with the fulfilment of the heart, is inconceivably rich compared to the ‘visual’ (i.e. blind) life of the ongoing materialistic strife that surrounds him.¹⁶³ Elias indeed has the kind of radiance of a prophet whenever he is confronted with

Even if there is no mystery of the author Maartens as the maker of *God's Fool*, mystery is evoked in the creation of its hero, Elias.

¹⁶² *God's Fool*, Dedication.

¹⁶³ Elias’ is Dutch for ‘Elijah’; he has the allegorical significance of the prophet ignored by the crowd. The biblical reference is in *Matthew* 11, 12-15: “From the time John preached his message until this very day the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered many attacks, and violent men try to seize it. Until the time of John all the prophets and the law of Moses spoke about the kingdom; and if you are willing to hear their message, John is Elijah, whose coming was predicted. Listen, then, if you have ears!” Similarly the ‘blindness’ of the people in Koopstad (Dutch for ‘consumer city’) prevents them to see the prophet in Elias; they see nothing but a fool, “his

other mortals, a radiance the author subdues by revealing Elias' mental deficiencies throughout with a light ironical touch. Without this, Elias would have been even less plausibly a realistic character. A chapter in which we dwell in Elias's inner world is like an unworldly dream-island surrounded by the clear-cut reality of the 'Koopstad' chapters.¹⁶⁴ That scission effectively strengthens the contrast between the two worlds: Elias's inner world of emotion and intuition on the one hand, the outer world of facts and figures of the remaining characters on the other hand. As his communication with that outside world is limited, not only because of his inabilities but also because he is deliberately kept away from it as much as possible by his guardians, he does not become corrupted by it, as all the others do, in one way or another. Within the Maartensian concept of a reality beyond the visual, factual world, Elias is the only protagonist who is *not* deranged, that is to say, he is still able to perceive the unity of Creation with his spirit ("And he opens his great eyes on the world. But he does not know they are open." Vol. 2, 83).¹⁶⁵ Not so all the others, who can see with their eyes only, and where everything is parcelled up into divided interests.

The ultimate clash between the two worlds is inevitable. Gradually, as the gap grows wider, the reader is being prepared for that clash to come. Long before, however, his thoughts have been geared towards the impending murder. In the chapter cynically called "Blind Justice", Hubert reads to his wife, selected by herself, a passage from *Kingsley's Life and letters*.¹⁶⁶ In the following there is no question that she deliberately seeks to egg on her husband. To what extent the subtle yet ferocious urging of this Lady Macbeth influences Hubert's thoughts and feelings, the reader can see for himself:

Presently he came to that bit about "the taking away of human life" in one of the letters to Thomas Cooper, the Chartist: "After much thought, I have come to the conclusion that you cannot take away *human* life. That *animal* life is all you can take away; and that very often the best thing you can do for a poor creature is to put him out of this world, saying, 'You are evidently unable to get on here. We render you back into God's hands that He may judge you, and set you to work again somewhere else, giving you a fresh chance as you have spoilt this one.'" He laid down the book. [...] He had read for his wife's pleasure, untouched in his heart. "That is strikingly put," he said thoughtfully, "very strikingly put."(vol. 2, 168)¹⁶⁷

blindness uplifted in the vulgar light of their little day" (vol. 1, 262). Elias not only exemplifies more than any other character Maartens' moral idealism, he equally personifies the author's *aesthetic* concept of a reality beyond the visible.

¹⁶⁴ As the titles indicate, for example: Part One, ch. V, "Light and Shade"; Part Two, Ch. I, "Compos Mentis"; Part Three, Ch. I, "A Fool's Thoughts".

¹⁶⁵ Maartens' concept of reality is insofar Platonian, since, according to Plato, life could only attain a sense if the artist acknowledged the ideal world as a visionary reality of existence.

¹⁶⁶ The correct title being *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of Life*, ed. F.E. Kingsley, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1879).

¹⁶⁷ *Kingsley*, vol. 1, 299.

Parallel to the family's attempts to communicate with the outer world, also in the name of Elias – after all he is the official heir to the mercantile empire – there is the story of the married life of Elias' other half-brother Hendrik and his wife Cornelia. While the reader is always aware of Elias' presence in the background, there are seventy pages dealing exclusively with the development of their marriage, and Elias's impact on their relationship.¹⁶⁸ Yet the story of this relationship, with its gradual increase of insight into the enormous discrepancies between its two protagonists, could easily stand by itself as a splendid short novel.

In reality, Hendrik is no more than the manager of his disabled brother, a difficult and humiliating position. In depicting Hendrik's personal conflict between his own interests and those of his brother's and his wife's, Maartens chose one of the issues *en vogue* in the realism of the day: How to cope with the increasing demands on a businessman's energy on the one hand and his emancipated wife's increasing demands for self-fulfilment on the other? The novel anticipates what will become a central theme in a number of his later novels as well as short stories: the marriage question. In dealing with the issue, Maartens reveals himself to be no less a master than, say, William Dean Howells in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), with the advantage that Maartens' acute directness of his style increases the dramatic effect. This is the case whenever he mixes the narrative of the realist with the right dose of satire as, for example, in Chapter VI. It entirely does justice to its satirical title "The bride asks for flowers on her path". There is so much vigour in these altercations between husband and wife; again it would be perfect as a short story, without a word left out or added.¹⁶⁹

Of course Hendrik is going to lose this battle, as men in Maartens' stories are bound to do when their path crosses with that of a woman who has led a tedious fight up the social ladder to a position at his side through much hardship and more humiliation. Where love is idealised, a woman sacrifices herself, as in *Joost Avelingh*. Where it is not, the relationship becomes veritably trench warfare. Cornelia's plain speaking is amazingly modern from our standpoint, emancipated and self-conscious considering the time it was written: the woman's victory in all aspects. Indeed the question arises who is being oppressed here, the man or the woman, but the real issue is that she *will not be* oppressed:

"You *must* understand, Henk. I want you to treat me fairly, without any further promptings on my part. The period for which I bound myself is over, but I do not want to appeal directly to that argument. Treat me fairly. Only treat me fairly. There is surely no reason for this continued standing aloof, half in enmity, half in distrust. We have had enough of it. Set your own conscience at rest, and give me my due." "You want more

¹⁶⁸ Vol. 1, 180-252.

¹⁶⁹ God's Fool, 221-224.

money,” said Hendrik doggedly. How much is your due? “My due,” cried Cornelia, with blazing eyes, “is to be treated honourably as your wife, and not, year after year, as your housekeeper or your landlady. It is a pity we cannot understand each other without such very plain speaking, for the people who require that in their intercourse with each other have but a poor chance of sympathizing at all. I am not your servant, Hendrik, to be content with my money pittance, and I refuse to have my wages raised. I have not come to ask for ‘more money’ as you put it. I believe I represent nothing else to you than an employee incessantly clamouring for a rise of ninepence a week. And you consider you ignore my clamouring, because you remember I cannot ‘go on strike.’”(Vol 2, 96-97)

At such moments of intense dramatic built-up, there is no room for the satire, which usually renders the discrepancy between the author’s concept of ideal life and its harsh reality extreme.¹⁷⁰ Time and again and notwithstanding all the pragmatic observation of the realist in him, Maartens holds on to the illusion of disinterested love, yet at the same time that very awareness of the matter-of-fact-reality surrounding him requires him to have that very illusion cracked up. There is a surprising new element in the narrative method, as if the author needed to disrupt his own traditional narrative method to distance himself from his themes, as well as to distort the readers’ illusion. At one point, after the narrator has been seriously engaged in characterising Elias, there is suddenly this: “And you, if you loved him, perhaps you would also understand him better. And yet, as you do not love him – Nay, throw down this book. There is the evening paper just come in, with to-day’s stock exchange. They’re up, I believe.”(vol.1, 174)

Authorial digressions in the guise of the narrator, serving to disrupt the reader’s illusion, may seem modern for the very reason that they run counter to the methods of realism. However, this is another technique Maartens had learnt from Thackeray, one of the great realists *avant la lettre*. Such digressions increasingly become part of his method from *God’s Fool* onwards, but in this novel he already passes beyond Thackeray: It contains distinctly modern instances where the narrator satirizes his own intrusions, seemingly rejecting them.¹⁷¹

II.6. Yielding to fate is not to surrender: *The Greater Glory* (1894)

According to two critics writing in retrospect on the entirety of Maartens’ published works, his next lengthy novel, *The Greater Glory: A Story of High Life*, marked the consolidation of

¹⁷⁰ Nobody could object that the ideals of the late-Victorians were not real, that they were not true to life. Indeed, the passions they called forth in man were most real, and insofar they constituted the most vital part of life. Still, the problem was that the discrepancy between their ideal and reality incessantly grew larger, cf. Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 79-80.

¹⁷¹ See in particular vol. 1, 70-72, for the narrator’s reflections on digressions; Maartens’ indebtedness to Thackeray is dealt with extensively in Ch. III; for questions of method, see Ch. IV.

his mode. Osbert Burdett, the English critic who wrote the only lengthy and objective general essay on the works of Maartens, observed about *The Greater Glory*:¹⁷²

Once its various opening strands have become woven into a central narrative, *The Greater Glory* is a better story than *God's Fool* [...]. In *The Greater Glory*, Maartens reached his maturity. It is the meeting point of his early and ripest work. The interactions of the upstart and the declining families on which the story hinges strain the long arm of coincidence a little, but once again we are aware of an imagination contemplating the wide landscape of society, of a rich power for conceiving widely different characters, while a tendency appears to multiply episodes. His novels become longer as each episode in them is elaborated.¹⁷³

Maartens' "Story of High Life" takes place entirely in Dutch aristocratic circles. Writing directly "on the premises", as it were, he introduces the novel with a note in which he declares "once for all, and most emphatically, that my books contain no allusions, covert or overt, to any real persons, living or dead." This seems necessary indeed, considering the extent to which Maartens abounds in filling out every possible corner with another type of human being wrapped up in anecdotal garment. Fascinated as he is by everything, he often has no choice, metaphorically speaking, but to leave his main track, to sit back and report not only what came across his way, but also what he managed to get a glimpse of, happening in the side alleys. Sometimes Maartens intersperses these observations with reflections of his own, but mostly he takes the guise of the omniscient narrator who, having had the privilege to be present at the spot at the time, now takes pleasure in relating his reminiscences.

According to the second critic, Van Maanen, there are "fewer digressions, fewer personal apostrophisings [sic] combined with a more closely knit, better balanced intrigue" which accounts for the "decided improvement upon the preceding novels."¹⁷⁴ Whatever the definition of the term "Maartensian" will ultimately turn out to be, there can be no doubt that here we have Maartens 'at his best': He has found his way of giving shape to what he called his 'temperament' with, as Burdett put it, "the experience of a practised author behind him".¹⁷⁵

The author puts an "Argument" (to which he adds, oddly enough, "which none need read") ahead of the story. While it instantly introduces the typical Maartensian irony, this peculiar

¹⁷² Maarten Maartens, *The Greater Glory* (London: Bentley, 1894). Up to March 1894, it ran in episodes in the *Temple Bar* and was simultaneously published in the collection of British and American authors by Tauchnitz; page indications are from this edition.

¹⁷³ Osbert Burdett, "The Novels of Maarten Maartens", in *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (July 1931), 120-121; written on the occasion of the publication of the *Letters*; fifteen years had lapsed over Maarten Maartens in silence. In a letter to Ada Schwartz, Lodewijk van Deyssel, the reputed critic who had also written on Maartens, announced an extended essay on Maartens' prose, but he never accomplished his intention. (Manuscript letter, unpubl., Maartens archive).

¹⁷⁴ Van Maanen, 72.

¹⁷⁵ Burdett, 120.

statement throws a shadow over the story that is now to follow: The “Angel of God is dead”; he can no longer guide man’s course through life. The author precludes upon his theme of the clash between the two family branches, the ‘old’ and the *parvenu* Rexelaers: the moral and feudal principles of the old aristocracy stand no chance against the decay of all values of this day and age of crass materialism. Yet exemplified by the steadfast dignity and inflexible pride of the old Baron, the novel is an appeal in favour of those values up to the very end, and in spite of all evidence to the contrary. The dilemma of being at the crossways between the past and the present, under the looming sky of a grim future, corroborates the afore-quoted Burdett observation about Maartens’ maturity: although we become but gradually aware of it, this dilemma is the central theme of *The Greater Glory*.

In spite of the narrator’s persistent and subtle irony, recurrent at regular intervals, and regardless of the frequently satirical context, there are moments where we start doubting the author’s impartiality. This is the case, for example, when we have just been informed about the faithful servant Antoine, negotiating with the priest the price of a mass celebrated in commiseration of his master, the Marquis, who is ill. The narrator’s interjection might be considered a sermon cast by an irascible priest upon his flock of humble and awestruck parishioners, while he is towering above them in his pulpit:

You who laugh in your souls at reading of this man’s thinkings, has the littleness of your life so dried up the tears within you that you have none left to weep over its majesty struck down in the dust? O God, all-loving, all-wise, all-terrible, this then is thy service in the latter day of Thy mercy, and we, Thy faithless, self-deceiving children, holding up our rags to shield us from Thy radiance, we call upon these, in their filthiness, and hail them as God! From the religions of our inheriting, our imbibing, our creating – from all religions but of Thine implanting – deliver us, O Lord!”(171-172)

As Thackeray at the beginning of *Vanity Fair*, Maartens projects his story into a past that is sufficiently far removed from the present to cast an aura of the innocence of “the good old times” over the narrative. As in *Vanity Fair*, that illusion will break up soon enough. With more soberness of style and setting, the author yet aims at a tone of epic description reminiscent of the opening of *Vanity Fair*:

On that sixth of October, then, somewhere towards the first sink of the sun down a white-blue autumn sky, a hackney-cab drew up, with a farewell rattle, in front of an outlying Amsterdam railway-station, away on the desolate dyke. The silver daylight rested cold upon the wooden shed, upon the great grey square, with its solitary kiosk, upon the dull expanse of water beyond. Across the loneliness a cruel little wind came persistently blowing. Inside the building a sudden bell rang out, with the very insolence of noise.(19)¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ The beginning of *Vanity Fair*: “While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton’s academy for young ladies, on

Traditionally, as in Victorian novels, the chapters carry titles, which give a clue to their contents as well as to the characters they introduce. The author provides descriptions of scenery in a leisurely manner and yet to the point. The characters are felt to ‘breathe’ in their natural setting, their personal psychological structure having been embedded in natural surroundings, which become emotively functional in their turn.¹⁷⁷

His social satire not being less radical than Thackeray’s, Maartens does not have his ironical subtleness of approach.¹⁷⁸ Mostly he is much more direct, saying things as they are – no more and no less. Social criticism is not one of the implicit results of the narrative, as in Thackeray, but in this novel it passes directly through the initiation process of the hero: Reinout, the son of the parvenu Rexelaer, is increasingly repelled by his father’s *nouveau riche* world of finance in which the latter expects his son, as a matter of course, to participate.

Van Maanen was correct in assuming that there are many autobiographical elements in the narrator’s account of Reinout’s confrontation with his own social class. Maartens knew only too well what he was talking about. He was only too familiar with the paraphernalia of such an existence. Reinout’s gradual disentanglement from his family bonds mirrors, on the fictional level, Maartens’ attempts at his own liberation from a socially stifling environment.

The catalogue of recurrent themes is further enlarged by the antagonisms that exist between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, antagonisms occurring in the ‘low’ life of the mercantile class as well as in the ‘high’ life of the aristocracy.

Up to this point in Maartens’ novels, the omniscient narrator has kept a certain distance. At the beginning of chapter four of *The Greater Glory*, we are informed by the narrator who professes himself to be a member of the illustrious family he describes: The Rexelaer feud

Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour” (W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* [New York: Odyssey, n.d.], 1). For a general assessment of the novel, see Edgar F. Harden, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (New York: Twayne, 1995), as well as his extensive bibliography for further reading.

¹⁷⁷ The beginning of chapter XII offers a telling example of this: The Baron has an encounter with his best friend’s housekeeper that leaves him somewhat agitated. He decides to go for a walk: “The Baron’s anger had cooled somewhat before he reached the little postern which leads from the bottom of the lane into his own park. He walked slower, having started with a run. And his footsteps suddenly died into stillness on the sodden leaves which filled up the narrow by-path, as he wound slowly forward into a wilderness of russet and gold. Evening was falling, with that tearful sadness which often heralds an autumn sunset, and the pale sky was visibly growing gray and blurred above the sharp outlines of the fading trees. His own trees. He knew them, individually. You cannot understand, unless you have had trees yourself. They possessed faces with which they met his eyes, in every chance of joy or sorrow. He knew them as the colonel of a regiment knows, or should know, his numerous men. He had always had a ready approval for the fine fellows that did their work bravest, budding early and blooming late, but also a gentle thought of indulgence for the weak ones, the stragglers, and an understanding that their lesser beauties were not so much the result of evil intention as an accident of circumstance or place. He stopped today before an old oak, far-spreading and stately, but dead at the top. He eyed it lovingly. It stood, sombre, and lonely, in a little clearing, bordered by a curve of lighter trees. He remembered how it had begun to decay in his father’s time”(122-123).

¹⁷⁸ Amongst the many works available dealing with satire, see e.g. Rawson, Claude, ed., *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

originated in the seventeenth century schism between Catholicism and Protestantism, in the course and the aftermath of which many Dutch aristocratic families were split. Ever since that period, and not only within the aristocracy but within all layers of Dutch society, the adherents to either creed alternately believed they possessed the sole claim to salvation and believed themselves entitled to suppress, or at least despise those who thought different and lived accordingly, however slight the difference may have been in practice. It is the age-old opposition not between individuals but between creeds, reflected in certain types of characters that appear at each corner of Maartens' social panorama.

On a lower social level, Father Bulbius, the Roman Catholic priest, is one of the most outstanding examples of a character who stands above the suffocating mechanisms of social prejudice – he simply personifies the Christian ideal of fraternity.

While adding digressions in the Thackerayan manner, Maartens explicitly gives proof that he is not unaware of their retarding impact on the plot. For example, the history of the parvenu count Rexelaer is the portrayal of the snob prototype, the would-be aristocrat, perfectly suited to take his place in Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*. That history is part of the central theme. The narrator then relates the activities of a real nobleman, the Marquis de la Jolais, to show how the latter got involved with the Rexelaer van Deynum estate. When we come to that point at last, the threat of yet another digression causes the narrator to arrest himself for an instant: "It was he who had – ah, but that is a nasty story. Better let it alone"(166), only to continue his previous tale.¹⁷⁹

By now Maartens has a fixed set of themes occurring in all of his novels: It becomes a question of merely shifting weights. *The Greater Glory* is an exposition of Maartens' concept of aristocratic honour as opposed to *parvenu* opportunism, clothed in a novelistic form. The author had been in a position to observe that social phenomenon frequently in his own surroundings. The decay of values, as he saw it, was one of the great personal frustrations he needed to vent in his novels. There is an implicit and idealistic appeal in favour of those values, notwithstanding the satirical and caricature undertones, which prove to what extent the author was aware of their irretrievable nature.

II.7. Woman on the way to herself: *My Lady Nobody* (1895)

Regardless of what might possibly be said to the detriment of Maartens' ensuing novel, *My Lady Nobody*, it has two positive traits that distinguish it from its predecessors: It is not only

¹⁷⁹ The problem of digressions is treated more particularly in ch. IV.

the first book in which the main protagonist is a woman, but it is the only of Maartens' books in which the plot develops from a misalliance between the heroine and her husband: Ursula, the daughter of a middle class clergyman, marries a nobleman, Baron van Belmont. In the course of the events that follow, Ursula is forced to struggle in order to earn everybody's respect based upon nothing else but her own merit. The odds are against her right up to the end, but ultimately Ursula Rovers, the 'nobody' of the story, vanquishes fate and class prejudice.

My Lady Nobody and its predecessor, *The Greater Glory*, have in common that they deal with the degeneration of the aristocracy. That is why critics were led to presume the two novels to form a pair.¹⁸⁰ Here again, as he had first set out to do in *Joost Avelingh* and *A Question of Taste*, Maartens endeavours to have his story more accurately and organically built up around a central character. One feels, however – more than in any of the preceding books – that the author has not entirely lived up to his own temperament, a temperament requiring of him that if the narrative is to be fruitful he should take – or at least seem to take – constant pleasure in the very act of narration. As long as this is the case, his creative impulse is invigorated by the given situation 'on the spot' so to speak, and his writing suddenly becomes excellent, particularly in the dialogues between the protagonists.

In *My Lady Nobody*, Maartens unfortunately dilapidates into a labyrinth of side issues, which make such refreshing instances stand out rather by themselves. They come suddenly like sprinkling rivulets, but end up all too soon in pools of stagnant water. Osbert Burdett criticised the structure of Maartens' novels in general, but he particularly referred to *My Lady Nobody* when he stated that not even Van Maanen could "clearly and shortly summarize the plot or disentangle [...] the central story from the cluster of detachable episodes."¹⁸¹

That Maartens found himself at odds with his narrative method as well clearly ensues from a letter by James Barrie, in which he nevertheless encourages Maartens to persist in his own mode, even if he hints at the need for a new direction: "I think my strongest impression from *My Lady Nobody* is that you would do an unworthy thing, be false to yourself in short if you abated one jot of vigour in your expression of what you consider the rotting thing in Dutch life. That has always been my view, and now it is strengthened, so much so that I feel you are at the parting of the ways."¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Maarten Maartens, *My Lady Nobody: A Novel* (London: Bentley, 1895). In January of the same year it began to run as a serial in *The Graphic*. See Van Maanen, 78 and Burdett, 121.

¹⁸¹ Burdett, 124

¹⁸² "From James Barrie", 15 7 1895, *Letters*, 108. In his book *A Window in Thrums* (1889, repr. 1892), Barrie used Scottish dialect and anecdotes to amuse British readers, with banal commonplaces about provincial life. His being a Scotsman placed him in a better position to understand Maartens, and may have added to the

In terms of form and structure, Maartens had reached a certain level of maturity in *The Greater Glory*, but in terms of thematic scope his level is considerably enlarged in his ensuing novel, *My Lady Nobody*. His catalogue of themes is completed by what is, in fact, a variety of his central theme of initiation: woman not only striving for recognition, emancipation and independence but, moreover, succeeding in the realisation of her intentions.

When *My Lady Nobody* appeared in 1895, women's emancipation had fully become an issue and at the centre of public interest at that. It was no longer limited to an intellectual loss of 'blue-stockings'. The periodicals and women's magazines give ample proof to that effect. Maartens' novel is actually a book *about* women: they dominate the scene, the action and, very often, the point of view is *theirs*. Ursula's friendly feelings towards Harriet arise from a deep intuitive awareness of the need for solidarity between women belonging to the same class, fighting for survival against the more privileged.¹⁸³ Towards the end, in a superb and dramatically realistic scene, we are shown how Ursula ultimately wins her battle.¹⁸⁴

From *My Lady Nobody* onwards, the special bond between father and daughter is to become another recurrent theme.¹⁸⁵ In this novel Ursula's father, the "dominee", has been instrumental in the process of her emancipation. He was – and had been – the only man in her life she could trust and absolutely rely on. Her upbringing resulted in a sensitivity of character that showed itself in speech and demeanour possessed by all of Maartens' heroines; in other words the opposite of all things artificial. They have the spontaneity and innocence of a child, until

feelings of affiliation that existed between them. Maartens wrote a lyrical essay that showed his deep affinity with Scotland: "Scotland, an Impression" for the *Woman at Home*, August 1905. Cf. Viola Meynell, ed., *The Letters of J. M. Barrie*. (London: Peter Davies, 1942).

¹⁸³ Considering the modern directness of narrative with which Harriet's crisis is related, *My Lady Nobody* anticipates, in style as well as in theme, a short novel like *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, which appeared in 1899: "Harriet's words came stumbling and tossing; she thrust out her limbs and the muslin fell away from them. 'It's womanly to live on day by day in bitterness, with every womanly feeling hourly insulted and estranged; after a year more, perhaps, of this, to go to some fresh situation and look after other people's children, and when you are worn out at last, to die, soured and in want. That's honest independence, that's womanly modesty. Well, then, I'm immodest. Do you understand me?' She threw herself wildly forward. I'm immodest. I want love. I just told you now I didn't want the old scoundrel's money. I don't. But I want love. I want love. And I mean to have it. A woman has a right to love and be loved. I won't be some lazy rich woman's substitute, with brats I don't care for. I want to love children of my own. Children that love me when I kiss them. I love my own body.' She fell back again, and her eager voice died into a pensive murmur; while speaking, she softly stroked her rounded arm. 'I love it, and I want others to love it also. I want to belong to someone besides my lonely self. Great Heaven, don't you understand? – her tone grew shrill again – 'one's youth goes – goes. But you don't understand.' She stopped abruptly, just in time, and hid her face in her hand" (65-66); on the bond or opposition between women in different social contexts: Christine Palumbo-De Simone, *Sharing Secrets: Nineteenth-Century Women's Relations in the Short Story* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000); cf. Donald Pizer, "A Note on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as Naturalistic Fiction", *Southern Literary Journal* 33. 2 (2001), 5-13.

¹⁸⁴ On the balcony of the old family seat, Ursula's aristocratic mother-in-law, the old Baroness, comes to the defence of her daughter-in law, when the mob, vicious and envious, refuses to accept Ursula as lawful heir to the estate of the Horst: *My Lady Nobody*, 498-500.

¹⁸⁵ As his wife was bed-ridden most of the time, Maartens' own daughter, born in 1888, increasingly took the part of the companion his wife was no longer able to assume.

in early adulthood, the inexorable quality of life's experience stains the hitherto unsullied white leaf of their soul. In Ursula's case that stain comes from Gerard, her brother-in-law, with whom she is obviously in love, although throughout the novel the heroine herself seems to remain unaware of the fact. During a visit to the dressmaker's, Ursula recognises the servant as one of the women who had come, a few days before, to the 'tryst': five women, having all placed an advertisement to get married, had come to the same appointment. They were not aware that it was a trap, meant to be jocular, and set up by several men. Then these men had driven by swiftly to see the result of their enterprise and, among them, Ursula had recognised Gerard. After first giving proof of her innocence, to the point of naivety, she gradually becomes aware of the enormity of Gerard's behaviour: Ursula is one of Maartens' heroines who are shocked into the realisation of the ruthlessness of male sexuality in general.¹⁸⁶ She has a long way to go before her knowledge of the social structures actually existing around her and within her is profound enough to stir her growing inner resistance into open revolt.

As in all of Maartens' novels, revolt is the ultimate logical consequence of a long initiation process leading up to the heroine's awareness of the conditions of her social existence. In Ursula's case, confrontation with the truth about Gerard is a first turning point in that process. Her ideal concepts of morality are instantly disrupted, but it equally enables her to fathom her true feelings for Gerard. Of course she now feels that these must now be persistently rejected. Some time later, but still early in her marriage with Gerard's elder brother, Otto van Belmont, the first actual signs of revolt occur. After we have witnessed the typical scene of a married couple discussing some domestic issue, the matter can now be concluded as Ursula presumes:

"So that will be all right. Don't worry, dear, I'll see to it myself." "No, I think you had better not," reasoned Otto gravely. "I – I think I had better do it. My mother, you see, Ursula, will take anything of that kind more easily from me." He hurt her cruelly, for it was by no means the first time she had just been checked in the well-meant endeavour to assume her legitimate duties. She turned away in silence, and took up some needlework. Somehow he realized, helplessly, that things were again uncomfortable. "My dear child," he explained, "it is only because I am anxious to shield you." But she stopped him. "I don't want to be shielded," she said, quickly; "at least, not *always*." And she beat back her emotion, looking away, with trembling lip. He stood uncertain, gazing at her, and his eyes grew half-reproachful. "Oh, of course, you don't understand!" she exclaimed,

¹⁸⁶ *My Lady Nobody*, 97: "Ursula was trembling from head to foot. Shielded and sheltered through all her simple girlhood, she had never come into contact – whether by actual experience or in literature – with any such vision of shame as this. She compared her own happy, unshadowed life with the struggle of the girl before her. And, full of compassion, she thanked God for the difference. For, to the very backbone which held her erect, she was womanly and pure. [...]", see 97-100; for a general survey of the patterns of role behaviour of the sexes, see J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, eds., *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991).

unwillingly reading his thoughts. “You have married a plaything, Otto. You cannot comprehend my wanting to be a wife.” “My dear child – “ he began. He too constantly called her that. She detested the name. She knew well enough how much he was her elder. “I am not your child,” she cried passionately. “I am a woman, and your wife.” (278-279)

Coming across a passage like this, women readily identified with Maartens’ heroines.¹⁸⁷ As the one quoted above, the drama of recurrent scenes begins with the assumption that men and women are so different in feeling, thinking and expression that any attempt at building bridges between them is bound to fail. Engendered by psychological motive, the plot determines the action, swiftly leading up to an acutely dramatic tension. It is in such scenes that one feels Maartens to be closest to the playwright in him.¹⁸⁸

II.8. The cosmopolitan view: *Her Memory* (1898)¹⁸⁹

With his short novel *Her Memory*, Maartens indeed stood at the parting of the ways, as Barrie had anticipated. He decidedly took a different direction in subject matter: It is his first artistic ‘excursion’ outside the Dutch panorama.¹⁹⁰ In size, *Her Memory* is comparable to a *Question of Taste*. They are also similar in giving absolute priority to the main character. The creation of Joris Middlestum had resulted mainly from the standpoint of a realist as well as a slightly satirical narrator taking an outward stance. Now the author unequivocally concentrates his entire attention on the character, the social situation and the emotional states of the main protagonist, Sir Anthony Stollard, from the psychological, inward point of view of the hero. For the first time in a novel by Maartens, there is no trace of Dutch scenery, manners and morals. Not only are the protagonists all English, but the book is also English in terms of setting and atmosphere.

¹⁸⁷ According to *The Washington Post* which interviewed Maartens during his visit to the United States in 1907, he referred as follows to his success, more particularly with a female American readership, as follows: “That [evidence] contained in the hundreds of letters that come to me from every quarter of the globe, that have made me humanly acquainted with your people before I visited them. These letters have been written to me by women who have found in my books [...] some note of understanding and sympathy. In these stories I have tried to depict the feminine heart. I have tried to show the unhappiness and tragedies that come about by the inevitable laws that rule the relations of man and woman” (21 April 1907).

¹⁸⁸ Something might be said for the conjecture that Maartens, more than a poet or a novelist, was a playwright at heart. Unpublished evidence of this is the play “The Sin of Hugh Manson”, a perfect gem, more effective in the treatment of the main theme than *Joost Avelingh*, the novel it is based upon.

¹⁸⁹ Maarten Maartens, *Her Memory* (London: Macmillan, 1898).

¹⁹⁰ Above all Maartens wished to prevent that the Dutch critics as well as ordinary readers, would merely take it as another *roman à clef*, as had happened with his previous books. Although a novel, it is much shorter than all of the preceding works. Up to the publication of *Her Memory*, Maartens’ books had not varied considerably in size (about 100.000 words), with the exception of a *Question of Taste* (48.000 words). Being of independent means, he was not obliged to comply with libraries’ demands for three-decker novels. He reached, like Dickens before him, a larger audience through serialisation. Cf. Introduction to George Gissing’s *New Grub Street*, by B. Bergonzi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 23-24.

For a number of years Maartens' had been frequently travelling all over Western Europe. As the plots of his novels generally have their source in the author's autobiography, this is one way to explain his passing beyond the Dutch boundaries. For example the scenes, vividly depicted, of Sir Anthony at the roulette tables at Monte Carlo and at the Riviera, recall the author's own experiences:

He wound down along the broad sweep to the station steps, amid the soft shrubberies and the moonlight. Crowds of people were leaving the gambling-rooms, all elegant, a trifle noisy, in a rustle of silks. With some difficulty he found a seat in the train, and had to abandon it at once to a lady. He took his stand, amongst others, in the long gangway, looking out to the splendid curves of illumined Mediterranean as the slow line of over-filled cars crept away along the coast. He barely heard snatches of talk about losing and winning; he barely noticed the diversity of attitudes, apathetic or truculent. Beside him, in the half-light, a little man pulled out a cigar-case, gold with a coronet in diamonds, and, replacing it in an inner pocket, began cautiously buttoning his coat. Anthony, observing the movement, edged away with a smile. (77)

In the following, we suspect the author's rejection of a world – the world of the rich – behind Sir Anthony's moral indignation:

Yes, he loathed the place. [...] The whole thing was hideous, most loathable, in its beautiful, blood-sodden attractions; loathable in the people who worked it, and the people who came. Most of all, in the people who came. Why, the 'people who came' formed the *whole* of cosmopolitan 'society.' Lady Mary had truly informed him that everyone who is anyone was here. It was the world which had pleased him for a moment that evening, the world Lady Mary had praised, while she scorned it – the life she had advised as a refuge against sorrow! Oh, sweet, oh, sacred sorrow! Oh, sweet, pure memory – on which each word of Lady Mary Hunt fell like a stain! (78)

Anthony's reaction to his experiences at Monte Carlo is typical for his attitude to all things he encountered since his wife's death, with the exception of his daughter and his art, painting. It culminates in the phrase "Oh, sweet, oh, sacred sorrow!" Not only is Anthony incapable of detaching himself from the isolated world of the memories that encase him; on the contrary he indulges in them. We understand why his mother-in-law describes him as a 'morbid' person: There is a maudlin tendency, cultivating and wallowing in a state of sorrow, and an eagerness to suffer.

Willem van Maanen stated that it was "not easy to detect in the life story of Sir Anthony Stollard any salient points of resemblance with that of the author,"¹⁹¹ yet the autobiographical substance can easily be detected by anyone who has some knowledge of Maartens' private circumstances. Up to this point in Maartens' prose, there was no such degree of self-identification of the author with his main character. Having the character of Sir Anthony

¹⁹¹ Van Maanen, 78. After her mother's death in 1924, Ada began collecting and editing her father's correspondence. Van Maanen may not have been able to study the extant autobiographical material while he prepared his thesis.

Stollard in mind, one concurs with the observations on Maartens made by his friend W.R. Nicoll.¹⁹²

Nicoll's observations point at the state of gloom of the author around the time of publication of *Her Memory*, the very mood that permeates the story. The sadness is like a large black curtain drawn against the background of the human scene. In spite of all the satire and social criticism, the depiction of the human scene had always been at the core of Maartens' novels, obsessed with it as he was, in the manner of Thackeray, as the natural and necessary pulse and flow of life. Here, while Sir Anthony takes refuge from this world in his painting, Maartens turns more seriously toward his own art. The change was partially due to the hostilities he had encountered in his own country.¹⁹³ By selecting an entirely foreign setting, he showed he was in no way dependent on his homeland for subject matter. However, we are dealing first and foremost with a psychological study, in which the location of the setting is not of the first importance. In artistic terms, *Her Memory* is arguably a milestone within the development of the author, because in this short novel, satire is levelled down to a minimum. It is of exceptional artistic value due to a standard of psychological realism, unparalleled in any of the preceding works.¹⁹⁴

When one compares the relationship between Stollard and his daughter to Maartens' own relationship with his daughter Ada, the psychological and emotional resemblance is striking.¹⁹⁵ Maartens gave imaginary and literary shape to his experiences with his daughter and, perhaps unconsciously, wrote to an extent in anticipation of certain events to take place afterwards. He published a short story called "The Facts", which is almost as directly

¹⁹² In a letter to A.T. Quiller-Couch, another of Maartens' friends, Nicoll wrote: "I do not quite know how to understand his melancholy, but I attribute it largely to the fact that he has nobody to talk to on the things in which he is interested. I am sure that a certain amount of human intercourse is essential for health of mind and body, and the consequence of his isolation is that he takes morbid and jaundiced views of everything (15.2.1900); *W. R. Nicoll: Life and Letters*, ed. H. Darlow (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 166.

¹⁹³ The Dutch attitude towards him had become a problem for Maartens, particularly now that, since the publication of *The Greater Glory*, the Dutch reading public became aware of a certain Maarten Maartens who was exposing their dirty laundry abroad, so they thought.

¹⁹⁴ In the conversations between the father and his daughter, the author subtly evokes the impulsive emotions engendered by the child's overtly instinctive psyche: "They had gone on to Siena. One evening, their walk being over, they were standing on the market-place there, behind the Palazzo Publico, with their backs turned to the untidy ascent of buildings and their eyes gazing down across the vast extent of plain. In the distance, rain-shadowed, hung the hills. Margie, who had insisted on taking her skipping-rope, now stood still, her cheeks flushed, her eyes far away. 'If I could see her face for just one teeny moment, I should *know*,' she said, suddenly, with vehemence. Anthony startled, but made no reply. 'Papa, I always knew at once whether mamma was pleased or not.' 'She would be pleased with you, Margie, you try to be good.' 'I don't mean that,' said Margie, marching off. [...] 'I can't help looking up, when I'm out walking,' she said. 'In all the pictures, in the churches, there's always lots of people looking out of heaven. Papa, does God *never* look out, now, as He did in Moses's time and Michel Angelo's?' 'Not for us to see Him,' said Anthony. 'But Michel Angelo saw Him dozens of times, and he didn't live so long ago, you said. It isn't like Moses, who died before grandma was born. [...] 'Why, if mamma could only look out for one minute, half a minute, only half a minute, I should know if she was happy up there.'"(94-97).

¹⁹⁵ A fact which becomes obvious *passim* in the *Letters*.

autobiographical as can be, but for the fact that setting is English and the names of the characters are fictional.¹⁹⁶ He actually describes his own home and domestic situation; naturally it was fiction to his readers, as they knew nothing of the private circumstances of this Dutchman. The most salient part of the story is that all is true but for the fact that his wife not only was still alive, she most likely read the story, apparently without objecting to its publication. Yet, she was a critical and astute proofreader. The story is, after all, the outcry of a man who feels abandoned and alone. Although Anna, Schwarz' wife, was physically present, he could not reach her most of the time, due to her illness.

Doubtlessly the impetus to write also stemmed from these private circumstances: In terms of emotional intimacy, his wife's permanent invalidity would increasingly compel him to associate almost exclusively with his daughter. That is where he drew the artistic inspiration for *Her Memory*, in an atmosphere of deep intimacy with his own child. Although his wife was not deceased as was Lady Mary (the wife of his main character Sir Anthony Stollard), Schwarz virtually lived alone with his daughter, his wife being hardly able to participate in everyday domestic life. With the exception of written notes there were long periods with hardly any communication between man and wife, necessitated by the fact that, due to her migraine, she could not bear to hear a human voice. Similar to Lady Mary in *Her Memory*, Anna too had, in a way, become more of an imaginary presence than a real one. *Her Memory* is an indirect autobiographical statement of the psychological hardships of such a life, even in materially most favourable circumstances.

There is another autobiographical aspect, completely different from the one mentioned above, but equally adding to the distinction between this novel and all of the preceding ones. In his books, Maartens never directly alluded to political and social issues of the day as, for example, Socialism or the Suffragette Movement. Evidently, a certain amount of political and social criticism is discernable in all of the works, but due to their satirical and comical Thackerayan mould, aloof amusement with the facts takes precedence over serious treatment. Equally in interviews regarding these matters, he expressed himself in as reserved a manner as possible. In the books he wrote before *Her Memory*, even when the satire is at a peak, one feels the author still – albeit somewhat half-heartedly – to assume modes of thinking typical for a representative of the leisured classes. Below the surface of the action in *Her Memory*, however, the author unveiled more of his own inner self than in any of his other published works before or after.¹⁹⁷ His detachment from traditional concepts on manners and morals is

¹⁹⁶ *The Illustrated London News* (Dec. 1911).

¹⁹⁷ That is to say, the "Van Weylerts", the 968-page manuscript written in 1887, before *Joost Avelingh*; brimful of unveiled autobiographical facts, it remained unpublished.

not only greater, but in a wide sense – political as well as moral – there is a deep longing for change. Maartens had elegantly cloaked his personal opinions under satire and humour. In *Her Memory*, satire and caricature have almost entirely disappeared. Unexpectedly yet irrevocably, its highly critical, emotional and sensitive hero escapes from the rigidly limited scope of the preconceived concepts of his own class.

Behind Sir Anthony Stollard one perceives the real identity of the author: an outward conformist to the principles of his class, he inwardly possessed, in a nucleus, the radical elements that make up the rebel. In his mind and soul he had not only begun to distance himself from those concepts; he was in the process of turning against them. It had started long before, and explains what Ada Schwartz meant when she called her father “a man with the manners of yesterday and the morals of tomorrow.”¹⁹⁸

Her Memory is also the testimony of an artistic temperament that is profoundly romantic: in his imagination the artist lives with his whole soul in the past, always reluctant to assume the present, and even less capable of presuming the future. In its disconsolate mood, the story touches upon the negative attitude to life that had begun to affect the arts in general and that would gradually permeate them in the decennia that followed. Under the label of modernism it would set the tone for the entire new century.

II.9. The search for a compromise: *Dorothea* (1904)¹⁹⁹

The economy of means and the narrative structure of *Her Memory* pointed in a new direction. After the publication of two volumes of short stories that we will discuss later on, Maartens returned to the novel with *Dorothea*, a story in which he deals more acutely than in any of his previous works with his own deepest concerns about the moral state of society as he perceived it. With the rapid spread of industrialism, spiritual values had been increasingly smothered by materialism in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. This is the problem at the root of the story that is situated at the turn of the century, when moral decay seems to have reached its culmination point.

Dorothea has been raised in provincial seclusion by members of her upper class Dutch family on her deceased mother's side. She is collected by her father, a frivolous and retired English army officer. He thinks it is time to introduce his daughter to the habits and morals – even if they be immoral – of the ‘real’ world; a world that she will soon discover to be vastly different from the isolated Dutch rural surroundings in which she was brought up.

¹⁹⁸ From amongst the remarks she added to the typescript of the *Letters*, Maartens archive.

Seen from the outside, there was no apparent reason to assume that Maartens, wealthy owner of a large country mansion, should harbour feelings of resentment against his own social class. It had provided him with the privilege of being at leisure to live entirely according to his own propensities. Particularly in *Dorothea*, however, the innocently charming and continuous flux of enchanting descriptions of life on the Riviera is repeatedly interrupted by the narrator's urge to rebuke the snobbishness of leisured inheritors of fortunes, as well as the ruthlessness of entrepreneurs, whose desire for material wealth had superseded all aspirations of a nobler kind.

Dorothea incorporates all the values, which are threatened by the Moloch of materialism: love, devotion, virtue, gratitude, duty and faith. The author carries his deeply rooted interest in the female character a step further: Not only is the central character a woman, like Ursula in *My Lady Nobody*; she is also a Dutchwoman experiencing crucial aspects of life in a foreign setting, the Mediterranean. In *Dorothea*, the negative depiction of the Riviera begun in *Her Memory* is continued even more penetratingly from the point of view of the heroine.

Although he felt indignant of the way society was changing, the hero of *Her Memory*, Sir Anthony Stollard, had still been able to observe the frantic frivolousness of the snobbish rich with the detached despise of the cosmopolitan aristocrat. For the disingenuous *Dorothea*, however, the confrontation between the principles she was imbued with in her childhood and the harsh facts of reality leads to a painstaking inner struggle, which she eventually manages to resolve in an attitude of compromise.

Even if the Maartensian canvas – with its many characters and lengthy digressions – returns in *Dorothea*, it does not digress unduly from the nucleus of interest: the underlying spiritual conflicts. Bearing in mind the author's private sojourns on the Riviera, it is as if he needs to have his own experiences reverberate in the outer world by means of the creation of his characters.

There are other causes, which account for the author's renewed and increasing concentration on spiritual conflicts. The outbreak of the Boer War, just before the close of the century, had deeply affected him. By nature he was of a gloomy disposition, but this experience turned his mood permanently and increasingly towards a pessimistic perception of things. "This war is to me such suffering, so far and away the greatest sorrow of my whole life", he wrote to his friend, Mrs. Gosse.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Maarten Maartens, *Dorothea: A Story of the Pure in Heart* (London: Constable 1904).

²⁰⁰ In *Letters*, p. 184; quoted by Ada, the original letter could not be retraced. Nellie Gosse, the wife of the critic and writer Edmund Gosse, was one of Maartens' few close friends in England, with whom he entertained a lasting correspondence from the early eighteen nineties up to 1914.

Maartens takes the space and time required to embed his heroine in the surroundings and atmosphere of the two contrasting worlds: The world of her childhood that Dorothea has to leave behind, and the 'real' world that she has entered. In fact a third of the book has lapsed before the author actually provides the action that gives this disparity its momentum: The marriage of Dorothea and Egon. As Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon in *Middlemarch*, they marry for idealistic reasons, i.e., for the illusion they cherish about one another: Dorothea and Egon equally go to Florence for their wedding journey.²⁰¹ As in George Eliot's novel, the husband is a serious art student whose wife makes a futile attempt to enter the imaginary universe of her beloved Egon. Carrying her Baedeker and retracing the steps they have gone together earlier on, Dorothea tries to perceive art from his angle:

She sank down by a much-effaced slab in the pavement, bearing some faint presentation of a human figure with illegible inscriptions. She studied this dusty ruin very closely, with careful allusion to her pamphlet, sitting huddled beside the stone. Her air of concentration deepened, as did also the puckers of perplexity all over her fresh young face. "Dorothea, you shouldn't sit on the stones like that! Whatever are you doing?" She started violently: her angry eyes caught Egon's. "Don't! Go away. You are spying on me," she said. "Why, I hadn't the faintest idea you were here. I looked in to see what Muther means, when he says – never mind, come off the stones. I'll go away fast enough if you like." "No, you may stay. It's no good," said Dorothea, miserably penitent. "I didn't mean to be rude, Egon" – her lips trembled. "Only – I may as well tell you, for I can't bear secrets – Mr. Ruskin says, if you can see the difference between the drapery on C. Marsuppini's tomb and the folds on Galileo's grandfather's then you've got the artistic soul or eye, or something – and if you can't, you haven't, so I thought I'd try. You see; I never had any chance at Brodryck. And I've been trying my very hardest, and I thought I knew what he meant about the Marsuppini laces, but – but I'm afraid I can't really see anything at all! She had risen: her head sank on his breast, towards the slab at her feet. "Don't laugh," she said: but nothing was farther from her husband's intentions. He came and stood beside her, drew the little book from her grasp and scornfully thrust it into his pocket. (213)

Each phrase in the narrative preparing this scene between the two protagonists gradually reveals the gap existing between the two (211-213). At any given moment in the story, the narrative serves the purpose of revealing Dorothea's innocence, especially when new characters are introduced. Count Pini Pizzatelli for instance, who had already proposed to Dorothea before she met Egon, and Egon's 'bad' brother Konrad are two typical Maartensian examples of perverted upper class men. Being in Dorothea's presence rekindles an archetypal image of purity in them, an image of which most, but not all the fragmentary bits had atrophied from their soul. Count Pini realises that he would not have deserved her. Another degenerate, Lord Archibald, declares that, since his mother died, he had not met a good woman again until he came across Dorothea. Even her father, Colonel Sandring, is in awe of

²⁰¹ One involuntarily thinks of *Middlemarch*. This aspect of that novel may have inspired Maartens. The wedding tour to Italy being the actual parallel between the two novels, it is of no consequence to the aesthetic

her innocence and in dread of the possibility, always impending, that she should meet his present mistress. We increasingly become aware that her innocence, even as a married woman, extends to entire sexual naivety. When the first unmistakable general allusion to male adultery occurs, we are implicitly made to understand that it refers to Egon's fate. Thus the reader has been prepared: male adultery is now at the centre of interest.

Throughout the second half of the book we are persistently aware of the author's own antagonism between his moral rejection of adultery as such on the one hand, while on the other hand he is aware that circumstances may cause its inevitability. Maartens' moral rejection of adultery had been implicit already in *An Old Maid's Love*: in that novel there is an aura of immorality in Arnout's liaison with Madame de Mongelas, because it is implied that he has already given his heart to Dorothy. Although he is not married and no promise has been given or broken, yet it is implied he should be exclusively hers.

While we are left in the dark about the degree of intimacy of Arnout's affair with the French woman, one has the persistent impression that he is considered to have committed a sin. Fornication, a strongly implied theme in *An Old Maid's Love*, is turned into male adultery in *Dorothea*, finally to become fully explicit as female adultery only in his last published novel, *Eve*.

In *Dorothea* then, the scales have been tipped again. Once more the thematic scope of perception has been extended a little further. Still, as in all of Maartens' novels, we have some form of initiation into a segment of the outside world, hitherto unknown to the main character. Dorothea's father, Colonel Sandring, appears on the scene as the only messenger from that other 'nether' world.²⁰² Having never been a presence in her life before, he now wants to take care of her and help her along, at first out of some unsavoury mixture of moral indebtedness and piety for his deceased wife to whom he was unfaithful.²⁰³ However, his belated acceptance of his responsibility towards his daughter soon grows into real affection. In the course of one of their moral discussions, he tells her: "Dolly, you may reason till Doomsday: you can't change human nature. Your great mistake is that you assume what it ought to be and not what it is. I love you. I rejoice, child, to see you accumulate heavenly treasure, but I

perception that the illusions cherished by Dorothea and Egon are of a different nature.

²⁰² There is an unconvincing but similar case in *An Old Maid's Love*, where Arnout's father suddenly appears out of the blue to convince his son that his moral duties lie with Dorothy: In this respect he merely functions as the author's mouthpiece.

²⁰³ Conjectures inevitably impose themselves at this point as elsewhere: undoubtedly, Sandring is a reflection of the author's own feelings of guilt towards his wife, and even towards his own daughter. To have been merely unfaithful in thought would have been an unpardonable sin for a puritan spirit like Maartens.

tremble to think how you mix it up with the earthly and refuse to make any provision for moths.”²⁰⁴

The reader’s interest in the initial process is not only sustained; it even gradually increases, consistent with Dorothea’s deepening awareness of her own ‘faults’ or ‘weaknesses’, as she sees her jealousy and righteousness. Her idealistic image of love – that persistent romantic fallacy – will, however, not budge. There is a considerable increase in dramatic tension after she discovers the abysmal truth about her husband, as she sees it.

Long before that happens, she invites a companion of her youth, Mark Lester, in the hope of getting his moral support for her principles. She shares with him the unique intimacy of a childhood and adolescence spent together. She also feels strengthened in her hopes by the fact that Mark is a preacher. Yet he, too, disappoints her, in that he does not back her up in her moral priggishness.²⁰⁵ Looming up behind Dorothea’s priggishness and Mark’s relativism is the shadow of the author. Together, his two contrasting characters give shape to his own *persona* as we conceive it. Lest the impression should arise that *Dorothea* is a novel of ideas, we hasten to add that the book contains all of the Maartensian ingredients, with its typical mixture of modes exemplified by the characters: cynicism in Egon’s brother Konrad and uncle Karl, caricature in Lord Archibald and his ‘Biermädel’, and the author’s own satire concerning the ways in which the morally debased lead their lives, when and wherever they appear on the scene.

A feeling of incongruity arises when a character, or actions by that character – instrumental in giving a decisive turn to the plot – are presented as pure caricature. This is the case, for example, with Barbolat, Egon’s surgeon. Nonetheless, the main thread in the plot – parallel to Egon’s estrangement from Dorothea, due to his growing involvement with Giulietta – is gradually pulled tighter. When the *dénouement*, long expected and anticipated, finally comes,

²⁰⁴ *Dorothea*, 323; the dispute between father and daughter exemplary reflects the antagonism between the author’s two contesting attitudes: the realistic and the idealistic.

²⁰⁵ *Dorothea*, 358: “She got up and came close to him. ‘I, too, have been out and seen the world’ she said. ‘It is a year since I left home for Nice – on the day after our talk. I have seen the world, and I – ’ She paused: they stood looking at each other. ‘I loathe it. I loathe it.’

‘In another year’s time,’ he said gently, ‘you will learn to loathe it less. Let me speak. It is a mistake to bring people up as we were brought up, in the inner court, so to say, of the temple, a beautiful error. Nobody could help it, I suppose. We lived in a walled corner; our guardians could not be expected to hoist us up the wall, because there were dunghills to be seen outside. Now we are face to face with facts, and must make the best of them. The world is neither as good nor as bad as we think.’

‘What is ‘the world’?’ she burst in impetuously. ‘In the Bible sense,’ he said, ‘it is, of course, everything that is not the kingdom of Heaven. But you and I mean contact with our fellow-men outside our little circle. Well, Dorothea, what astonishes beginners like you and me is the goodness of bad people and the badness of good. It upsets all the little rules we were brought up in. And so we get mixed and say every one’s bad. Now it’s a mistake; don’t take all my time finding it out. Realise at once that you know a lot of good people, and that there’s plenty to appreciate in the bad people you know.’ ‘I am a prig,’ said Dorothea sadly. ‘Mrs. Sandring is right.’”

it seems yet unexpectedly sudden: Barbolat manages to cure Egon's limp, and Giulietta is at his side – where his wife should be – capturing him in the momentary emotional instability of his happiness. The outpour of dialogue now following could hardly be more dramatic. By starting new lines on the page at certain points in the narrative, the author establishes momentary pauses with a shift increase of dramatic effect.²⁰⁶ Egon is the typical Prussian, upright in his thoroughly traditional concepts of class and honour. Within the social framework presented, characters and plot are entirely plausible: He is only twenty-five years old, trapped in a marriage where one constantly senses that his wife's sexuality lies dormant still. What may not necessarily be typical, though, for the Prussian, is typical for the Maartensian hero: the obsession with sin. After the deed is done, the narrator expounds upon the male perspective of adultery:

It was not so much a sense of wickedness that overwhelmed him – after all, in spite of his own pure past, he knew well enough that men are men – what bore him down was the consciousness of the great wrong he had brought upon Dorothea, she being she when he married her, loftily, placidly innocent as a dove from the nest. He knew she was not as the ten thousand decent daughters of worldly mothers who have read “Autour du Marriage” and are waiting to be asked. He might have proposed to any number of honest women, who, now hearing his story, would laugh to think there was such a fuss. He had found Dorothea at Nice with her father: he had rescued her from her *entourage*; he had taken her to his bosom – God! his sin against her was a sin beyond redress! (439-440)

Like Ursula in *My Lady Nobody*, Dorothea experiences a slice of real life, as Henry James was wont to put it: love, power, money, and social status. In *My Lady Nobody*, the author put a change of attitude predominantly into Ursula's actions. The consequences of Dorothea's experience, however – while being woven into a richer social carpet – take a turn directly towards the inner centre, the emotional reality of the heroine. Dorothea gradually learns to understand her father's views and character, the worldly colonel, whom we never get to know any closer. Odd as this rapprochement may seem, it helps her to find her way back to her husband.

The father-daughter relationship is one of Maartens' recurrent themes, and even when the two are worlds apart, as in *Dorothea*, the importance of that bond is explicit at crucial moments.

²⁰⁶ *Dorothea*, 413: “She looked up at him; her lips trembled. ‘He tells me I can leave to-morrow. The thing is over. I shall walk as well as any man; I owe it to you.’ Still she looked up at him; suddenly she burst into tears. ‘Oh don’t,’ he cried. ‘see, I owe it to you. All this great happiness, I owe it to you.’ She buried her face in her hands, sobbing. ‘Oh, don’t, don’t.’ He bent over her, distressed. She lifted her face. ‘To-morrow?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘But you will not go?’ she whispered. ‘Yes, I shall go. It is better.’ ‘Why better?’ ‘I don’t know. Do not you also think it is better I should go?’ ‘Oh no, no, no! A thousand times no.’ He faltered; he hesitated; all her beauty was about him, like the opening breast of a rose. Her arms had gone out to him in entreaty and abandonment. She was close to him; she was with him. He was at her feet, he was beside her, around her; they were together; they were one. Outside, the darkness lay black against the windowpanes; inside, the starry chrysanthemums shone in great patches of pallor. The room was very hot, and heavy, and silent. The glow of the hushed fire throbbed wide, like the eye of a watcher that sees.”

The colonel's plea for men in general is actually a plea for himself. "You knew", he says to Dorothea, referring to his adultery, "and yet you kissed me. I can't make myself different from what nature made me." (472) Woman, at this point, personifies purity on the one hand, as in Dorothea, or sensuality on the other, as in Giulietta. The problem of adultery is at the centre of interest, more particularly a 'pure' woman's reaction to her husband's 'impurity'. It will not be before his last published novel, *Eve*, that Maartens attempts to fuse the two antagonistic qualities in one and the same woman. Matter-of-fact Maartens does not allow for a lot of symbolism, but when we observe Dorothea pulling flowers to pieces, there is a close connection between this action and Egon's 'bad' brother Konrad pulling the wings off flies whenever he has the opportunity. Whereas in Konrad's case it betokens his destructive character, in Dorothea it is an indication of despair: the price she has to pay for her initiation is the destruction of her ideals, symbolized by the destruction of the flower.

Dorothea is Maartens' most 'pure' novel in the classical sense. It balances the dramatic realism resulting from the juxtaposition of emotional extremes: the result is an increase in the effect of both: drama and realism. Maartens had returned to the principle of descriptive psychological realism, as he first set out to do in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. *Dorothea* contains more narrative description than any other novel, allowing for an unprecedented depth of analysis beyond the surface of things observed. It is Maartens' 'best book' in the sense that although it is a novel twice the size of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, there is balance between main theme and plot development on the one hand, and side characters and sub-plots on the other.

The psychological plot, i.e. Dorothea's initiation, remains almost throughout at the centre of interest. Perhaps it is precisely because of this feeling of equilibrium that we become aware of an inconsistency in the portrayal of character, which is what the richer canvas, presented here, would require. As Maartens himself said, the rendering of Dorothea is indeed his judgement of "how a girl in such circumstances would act", which is to say that it could be *any* girl under these particular circumstances.²⁰⁷ The thematic development, i.e. Dorothea's itinerary from her protected youth at Broderick to the 'real' life outside, is ultimately more of interest to the author than her individuality.

²⁰⁷ "To Mrs. Gosse", in *Letters*, 19.6.1904, 224: "One thing provokes me, that nobody seems to have guessed, that 'pure in heart' [the subtitle of the novel] refers quite as much to Egon as to Dorothea. That must be my fault. [...] Such a girl, from such surroundings of right and wrong could not be anything else [...]."

II.10. The attempt at satire *pur sang*: *The Healers* (1906)

It is only on a superficial level that the next two novels, *The Healers* and *The New Religion*, divert from the above-defined path of Maartensian dramatic realism. Concerning matters of health, Maartens was writing from a long personal experience, acquired through the chronic illness of his wife, as well as through health problems of his own.²⁰⁸

The satire upon doctors, touched upon in *Dorothea*, is now intensified to the extent that it dominates the entire framework of *The Healers*. The author's main purpose is to satirize the 'specialists' in the medical profession. Compared to these ruthless businessmen in the trade called health, modest country doctors or general practitioners had relatively little to suffer at his hands. However, parts of the book read like the personal testimony of someone who had to get something off his chest, more for psychological than for aesthetic reasons. Notwithstanding his own anger, Maartens might have succeeded in reaching his aim that is to criticise and attack by means of satire if he had maintained artistic consistency throughout. Thackeray had shown him that it was not impossible to clothe satire effectively in garments of romanticism or realism.

Moreover, the narrator's satire in *The Healers* again and again lapses into cynicism. The plot falls apart, and the credibility of realist presentation is undermined. Descriptions that might otherwise have had an impact, such as those of the private hospitals for example, seem to occur in some distant location that cannot in the least effect us. Equally criticism of many other contemporary phenomena of the leisure class, and of society in general, does not sufficiently surpass mere verbal disapprobation. Such as vol. 1, chapters XV and XVI: virtually throughout, they consist of criticism of all the "pseudo sciences of the day"(242), cultivated by the leisure class, such as atheism, empiricism, surgery, graphology and heredity. Here is one example of the permanently recurrent criticism of jurisprudence: "When I first began to look after my nephew's affairs, I soon came into contact with a couple of cases of manifest rascality. I remember so well going to our lawyer, quite simply: 'Would you just put this right for me? Get these people condemned.' He was an honest man, and he told me at once that the right was on my side and the law on theirs. 'And, if it wasn't,' he said, 'they'd bring it round to their side, by trickery and perjury – they always do. In legal proceedings no honest man ever stands a chance against a rogue'. That was a lawyer's verdict. I don't know about your country, but it's bound to be the same."(vol. 1, 249)

²⁰⁸ In a letter to *The Graphic*, November 1912, Maartens wrote: "I have been an invalid all my life. My work is undoubtedly tinged by the fact, that medical aid has caused me more, and more varied, kinds of suffering than all the other ills of life, including my ill-health, put together" (unpubl. TS, Maartens archive).

With much satire, we first make the acquaintance of Baron Lisse of Bardwick and his wife. The famous old professor of Bacteriology spends his days vivisectioning animals in his private laboratory. His son Edward, a promising young man, fond of nature and animals, abhors his fathers' experiments.²⁰⁹ The contrast in tone between the introductory satire and the unexpected acute realism now following may be disconcerting to the reader, but it does not miss its mark.²¹⁰

Regardless of his own traumatic experiences at home while he was still a boy, Edward later revokes his decision not to study medicine, for shame of having frustrated his father's self-sacrifice for science and fearing to disappoint him further. Long stretches of satire wrap up the patches of a plot until one loses sight of them; there can be no question of any building up of dramatic tension. Up to this point, Maartens' novels were written as dramatic realism interspersed with satirical interludes with a more or less strong moral claim. Here it is rather the other way around: a satirical novel with realist observations tinged with moral indignation. The satirical narrator introduces new characters that have the mere purpose of being complementary to the illustration of Edward's exemplary medical career:

So Edward studied for a year, under Charcot, and with Bernheim at Nancy, all the latest developments of hypnotism, suggestion, double personality, and etcetera, according to the awakening light of that day. He saw the strange sights of the Salpêtrière Hospital, psychic vagaries so fantastic that they require actual experience for belief. At that moment the Gascon peasant-girl, Barbette, who could speak only patois in her natural condition, but answered in her trance every foreigner that addressed her, was the wonder and vexation of the scientific world. Almost immediately after Edward's arrival the famous doctor sent for him, to the hospital. [...] Charcot was in the zenith of his fame and his achievement. The fine Napoleonic head, of which he grew to be so vain, proclaimed in its classical outlines and self-conscious but penetrating gaze the calm force of this masterful manipulator of weak minds. "Ask her, in your own language, how she feels!" he said. Edward, bending over the cataleptic form on the white bed, repeated the question in Dutch. "Again!" said the great man impatiently. Edward obeyed. The girl's bloodless face contracted: she gasped and struggled for some minutes: then, over her lips, in the same language, one word came haltingly: "P-p-pain." The Professor, recognizing it by its likeness to German, turned to his assistant. "You see!" he said. "We will repeat this in the lecture room. Good day, Mr. Lisse." (vol. I, 112)

²⁰⁹ The father-son conflict – pragmatism versus idealism – is a recurrent theme, indirectly in *Joost Avelingh*, also in *An Old Maid's Love*, *The Greater Glory*, *The New Religion*, and *Harmen Pols, Peasant*.

²¹⁰ *The Healers*, vol. 1, 26-27. The book was instantly acclaimed by the anti-vivisectionists as a "pregnant and most suggestive anti-vivisection novel. Not that it is in any sense a story with a purpose. The writer's art is not subjected to the didactic aim; indeed, one cannot affirm that the author has any intention to teach anything whatever. So much the better for us; the power of the book, the truth, the suggestion is all on our side; its work will be done on the mind of every thoughtful reader and the effect will be to advance the cause of humanitarianism in science so far as it has to do with the healing art." (*The Zoophilist and Animals' Defender*, July 1906). There are several instances of cruelty to animals in Maartens' novels. They are a means for man to vent his frustration caused by his own powerlessness in the face of fate such as Konrad dissecting a fly in *Eve*. As early as in the unpublished novel *The Van Weylerts*, one of the protagonists, Evert, witnesses a horse being beaten (TS 18). Neither does the narrator hesitate to blame the English in particular for their cruelty to animals (TS 57). In some form or other, this novel, experimentally written, already contains all that preoccupied (and was to preoccupy) Maartens for years to come.

As often in satire, the humour lies in the exaggeration. However, it takes a slight touch of humour to be effective. When the humoristic note is lacking, the satire is under instant threat of losing its justification. In Maartens' novels there are innumerable instances where the spontaneous hilarity of a situation can compensate for a certain general lack of interest. As long as those instances are funny, brisk and surprising, the writing is good. Yet *The Healers* has not enough to offer in that respect. Even for those who are unaware of the author's personal circumstances, the sense one has of his scornful omnipresence is too persistent to be merely taken for the narrator's. Later on in the novel, Edward is charged by Charcot with the cure of one of his patients, a certain Sir James Graye, a character strongly reminiscent of Elias in *God's Fool*. We have gone through half of the book when increasing attention is given to Sir James's uncle, Kenneth Graye. He promised his dying sister-in-law to take care of her son: "I am my nephew's life long nurse and guardian" (III, 41). Interwoven with James's story is that of Kenneth's problems of conscience, which partially account for his temporary madness. At this point all satire has disappeared: We are well into what now has become another "case of conscience", the nucleus around which, at some point or other, all of Maartens' novels must of necessity revolve. It parallels *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, with a twist: In *The Healers* the reader has not gradually been guided towards the psychological disposition of a nature corresponding with that nucleus, consequently the fusion of modes fails to fall into a coherent pattern. The inevitable result is that there is too much material parcelled up, too loosely intertwined with the narration of current fashionable topics and moral and ethical theorizing in general, clothed in the disguise of dialogue. Humoristic description or observation does not sufficiently compensate for a lack of feeling of plausibility and coherence in the novel.²¹¹

II.11. Introducing the ludicrous: *The New Religion* (1907)²¹²

The middle-aged banker Lomas and his young wife, Lucia, live peacefully on Beechlands, their country estate, until they decide to consult a doctor: occasionally Lucia suffers from nervous exhaustion. The local practitioner Dr. Rook, unable to discover what might be the matter with her, advises them to consult Dr. Russett, "the great nerve specialist. The greatest

²¹¹ Even Van Maanen ventures a criticism at this stage: "The strings which bind all these lives and incidents together are very loosely and not nearly so dexterously tied as we might expect. It would seem as if the continued writing of short stories had influenced the author's manner, but not to the good. Many of the characters are drawn with the same, nay even greater skill than before; but their presence is not justified, they move like utter strangers in a story that could have easily gone without them." (89-90).

²¹² *The New Religion* (London: Methuen, 1907); Maartens sent a copy to Spielmann and wrote: "I must send you the book I am sending because it is so full [...] of experience of yours and mine" (unpubl. TS, Maartens archive).

living.” (vol.1,72). It is the beginning of a nerve-wrecking and financially draining enterprise, in which the Lomases stumble into pitfall after pitfall, all the time making matters worse and more complicated. At this point, after a lengthy presentation of the circumstances, Maartens really revenges himself, in a literary way, on the medical world that put his wife and himself through such an ordeal in their endless quest for health.

Dr. Russett, a clever and successful specialist, knows that he deceives most of his patients, that all their searching for health in southern sanatoria is illusory. At the time, these specialists operated more or less interconnected all over Europe, sending each other patients as if by gentleman’s agreement, duly receiving their percentages. Dr. Russett advises Mrs. Lomas to go for a cure to Dr. Alphonse Vouvray’s sanatorium at Peysonnax, near Gringinges-sur-Aulch in the Vaudois Alps. Later he comments “A difficult *clientèle* these women of our century, with nothing the matter but their wealth. Vouvray can manage them. Nobody can manage them quite as Vouvray.” (I, 85)

Rather than the omnipresent satire, the persistent tragic-comical vein of the narrative keeps the reading enticing, a series of tragic and comic moments shifting from one to the other with such rapidity that they become almost undistinguishable. That Vouvray diagnoses a tendency to arterio-sclerosis in Mr. Lomas is implied as a matter of course: being a patient himself now, it enables him to stay with his wife. The business acumen of the dexterous Dr. Vouvray shown in this case make the immensity of offers he gets from the ‘sick market’ entirely plausible: “Consider how I am placed,” he said kindly [to Henry]. “This house, newly built, can hold a hundred. I turn away” – he moved his hand to a pile of letters – “half a dozen a day.” “To-morrow I expect the Rajah of Rumdoolah. [...] Can I wrong those who beat at my door?” “No,” replied Henry, crushed at this evidence. (I, 149)

The satire has its effect when all things described stimulate the imagination, even where exaggerated:

The Sanatorium of Peysonnax is undeniably a medical delight. The magnificent south front, with its long lines of sun-box balconies, gleams all day, a tall stretch of white facade and polished pine-work, in the heat of the mountain sun. Inside, the arrangements of the corridors and apartments are those of a palace-hotel, treated hygienically. No paper of any kind is allowed on the walls, nor, of course, can such atrocities be permitted as hangings or curtains. But each patient’s chamber is a “symphony” of harmonious colour-tinted walls, polished parquet, painted furniture: a hundred thousand francs, it is told, have been expended on artistic tiles alone, another hundred thousand on the perfect heating and ventilation, yet another on the baths and the gymnasium. Vouvray could therefore assert truly, in spite of his enormous prices, that he cared not to make money. [...] And the corner stone of his whole method was the “Return to Nature,” the Simple Life in a Palace Hospital, as applied to the extremely rich. (I, 155-156)

Lomas is introduced to this “Return to Nature” as the great doctor’s “monkey system” is called. It is based on the theory that of all animals, man is most closely akin to the apes. Consequently, it follows in Vouvray’s view that one regains strength by living with a monkey. However difficult it may be to imagine Vouvray’s system, the reader almost believes that there are bound to be situations in real life coming extremely close to this, considering the enormous amount of cranks and creeds:

Henry Lomas had taken kindly to the follies of the monkey-life. Every morning he was weighed in the oddest file of sleepy *déshabillés*: his nuts were then counted out to him, and he went and chopped his wood. For, all these things we know our cousins daily do. And it is not unedifying to stand chopping your wood beside two elderly chopping millionaires (upheld by memories of the “Grand Old man”) and a couple of youthful dudes, triumphantly carried through by bets on the number of their blows. When the alarm-watch, which every patient was ordered to wear in his pocket, went off, the worker would immediately pause, and the American Railway King and the Australian Court Chamberlain would lean on their axes, munching their three Brazil nuts. (I, 189)

The purpose of the satirical novel is not primarily to follow a plot development or reveal a process, for example of initiation. The narrative is not primarily based on a plot, but on an argument; it should therefore not be taken seriously as a story, but at the same time seriously enough, though, with regard to the argument. In *The New Religion* all this fuss about health proves that these people have nothing better to do with their lives; they are not really happy anyway, even if they should be able to keep up an illusion of happiness.²¹³

This explains why it takes such a long time before there is something like a turn in the story. Towards the end of the first half of the book, after a long period of absence, Dr. Russett’s son Jack is reintroduced as a student of Vouvray’s methods. On his way to being a professional himself, he is particularly interested in Mrs. Lomas’ case, particularly after it appalled him to hear how – unaware of his identity – she abhors his father. In the following he discovers that there is another, darker side to his father’s reputation, that his entire medical and financial dealings with the Lomas couple have led to their ruin. As is the case in all of the novels, we have again ended up with the mixture of satire and morality, but this time the stress remains on the satire. *The New Religion* does not attempt at the same dramatic overtones that were particularly dubious in *The Healers*. There is a difference in the way the two have been balanced. Now we have the impression that it does not really matter where we are or whether we lose track, as long as there is momentary fun or astonishment, emanating from the situation itself: half ludicrous, half serious. A distance has been established towards the narrative that will not affect our emotions beyond the point of amusement, even if a love-story

like atmosphere is created in that Jack Russett may have fallen in love with Lucia Lomas. Now, within the established satirical framework, there is room for all the elements, which took their place in the previous novels with the principal purpose of increasing the *dramatic* effect. After we have been so thoroughly imbued with satire, we are not impressed by a point of view that is only on the surface a shift from satire to dramatic realism. Equally we are not really disturbed by Maartens' incapacity to portray his main heroine satirically, or at least ironically.²¹⁴ In *The New Religion* Maartens' inclination towards dramatic realism can no longer substantially impose itself on the satirical tone of the book. A poignant example of such a situation that would have been highly dramatic in the other novels, except for *The Healers*, is the climactic collision of two carriages. In *The New Religion* it is no more than the logical conclusion of a long expected occurrence.²¹⁵

Lucia comes to her senses in a way reminiscent of Ursula's initiation process in *My Lady Nobody*. It dawns upon her how she has been manipulated. Unwilling to be a puppet any longer, she expounds on this in a conversation with her father: "I want to ask you, father, please, to take me just as I am, whether you think me better, or worse, but I *am* better, only never mind – but never again to ask me to do any treatment or to run to any specialist or do anything but just healthily live my life – healthily and sanely and quietly live my life.' 'My dearest child, when occasion offers –'" (2, 234). Then the narrative continues in a vein that cannot altogether eradicate the suspicion that we are listening to the author's mouthpiece.²¹⁶

Although *The New Religion* may justifiably be called a satirical novel, it is less so than Quiller-Couch claimed it to be. Particularly at the beginning and towards the end, there are shifts in the readers' expectation of where the narrative may lead. In her review of *The New Religion*, Virginia Woolf observes:

A beautiful young woman waiting her husband's return in a country garden, soft, affectionate, pure-minded; a faithful business man, submitting tenderly to the punctual button-hole, whose years confirm his sincerity – here is the stuff for close domestic analysis [...] But before this picture has established itself it is clear that the interest does

²¹³ The cult of the body is demonstrated in an abject sense throughout by means of Lucia's mother, Mrs. Blandrey, the type of woman with no other purpose in life than to worry about her health; see, for example, vol. 2, 205-206.

²¹⁴ Lucia is merely presented as a victim of circumstances, weak and unable for a long stretch to fend for herself, quite unlike Joris in *A Question of Taste*.

²¹⁵ One afternoon, when Mrs. Lomas has gone out for a short ride, Mr. Lomas is taken for a drive by his new doctor, Globowsky. Accidentally the carriages meet. During the same night, Henry Lomas dies (vol. 2, 39); similar ominous encounters of carriages occur in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, *My Lady Nobody*, and *The Price of Lis Doris*.

²¹⁶ *The New Religion*, vol. 2, 235: "What is occasion? Oh, father, we make occasion. In this modern international existence of ours, there's occasion everywhere. Look at us: what has medicine made of our lives, suddenly in so short a time? Henry and I, less than two years ago, at Beechlands! And the specialist comes into our existence with his careless 'science', and all at once we are in his hands, and in those of the sanatorium man, and the brother specialist and the correspondent abroad and the whole train of –"

not lie in those regions at all, but, to begin with, in the state of Mrs Lomas's health. [...] then there is a specialist, and then another specialist, and then we see that it is not Mrs Lomas's health that we are to be interested in, but health in general, and doctors of all kinds.²¹⁷

In the second part of the book, the number of instances increases where the satire threatens to be superseded by dramatic realism. In spite of this, the satire sustains the 'pamphlet-like' character of the book, ultimately in defence of a medical profession based on closely defined ethical and moral principles.²¹⁸ The ludicrous and somewhat melodramatic 'happy end' of the book may do nothing to enhance the satirical effect – it neither dispels it.

II.12. Disinterested love: *The Price of Lis Doris* (1909)²¹⁹

"I suppose 'God's Fool' is my best known book. I like 'The Price of Lis Doris' best, Maartens wrote in his "Interview" (p. 3). Let us begin with the end: the very last chapter with its premonition of disaster is not unlike the end of *The Black Box Murder*: The reader is kept in suspense by expectations of the imminent catastrophe. Perhaps *Lis Doris* was Maartens' favourite because it is a return to his central theme: plot and action evolve around a problem of conscience. Only, on this occasion, all the ingredients of the Maartensian Dutch canvas are reassembled on a more sophisticated level.

Jetta, the female protagonist, is the child of a Dutch village pastor. She is more and more absorbed by the little son of the village grocer, in whom she discovers a talent for painting and drawing. He becomes the object of her half-maternal and wholly disinterested affection for him: she would do all she could to improve his chances as an artist. Actually this is the theme of the book: disinterested love. Maartens employs his combined powers of dramatic development and narrative to reveal what he deems to be a form of supreme love. In order to attain that goal, the author is prepared to go to any lengths. To Jetta, love is a spiritual devotion. To Odo, the wealthy amateur painter she encounters, it is purely a matter of the senses.²²⁰ When Odo asks her to marry him she is perfectly candid with him. She wishes to

²¹⁷ "The New Religion", *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), vol. 1, 149.

²¹⁸ That *The New Religion* was also meant to be read as social criticism recalls Maartens' affinity with Tolstoy to mind: "My mentality is, I suppose, in closest sympathy, in its own small way, – among the great of my time – with Tolstoy. Perhaps with less sentimentality – in the best sense of the word." ("Interview", 3) Tolstoy wrote in his famous autobiographical essay "My confession" (1879): "A change has accomplished itself within me that had been preparing itself for a long time (...) Life in our circles of the opulent and the cultured has not only become obtrusive to me, it has lost all sense." Op. cit.: Natalija Nossowa, "Tolstoy und die Tolstojaner, *Russland in kleinen Geschichten*" (München: dtv, 1993), 91 (tr. HB).

²¹⁹ *The Price of Lis Doris* (London: Methuen, 1909).

²²⁰ Maartens may have been inspired by the similar character constellation of Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond in Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

have enough money at her disposal to gain access to a life in distinguished surroundings, untrammelled, free, while at the same time enabling her to support Lis in his endeavours to become a painter. It seems therefore plausible that she should ‘sell’ herself – that is to say her body. She even names a sum; but she does not promise to love him – only to become his wife. And yet it strains our credulity that now, all of a sudden, a Maartensian heroine should be thus capable of distinguishing between her body and soul. At the same time there is a gasp of relief: finally we have a main character with however slight a stain.

It is up to the reader to accept or reject the possibility of such a degree of disinterested love, after which one is easily enticed into following the ingenious plot. From the beginning there is no postulation of any idealistic precepts; therefore and due to the complexity of a character like Lis, there is none of that usually slight feeling of inconsistency between the purport of the narrative and the opinions of a narrator suspected of being the author in disguise. The author himself eclipses behind his narrator’s subtle depiction of the relationship between Yetta and Lis, the two protagonists. There is no room for the suspicion that the narrator only deems woman capable of disinterested love. With the money Yetta earned by having her hands painted by Odo, she is able to give Lis his first paint box for Santa Claus.²²¹

Upon the death of Lis’ father, Jetta, now married and wealthy, secretly purchases the grocery shop and the first two drawings exhibited by Lis. With this capital he is able to finance his art study. Within the light of the immensity of his increasing gratitude towards Yetta, the fact that he allows Odo Pareys to establish a reputation for himself by presenting Lis’ pictures to the world as his own, becomes less implausible than one might be inclined to think. Not only does Lis find out that he owes it all to Yetta and therefore, indirectly, to Odo, he also feels that Odo, despised by his wife for his lack of talent, acts out of sheer despair in order to gain her esteem.²²² In view of the author’s ideal of disinterested love, credulity is more strained by

²²¹ There is great evocation of their deep mutual affection in the entire dialogue of chapter XIII, of which the following extract: ‘Santa Claus has come to see you. Don’t you want to know what he has brought?’ ‘Not too big a present, I hope, Yetta. I’ve nothing for you.’ ‘Well, it is a big present, rather. Remember it comes from a saint.’ ‘Yes, mine would not,’ said Lis, gravely. [...] ‘I don’t mind being thought a good fairy – for instance by you.’ ‘You’re more than a good fairy to me. Good fairies are uncertain, and you’re sure.’ Her cheeks flushed with delight. [...] ‘That reminds me of my present. You are not very inquisitive,’ she made answer. ‘I don’t think I should give it you: only I can’t keep it for myself.’ ‘The slippers for father!’ cried Lis. ‘Why no, I sent you those this morning for your birthday, with your tie.’ ‘I never got either,’ said Lis. ‘I thought you had forgotten my birthday.’ ‘Oh, Lis, you – thought – I could – forget your birthday!’ There was real reproach in her tone. But he turned the tables adroitly. ‘Oh, Yetta, you thought – I – would forget to thank you!’ ‘We are children,’ said Yetta, and you are the clever child of the two. Hush! It only remains for me to give you your present. Remember again: it is Santa Claus who sends it to you. I have nothing in my hand Lis. The gift that I bring is just all your future – your whole future life as a painter, Lis.’ ‘“What do you mean?”’ he asked, and his voice jumped. (128-130).

²²² Van Maanen, otherwise abundant in his praise of *The Price of Lis Doris*, is unable to accept such a sacrifice by the artist: ‘To me it appears hardly probable that an artist should find it in him to wink at the usurpation of his work by a contemptible amateur, for the sake of a woman. Artists are not made like that; to

the fact that Odo is allowed to keep up his fraud until the end. Could he have persisted in the fraud to the extent of being honoured in an address by his fellow-artists and rewarded the order of Orange Nassau?

In the novels before *The Price of Lis Doris*, the principal constituent of the love of woman had been a total devotion, up to the point of self negation, paradoxically leading up to the point where she becomes aware of the absurdity of her condition. In *Lis Doris* we have, for the first time, a male principal character capable of complete self-sacrifice for the sake of a woman. The point is not whether we accept Maartens' idealisation of love as something even stronger than artistic pride, but whether the development of the plot is consistent with the behaviour of the protagonists. The classic dictum that a strong plot holds all narrative strings together may safely be applied to *The Price of Lis Doris*.

The second part narrates, in retrospect, the five years that have passed since Lis' father died: the selling of the home and the student life at Amsterdam. There are lengthy digressions on his life with his landlords, the Loksters, a curious family constellation that devours a considerable part of his budget. Complementary to Lis' personal and artistic growth, Yetta is shown in her activities as a wealthy woman, visiting the poor and no longer intimidated by her dominant and narrow-minded mother, the parson's wife. Yet we cannot altogether escape the impression that the author wants to be as complete as possible in narrating everything pertaining to the status of such a position. In other terms, there often is but a thin borderline between provided 'information' in a general sense and fictional narrative.²²³

It is here, at the close of the second part, in the middle of the book and the at centre of the story, that Yetta's culmination of loneliness is paralleled with Lis' painting the Dutch heath: In its sobriety of style, Chapter XXV masterly renders the passionate and painful process of his first achievement as a mature artist, suggestive, in its obsessive manner as well as in its subject, of a Van Gogh at work:

After that, during ten days, except for his burdensome portrait, he painted morning and evening, in oil and in watercolour, the heath! He had abandoned his Sandpoort Dune picture. For the great Feydor Prize, on which his whole future depended, he had resolved to compete with a picture of his own native heath. In spite of all toil he had not as yet got the effect – no, not even the idea – which he wanted. He was dissatisfied with his colour schemes. Ever, while he worked, the feathery film of the luminous Dutch landscape sank

them their art is more than a beloved woman's tranquility of mind. However much Lis' breeding and circumstances heighten the awkwardness of his position, I cannot believe that any artist *pur sang*, even if he had wanted to, could have done the thing that Lis does." Van Maanen equally points at the structural improvement in this novel, as each of its four parts represents a definite phase in Lis' career, a return to the method Maartens used in his early novels (99).

²²³ Chapter xxii provides an example of the latter category. The splendid nature descriptions here are impressionistic reflections of Yetta's inner emotional state, returning from a visit to the poor; see in particular 199-202.

away from the canvas under the weight of his brush. Once, at the dinner table, he lifted two peaches from a dish and, scrubbing one clean with his napkin, placed the two fruits before him side by side. The rest of the company exchanged glances. “What is the joke?” questioned Ryk after a time. The painter started from his long contemplation, abashed. “Nothing,” he answered lamely, “nothing” and he hastened, blushing, to put the peaches back. He painted on desperately, over and over again, the same bit unwearingly, living with it, dreaming of it – the heath. One small bunch of heather, taken home, he reproduced, in its changes of colour, at least twenty times in ten days. He got up at three o’clock one night, unable to sleep, for the itching of his fingers to have another try at it. Unlike so many who contentedly work over, he scraped every unsatisfactory blotch clean with the knife, and immediately repainted it, straight ahead, in clear strokes[...].” (vol. 1, 217-218)

Imbued with the impeccable and incorruptible morality of his predecessors, a Maartensian hero like Lis Doris would never accept the Feydor Prize obtained by Pareys’ improper means. That he is altruistically able to violate his artistic principles is harder to accept than that he sacrifices his art for Yetta’s sake. Still, the fact that he is able to subdue his conscience doubly testifies of his love for Yetta. The passages given and referred to above should not lead to the assumption that narrative description is dominant in *The Price of Lis Doris*.²²⁴ As usual, most of the chapters mainly consist of dialogue: what may happen is not sufficiently implied or suggested. Therefore the decisive turn in the plot at the end of the second part – Pareys’ pretending the stolen pictures to be his own – almost comes too abrupt. Lis accepts the Feydor Prize, promising never again to paint landscape. This stipulation seems entirely out of proportion to his sacrifice, even if Lis now understands Yetta’s deep sorrow, aware as he is that she sacrificed her happiness for his sake. He is willing to indulge Pareys wishes on condition that he remove the manservant, Job. Yetta feels threatened by the man, not in the least because she believes there exists a special bond of confidence between her husband and him. At this point, Lis’ total sacrifice balances Yetta’s total devotion to him: Where it concerns the deepest affection, self-denial in man is equal to woman’s.

The third part opens with more examples of Lis’ altruism towards all the people surrounding him (selling his only beloved father’s picture to help a friend in need), his strong moral rigidity towards himself (rejecting the Feydor Prize after all) and his artistic pride (refusing an attractive portrait painting offer). After this sequence of Lis’ self-submissive instances, persistently reminiscent of Joost Avelingh, his revenge comes as a relief. Lis has entered the exhibition where, at that very moment, Pareys is receiving the honours for the picture painted

²²⁴ In his monograph on Maartens, Th. M. Gorissen suggests that Maartens was influenced by *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in his descriptions of the Dutch heath. It seems that there is not sufficient indication in the narrative to justify inter-textual comparison. If there are grounds for such a suggestion, the influence should not be sought in the actual descriptions, but in the metaphorical sense of the ‘wuthering heights’ as the strength of emotions in each of the characters, with one dominant passion in particular: for instance, hate, love, devotion, selfishness (*Maarten Maartens en het Maarten Maartenshuis*, 56-58).

by Lis. The latter's distress acutely increases when he discovers that the portrait he made of his father, which he sold to a dealer, is equally being exhibited. It is then, at the moment of his most intense frustration, that he encounters Pareys again. Dialogue and descriptive narrative perfectly fuse to heighten the dramatic tension of the moment:

“A very good likeness,” said a smooth voice behind him. Pareys stood in the middle of the deserted room, leaning on the arm of Job Boonhakker: He looked older, with an air of weary cosmopolitan refinement. Perhaps it was the astrakhan collar of his coat or the red ribbon peeping from a buttonhole underneath. “He was a fine-looking man, your father. By-the-bye, what did he die of?” Lis looked deep into the other's yellowing eyes. “Of the longing to see me a great painter,” he said. Pareys's slender figure thrilled. “It is a pity he had to wait for that till you drew his dead face,” said Pareys with a pretty smile. Lis clenched his fist, tight down, by his side, as he had done before with this man. “We must put our trust in the peep-holes of Paradise,” added Pareys. “I pity you from the bottom of my heart,” replied Lis Doris. “Thank you,” Odo put up a delicately gloved hand to his moustache. “But I am not here for more than a few days. I have been looking at the pictures in the big room. I suppose you have heard of their success in Paris? Undoubtedly, Lis, they have real merit. The impassive Job nodded the slightest, imperceptible nod of endorsement. Lis asked himself, with no new pang, how much did this fellow know? “I have you – ” he began in his halting French. Pareys stopped him. “Job understands a little French,” said Pareys. “Do you want him not to hear?” “I have you at my mercy: do you mind his hearing that?” cried Lis hotly. “I have but to loosen a string, and you – drop.” “Job is accustomed to take my metaphors cum grano: he will doubtless appreciate yours!” “There is a picture of sunlight on a heath, Mynheer Pareys, between two boards in an Amsterdam garret, better than anything hung in yonder show-room, and signed with another name than yours!” (Vol 2, 41-42)

As a rule, such situations of dramatic tension are followed by a slowing down of the plot, as if the author had to unburden himself of the strain of having to keep it at the same intensity. Often, however, the reader does not perceive this as a necessary relaxation, but rather as the author's sense of obligation towards the reader to be as complete as he possibly can. This counts for the lengthy pages that follow, describing Lis' landlord, Old Lokster, as the type of the *artiste r  t  *. The narrative should be like a flow, imperceptibly changing in tempo, as smoothly as the gear of a car. But now that Maartens has returned to his former mode, it is rather the renewed attempt at blending the realistic with the satire that creates the strenuous impression of “too long” at particular instances. When for example the author digresses into satire about Dutch customs in his off-hand way, casually generalizing, the exaggerations are not amusing, they merely render the reader impatient, because all he asks for, at that point, is to get on with the story.²²⁵

²²⁵ As, for instance: “[...] the banker – cousin to the centenarian Rothschild – who talked about himself and his two daughters to Lis all through a long luncheon and then wrote a note about painting ‘myself and my daughters’ for a lump sum. There were ten daughters, each of them uglier than the last. Lis took almost a year over them trying to make them not resemble themselves, or even each other. They nearly killed him. As an artist, at any rate. But he picked up, painted them all over again [etc., 60-61].”

Now that Lis has gained himself a reputation as a portrait painter, Pareys' fear of being 'found out' increases, as he is unable to produce any new paintings. Added to that comes a jealousy other than artistic: That Yetta now openly defends Lis renders him suspicious of the existence of a bond between the two; something he himself could never aspire to share with another human being. Pareys cannot understand that her love is the love for a man that is not based on sexual interest, but on the fidelity that arises from the interest she took in him ever since he was a boy. His despair drives him to get at Lis' remaining hidden landscape picture by all possible means. The theft is prevented just in time by Saskia, one of the Lokster daughters, who presently avows her love for Lis. The premonition that this might turn into a sub-plot is unjustified: it is not long before we hear of Pareys' fatal illness, which once more causes an outpour of Lis' altruism. But now there is something ludicrous about his surrendering his last picture: Behind Lis' devotion to Yetta we feel a conglomeration of the author's idealism which has reached a level that has become hard to conceive.

Back in the second part of the novel, on a return visit to his former home, Lis had paid a sum of money to a mother to have her daughter under his care, in order to save the girl from further neglect and maltreatment. What we then took as another demonstration of Lis' altruistic nature now takes an additional function in the plot: As Redempta has become a beautiful young woman, he is stimulated by her presence and sensibility into painting landscape again, whilst including her in the painting. It is the fusion of his two artistic spheres – landscape and portrait – into a vision that is the culmination of his art.²²⁶

After Pareys' death, part four opens with the prospect of Lis Doris now freed from all inhibitions, finally embarking upon the road towards artistic fulfilment. He is alone in his study when Redempta enters, suggesting that he use her as a model for his Venus. Instinctively turning to indirect speech, the author always excels at such moments of eruptive emotion:

Lis studied her for the first time, with the eye of the reproducer.²²⁷ 'Tis a new light altogether. She was not the conventional Venus of so much Italian imagery, fat, fair and, very nearly, forty. But the grace of her young figure was inestimable: her face must be made a little older, without lessening its charm. He began making a sketch of her, almost before he knew whither he was plunging, carried along by his creative emotion, eager to place the figure where he saw it already, against the broom. He overheated the stove: he had closed the window. Unresistingly she draped herself according to the needs of the first hurried scrawl. "Let me do it myself!" she pleaded, her eyes full of tears, her hands faltering. "I comprehend. Yes. I comprehend. See, I stand so!" "So!" he echoed, his own eyes kindled. A fever of artistic enthusiasm throbbed in his veins. He was making, creating, as he had never shaped his conception before. Already it was forming in his

²²⁶ Consider the symbolic significance of the name 'Redempta': the muse who renders Lis' rescue – the reclaim of his own artistic self – possible.

²²⁷ Lis had painted Redempta before, cf. vol. 2, 134 ff.

sketch, in the scratches on the canvas, above all, in his brain. Adonis awakening from long death in the darkness! Adonis, his own genius, uprising to new life in the light. "I must get some fresh candles," he said, with a sob of conquered exhaustion. She sank, trembling, lifting her chemise, on a settee. He stumbled in the passage: his candles were clattering to the ground. (vol. 2, 179)

Even now, we are to witness another instant of what seems again an exaggeration of altruism in a *mise en scène* that could hardly have been more theatrical: Upon hearing the noise, the housekeeper unexpectedly enters the room at the most embarrassing moment. It must have seemed to her that Lis and Redempta were kissing and exchanging vows of love. Her suspicions quickly aroused, she offers her resignation. Regardless of the proximity between the painter and his model, we are as dumbfounded as the housekeeper by his announcement that he is going to marry Redempta. Although we cannot accept this as the spontaneous outcome of the situation, the narrative is compelling in its rendering of the moment (180-181). The conclusive chapters smell too much of a mere device to 'straighten out' the lines of the plot. There is for example, quite unconvincingly as *deus ex machina*, the sudden appearance of Alex Pareys, who happens to be the son of Yetta and Odo. He professes his love for Redempta, whereupon Lis, noticing Yetta's infatuation with the young man, withdraws from his engagement with her, entirely in line with his disinterested nature. Then Yetta finally discovers the truth about the heath landscape paintings. In his attempt to find some way of preventing her son Alex from utterly despising his quondam father, Lis' unending devotion for Yetta is once more demonstrated. It now seems as if nothing further stands in way of the happy ending one might long have expected: the marriage between Yetta and Lis. However, such an ending would be out of tune with the author's concept of disinterested love. Indeed, as Yetta avows herself, the bond Pareys made her sign is of no significance: never to marry Lis after his demise, not now or ever, since this had never been her intention.

The tension has gradually increased, creating an atmosphere of gloom as it gradually prepares the way for the catastrophe ahead. In the built-up there is the encounter between Lis and Job, Pareys former factotum, at the railway station. Lis' refusal to meet with Job's demands to keep his master's name untarnished is wrenching for Job, bound as he is by a spell, as it were, to serve his master even beyond the grave:

Job stood watching the dwindling spot against the dark-blue line. He drew a long breath, in swift shocks. He stood thus immovable, as the moments slowly passed. He stood quite alone in the vast solitude of nature: before him the bleak, black heath: behind him the desolation of a deserted railway-shed. His arms were tight down by his sides: his eyes were staring. He stood there in all his old uncouthness, gone limp, respectful, listening. He could not have told what he thought or saw, as the twilight very gradually lost its depths and closed in, dark upon his darkness. Unthinking and unseeing as he stood there, a form was in his eyes and a voice was in his ears. In the darkness and the dizziness he felt them. And a memory of words, heard long ago he knew not where and half forgotten,

woke, resistless, in some deepest depth of his full being: “Well done, servant – faithful servant!” – sounding on, and on, and on. (vol. 2)²²⁸

Having arrived at the end, the question as to why Maartens preferred *The Price of Lis Doris* to his other novels cannot be answered definitely. Is it because Lis Doris, in the author’s view, represents the most accomplished artistic representation of a character, or maybe even because he is something like a projection of the author’s *alter ego* as an artist, striving to accomplish the perfect fusion of landscape and character? One cannot really believe that Odo Pareys is able to reach lasting European fame during his lifetime as a painter, exclusively due to Lis’ youth paintings. Concerning the plot, one might object that it might have been more dynamic, had it been less cluttered with anecdotes and sub-plots.²²⁹ However, it seems as if all that does not really bother the author, as long as the two idealistic motives of his tale hold each other in check, as two main threads paralleled: The first is the rendering of Lis corresponding with his ideal of the artist: of modest peasant origins, pure, young, sensitive, generous and incorruptible of character, but also moody, impulsive, proud and unconventional.²³⁰ The second is the central theme of the ideal of a disinterested love between two people, strong and durable enough to transcend the mediocre dealings and interests among the members of the conventional society they belong to.

While the story takes its course, one senses again the movement that in fact begun in *An Old Maid’s Love*: the widening of scope from a provincial to a cosmopolitan outlook. The hero’s deep affection for his childhood friend Jetta continues to have a decisive influence on his life. Again, as in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* and as in many novels of the period, for that matter, the plot develops from a case of conscience, like a thread pulled relentlessly until we arrive at the spool inside. However, the credibility of the ethical position taken by the author is at stake when he persists in holding on to a code of behaviour that contemporary readers must have

²²⁸ In the last pages of *Lis Doris* there is a parallel to Act II of Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* too conspicuous not to be mentioned: Job (= Hagen) feeling he is called by his master (father = Alberich) to revenge (“Well done, faithful servant, well done!” Lis (= Siegfried), the almost innocent hero, nearly killed in an ‘accident’, is carried home in mournful procession. He dies in the arms of his true love, Yetta (= Brünnhilde). On the occasion of attending a performance of *Siegfried* in Amsterdam, Maartens wrote to Mrs. Gosse: “I am going to talk nonsense about Wagner, but I hope you agree with me all the same. In spite of the shrieks of the disciples, his grand music is, like all our artistic products, music of a decadence. A lot of the symbolism I venture to call silly, and the much-praised Leit-motiven system I venture to call silly too. (It returns, – beg pardon – like radishes). A lot of the humour is also dreary; in fact, he had not a scrap of humour, not an atom of sense of disproportion in his whole big heart and brain. This all being said, there are no *operatic functions* to equal the *Trilogy*” (in *Letters*, 27.1.1898, 144).

²²⁹ In the literary correspondence, there is a letter in which Ada Schwartz suggested the publication of a shortened version of one of Maartens’ novels. It probably concerns *Lis Doris*, to be published by Albert Langen, the German publisher, a plan that was not realised (cf. MS, 11 Aug. 1931, Maartens archive).

²³⁰ Part of the answer, too, may be found in the author’s biography, an issue always present in Maartens’ novels: More than any of his other heroes, Lis’ is a projection of the idealised self.

had difficulty to identify with. It is a further deepening of the gap begun in *Dorothea*. Burdett describes the dilemma as follows:

Both Jetta and Lis, like two of Hardy's characters, are nobler than the fate which encompasses them, and Maartens inclined to that desperation of goodness which shall give everything in this world and which will receive nothing in return. The book's conclusion reaches, I think, the height of the author's idealism, and, as he conveys this to us, our opinion of his work will depend upon our own valuation of his vision of things.²³¹

II.13. The very smell of the soil: *Harmen Pols, Peasant* (1910)

Maartens had first embarked upon the question of adultery in *Dorothea*. Although it was the husband, Egon, who had gone astray in that novel, the point of interest had actually been how the wife, Dorothea, coped with her husband's infidelity. It is the woman's psyche that is being explored, and in *Harmen Pols* that exploration is carried another step further. This is but gradually discovered, and in fact not really until the novel is drawing towards its close.

On the level of realism the first part of the novel predominantly deals with Harmen, the son of a peasant. The novel starts by showing, in brief strokes of nature description, how the protagonist is entirely embedded in the rural world of his forefathers. The beauty and harmony of that world become visible most unobtrusively and naturally through a narrative voice that often imperceptibly shifts from the point of view of the protagonist to a point just outside of him as it were, and vice versa. It is not the first time that one wonders, with regret, why there are so few nature descriptions in Maartens' novels. This is the "very smell" Thomas Hardy meant, when he wrote to Maartens about *Harmen Pols, Peasant*. These country people are still embedded in a world of their own that breathes its life in all things visible and invisible.²³² On another, deeper level, many of the nature descriptions impressionistically unveil the intimacy of Harmen's relationship with his mother:

The pair wandered along the narrow windings through the coppice in the golden-grey twilight calm. Above them, against the darkening heaven, clear-cut, the small crescent lay tossed. In the mellow mildness of the air, breathing gently, the farm-wife, fatigued more than she would easily have chosen to confess, leaned upon the firm hand of her son. [...] They passed forth into the brushwood. The opaline radiance of the twilight opened out before them. Tangled masses of oak leaves stretched fantastic and fragrant, alive with a million quiverings of inaudible life. They passed on through the brushwood. Her bosom rose and fell. (8-9)

The small part omitted from the above quotation is a passage of dialogue: *Harmen Pols* is Maartens most dramatic novel because of the well-rounded balance between dialogue and

²³¹ Burdett, 127.

²³² *Letters*, 292.

description. *Harmen Pols* is at least as objective as *Her Memory* in the absence of authorial comments and side-plots, but without that novel's biographical import.

Through his mother, Harmen was imbued with the aesthetic sensibility she was able to develop during the years she worked for an aristocratic family. The straightforward, earthy taste of life and of all things living, the natural instinct that all that is good resides in modesty, all this was engendered by his father. The blend of these qualities gives his experience a degree of intensity, a sensuous richness unprecedented in Maartens:

Best of all his farm work he liked milking, the purity of it, the energetic repose. The touch of the clean hands on the cleansed dugs, the rhythmical spurt of the milk, with its musical fall, cream-white on cream. The calm freshness of the half-awakened day, in immensities of silence and sleepy meditation. And the thought of relief brought to those patient purveyors of man's most innocent nourishment.(136)

The unity of the narrative is confirmed by our persistent sense that all that is being narrated in some way or other contributes to the rendering as well as the formation of Harmen's character. It is as much a Maartensian novel as any of the others in that all things occurring are part of the ongoing initiation process in some way. The burlesque rendering of aunt Carolina's wedding to Roel Slink, at the beginning, serves as an aperture to the plot, inexorably causing dramatic changes in the lives of all characters involved. When it is incumbent upon Harmen to help a cow in labour out of her suffering, this is like the admonition of imminent threats ahead:

Harmen watched her sympathetically from his pail. He tried turning up the lamp in the darkness and heat, but its paraffin smelt so bad he turned it down again. Great shadows gloomed around him, framing in a yellow illumination the one stall, which contained the huge recumbent figure, quivering and querulous in her pain. "I wish it was over," said Harmen, his shapely chin upon his broadened hand. He was preternaturally awake, full of novel emotions and impressions, big and little, the day's revelry, the smashed plate, impending ruin, his mother's perturbation amongst the moonlit trees. His skin tingled with a mental vitality very different from the tranquil sub-consciousness of his young life's perennial routine. He felt that, however long he might live afterwards, he would never forget this wedding day. A new section of his experience must begin with it. He must face trouble, and human passion. The hour of his travail was come.(29-30)

Impending ruin indeed: Roel does not tarry to ask his brother-in-law for his wife's share in the farm and, as there is no money, the farm will have to be sold. It is by mere chance that Steven's wife Jenny discovers a huge sum of money hidden in the cellar, which would largely suffice to pay Carolina her share of the heritage. But old Pols stubbornly refuses to part with the money, exclaiming in despair that it is not his but God's, a sentiment Harmen cannot as yet attach any sense to. Although these people, as everywhere in Maartens, should strike us as types, we are nevertheless impressed by their individuality, in particular in the case of old Steven Pols, Harmen's father. As we are being told, he is a silent, self-centred and reticent –

even recalcitrant – man, and soon it becomes evident that his suspicions of his wife’s conduct *before* their wedding, when she was engaged to the wealthy corn-factor Blass, stem from his own deep sense of inferiority. He is afraid of his own passionate outbursts, which in his youth led to a wrongdoing: the accusation of an innocent man. A sin from which he still suffers deep down and for which he believes there is no atonement. “With the ready gloom of his race”²³³, he has become equally suspicious of all men and afraid of his own suspicions, having no one to confide in, as he dares not confide in himself.

In his bewilderment, due to his father’s intransigence, Harmen rides over to Blass, whose acquaintance he has made some time earlier and who passes their house every evening on his way home. The story advances unusually rapidly by means of plot-injections given in the shape of dialogue, frequently interrupted by significant moments of silence:

“Steven, why didn’t the boy take his coffee this morning?” she burst out. She held the empty cup in her hand. “Because he didn’t want it,” replied the man, taking up a pail. “Yes, the cow’s dead. More misfortune. You and I’ll have to search our hearts before the Lord.” “But why didn’t he want it? Why hasn’t he been back for bit nor sup all day? ‘Tis the first time he’s missed a meal that we didn’t know.” The old man paused, with his two gleaming pails, in the sheltered heat of the barn, the warm, grey, sunless light. “Steven, why did he look at you and then draw back his hand?” She spoke with the fevered insistence which, in a woman, commands reply. “You had been angry with him!” – she bent forward; the cup rattled. “What had you done? What had you said?” He drew back before this silent helpmeet, suddenly become his judge. It was true that he had always been kind to her; his were olden ideas, Jewish ideas, of the handmaid whose eyes are upon the lips of her lord. “I was angry with him: I did good to be angry,” he said, pressed. “I was sure of it!” she exclaimed, almost in triumph. “You have reproached him with this marriage! You have bidden him get you money. He is gone.” “Did he tell you”, cried Pols, letting go one pail. “How else could you guess?” “No. Aren’t I his mother?” “You guessed? You guessed?” “Mothers don’t guess. Guessings are often wrong.” “He taunted me,” said the farmer. “He’s ruined me. It was he put Roel up to this plan.” “Ruined *you*? You’re an old man. It’s worse for him,” she cried, enraged. He looked at her. “It’s worst for me,” he said. “It’s my father’s place. I’m Steven Pols.” A great silence fell between them, a heavy, horrible silence. (65-66)

Not only at several instances in the quotation above, but throughout the narrative it is implied that there is truth in Steven’s suspicion. From his conservative and religious standpoint there is of course no alternative to woman’s duty: to marry the first man she gave herself to. In spite of all his doubt and self-despair, he is increasingly convinced that he is not his wife’s first man and that, therefore, the marriage has been a sin ever since the day it was blessed.²³⁴

For Maartens, being a Christian means one should have a bad conscience intrinsically. It is this attitude from the pulpit down to the culprit that irritates in the long run. One is reminded of the author’s father who was a preacher and there are moments when we involuntarily

²³³ *Harmen Pols*, 58-59.

²³⁴ The satire in Steven’s mixture of Dutch Calvinistic pragmatism and devotion cannot be overlooked: he believes money will condone for his wife’s sin.

suspect the author himself of being a preacher *manqué* in the guise of his narrator. Accordingly, in Maartens' novels, the word 'sin' is quick at hand, too quick, in fact, for the period in which *Harmen Pols* appeared. Particularly for the peasant class, old-fashioned and pious, it certainly was not an uncommon phenomenon that women were forced to marry *another* man because they found themselves pregnant.

From the physical similarities between Harmen and Blass, Steven Pols despairingly conjectures that Harmen is not his', but Blass' son. When, at the end of their long talk, his wife avows that she has a secret, this threatens to dissolve the entire foundation of his existence. Now there is a prevailing notion of adultery, although, *de facto*, this is impossible. But the notion, injected by Jenny's ambiguous attitude, spreads like ripples caused by a stone thrown into water: we are left to surmise whether she committed adultery after the marriage to Steven, and whether that adulterous relationship perhaps never ended. The theme embarked upon in *Dorothea* is carried a step further: in that novel, the author was interested in woman's reaction to her husband's moral trespassing; here we have a woman grappling with her conscience with regard to *her own* conduct.

The characters enact the author's increasing incomprehension of the ways of the world, as opposed to the idealistic doctrines of faith. Quite apart from the fact that this discrepancy had been Maartens' central problem from *Joost Avelingh* onwards, the degree in which these values are being questioned here points at the transition of values characterising the period.²³⁵

The old man came behind her, asking about a cloth he wanted. "You startled me," she said. "I couldn't find you," he answered darkly. She had understood that he had expected, perhaps hoped, to surprise her in the cellar. [Where the money was hidden in a safe]. "I can't stand it any longer," he continued. What couldn't he stand? The boy's prolonged absence? No, nor could she. "You must swear to me that you'll never open the letter-lock," he said, "You must swear by God in heaven." "I don't believe in God in heaven," she said. "But I'll swear." He turned to her, appalled. The great silver-clasped Bible on the polished table gleamed at her. She saw it. "You have never said anything so awful before!" His voice was hushed. "I have thought it the more. Oh, well, I'll believe in your God in heaven if only you don't think He's on earth." Her words came sadly; they thrilled her; it was not easy for her to speak them. [...] "Swear," he broke out, "That, whatever happens, you will never, never tell anyone else!" He lifted both fists to his own face. "That I refuse. I will never swear not to tell Harmen." He stood away from her. The tears

²³⁵ W. Robertson Nicoll wrote about Maartens to A. Quiller-Couch: "He is now firmly convinced that, though there is a God and he means well, He is not able to carry out His purposes owing to the strength of the Evil One and is constantly defeated" (P. Darlow, 167). In his seminal study of the changing concept of the novel between 1880 and 1910, Paul Goetsch finds that writers were no longer bound to take into account the ethical norms of society, considering that art lived of the very opposition to all codified forms of behaviour, cf. *Romankonzeption*, 85. Such was the position of the aestheticists, as presented, for example, in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and the "poisonous book" mentioned there, Huysmans' *A Rebours* (1884). Goetsch observes that, in *Dorian Gray*, the "deficiencies of hedonism are all rendered by means of moral allegory" (436). Maartens renders deficiencies of hedonism by means of psychological implication, as, for example, in his last novel, *Eve*. In this respect both novels are indicative of the transition of the age, regardless of the immense differences in artistic method and concept.

were under his lids. She did not see them, in the dusk. She saw the keen old eyes she knew so well. "I believe you think I am only a wretched old miser?" he questioned. He waited one moment. "I am not," he said quietly, and crept to the door. She stole after him. "Your love for the boy is a sin," he said. (75-76)

Harmen is overwhelmed by Blass' generosity in setting the terms for a share in the farm. Yet he refuses when he learns that Blass already has a mortgage on the property. He learns from Blass' niece Greta, the girl with whom he is in love, that Blass had gone to South Africa when he was a young man. He had adopted her there and brought her back to Holland. Long before he finds out about Blass' engagement to his mother, and before Blass' departure to South Africa, Harmen intuitively attempts to smother an awakening sympathy for this man. The psychological interest, engendered by the plot, mainly concentrates on Harmen, since the conflict now emerging cuts both ways: he feels he must condemn Blass *and* his mother, and he understands that there must be some connection between his mother's past and his father's motives not to use the savings in order to save the farm. All this is revealed in retrospect: things have begun to fall into a pattern for Harmen ever since his first encounter with Blass. But as the pattern gets more intricate, it turns into a labyrinth without escape for Harmen. The anger caused by his frustration turns against Providence. It is the one force that appears to be utterly indifferent to his appeals for reconciliation. Thus, initiation manifests itself as a cry of protest against God.²³⁶

Harmen has an encounter with old Suerus, who is quick to sense the young man's difficulties in his quest for the truth. Suerus is not only a small-sized sample of the profit-seeking Jewish merchant; he is also the shrewd intellectual who has long lost his faith. Sceptically and ironically, he observes the community under his eyes, and the world at large from a distance. In a number of Maartens' novels, characters that possess these qualities offer the hero or heroine a temporary escape from their isolated position by means of dialectical argumentation.²³⁷ Apart from that, the Suerus *intermezzo* is Maartensian satire at its purest,

²³⁶ *Harmen Pols*, 147: "His heart was full of dull anger. Against God. Against the God, whoever He is, who puts thoughts of fear and horror into the tormented lives of men. The God who sees men suffer and tells them they will suffer more. The God, whose heaven-sent word, throughout the ages, has brought that look into loving women's faces, those words into the mouths of righteous men. This was the God of his up-bringing, his surroundings, the God of his fathers, his father's God. Every morning, every evening, before work and after, the hard bread from heaven had mingled with the coarse bread of earth. Father read, from the Old Testament chiefly, commination by preference, every evening, every morning, like most men of his kind and of his child-memories. Harmen repeated a few words that were not even a mechanical prayer. But his life was unavoidably blackened by the dull thought of "the Lord." In the trouble that had suddenly ruffled its repose he had naturally cried out to the Almighty, certain tyrant and possible helper. He had believed in the reply, at Lievendael [i.e., Blass' willingness to help]: he had rejoiced in it. Now he struggled, bewildered, caught by the Fowler in His net. This was his Father's religion, the religion of your childhood. You never needed it until you were in trouble; then it thickened the haze."

²³⁷ Other examples are: Parson Jacob in *An Old Maid's Love*, Volkert in *The Greater Glory*, and Mark Lester in *Dorothea*. In spite of their scepticism, these intellectuals still remain within the bonds of the

occurring at the very moment when Harmen's religious entanglements threaten to become annoying. The caricature of the Jew introduces a change of mode into the satirical. Now that a certain narrative distance has been re-established, the author is able to continue the theme dealt with here, God's severity, in a lighter mode while having got rid also of that certain oppressiveness of the preacher, mentioned above. The point of focus has effectively shifted from Harmen to a panoramic view, made possible by the regained narrative distance. Within that panorama, Harmen naturally takes his stance as one of the characters among many. Often though at such instances, it appears as if the author resorts to the Thackerayan mode in order to get away from too close an involvement with the theme at hand, a narrative diversion not always successfully undertaken.

We have now passed the middle of the book, and the interest has shifted from the son to the relationship between the son and the mother, a relationship the real nature of which remains ambiguous. All we know is that it is extremely intense, suspect even of a symbiotic tendency. Inherent to Maartens' psychological realism, the intensity of that relationship is manifested with a renewed impulse of dramatic dialogue in the narrative: Harmen shows his dislike for Blass, and Jenny is aware that her son, not knowing how to cope with his frustration, instinctively withdraws from her. It urges her to justify herself, which, to him, must seem like an avowal of her guilt.²³⁸ The fact that Jenny does not perceive the significance of his allegation increases the ambiguity about her personality: We keep wondering what her secret is, if not that Harmen is in reality Blass' son.

metaphysical tradition According to Goetsch, the liberation of man from these bonds was not yet a fact in the literature between 1880 and 1910. However, the type of the free intellectual (usually a natural scientist) occurred, for example, in Hardy, where he took diabolical traits, or he became an impostor, a threat to his fellowmen, as in Gissing, see Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 441 ff.

²³⁸ *Harmen Pols*, 205-206: "You don't know him," she said coldly. "It is a foolish fancy or a misunderstanding. He is a good man, though I could't see my way to becoming his wife." "Because you loved my father!" said Harmen. He could have bitten out his tongue, as the saying goes. Here was the one thing he had resolved not to say – the one irreparable thing – he had said it. "No," she answered, beneath the shade of the lindens. "I did not love your father." The very nightingales seemed to pause to hear her. "I loved Govert Blass." "Mother why do you say this to me?" "Because you asked me. Your manner is so strange, it almost looks as if your love were slipping from me. I cannot bear that. I can bear all our other misfortunes. Not that. Believe me, I shouldn't have said it, had you let me keep it back. Why didn't you? I can't lie to you, Harmen, I can't!" He was silent. He wondered, could she lie to his father? "Your father doesn't ask," she said quickly, as if divining his thoughts. "He is wise. I told him honestly I didn't love him, when he proposed to me; he was so much older than I – I said – oh, Harmen, why do you make me speak?" "I don't, mother; I'd much rather not hear." He rose from his seat by her side. The moon shone down on her, through the lindens. "Wait! Don't run away now! Yes, you do make me. I must tell you now!" Her words broke loose, nervously, jostling each other, and falling, "You see, he understood I was willing to marry him. I liked him. We have been happy. I have done my duty by him. Oh, Harmen, you mustn't misunderstand." "No, I mustn't misunderstand," said Harmen in a heart-breaking tone. He tried to alter it; it ended in a sob. "You can't, if you will only listen to me," she pleaded. "Oh, Harmen, why do you look and speak like that? Govert Blass went to Africa. I urged him to go. I didn't want to marry him. I honestly wanted to marry your father. I wanted to, Harmen! I had a perfect right." "Yes," said Harmen. "Hadn't I a perfect right?" "To marry *my father*? Certainly."

Harmen suffers, but it is within the logic of the intrinsic psychological plot that his emotional crisis has the liberating result of loosening the bond between mother and son. It helps him to embrace without fear the new experiences that lay on his way, not only with regard to Blass, but in particular with regard to Greta. Not much is said about the girl. Obviously it is her function to be another stepping-stone in Harmen's initiation. In singing for him, she unexpectedly achieves what he is most in need of: she unleashes the knot of pent-up frustrations and breaks down the barrier of his restraints.²³⁹

For a little while the author is engulfed in the sub-plot of the entanglement between Harmen and Greta. It takes its course – inevitable in Maartens it would seem – into the father-daughter pattern existing between Blass and Greta. However, contrary to our first premonition, the author does not focus on that relationship, but on Blass himself. What we really suspect is that Blass' opposition to a union stems from his own fears, as it were, of a repetition – in Harmen – of his own shortcomings. Blass' bad conscience thus corroborates the previous implications: the question arises why a rapid climax is delayed, now that it seems a pre-marital sexual union between Jenny and Govert Blass is beyond doubt to have taken place. The sustenance of mystery not only increases the tension, but also the reader's interest. Yet it equally strains his patience and, hence, lessens his empathy with the characters, even if he remains credulous. In particular this is the case towards the end, when Harmen learns that Greta might not be Blass' adopted child, but his daughter (289). This provokes the climax of Harmen's crisis: he approaches the point of losing his faith. Ironically, the 'danger' is warded off by Suerus, the pragmatic Jew-philosopher, who warns him: "Whatever you do, don't lose your faith, as I did. That's illogical. God must make sense." (303)

In a conversation between her and her husband, in the presence of their son, the final disavowal of the mother and wife comes as a revelation to the parties involved giving a surprising turn to the reader's expectation:

"Steven, what have you told my son?" she said. A sudden purple overspread her face and neck, a colour so strange they had never seen it before. "Do not speak!" she added swiftly. [...]. She rose to her feet. "You have told him that he is the son of Govert Blass!" Harmen, motionless by the door, gasped aloud. "It is not so, Harmen. You are not Blass's son." "What!" exclaimed Steven. "After all these years, all our wretchedness, all my doubt – after the money is gone, the expiation – gone, you tell me now, you have been a faithful wife to me – honest and true?" She shrank back, involuntary, against the folds of the green curtain, in the heat and dusk of the partly shaded room. "No," she said. "You must keep calm, Harmen; you must have patience. No, I have not been a faithful wife to you Steven." (308-309)

²³⁹ Maartens uses this device, the deliberating effect of singing, at several other instances, e.g. in *An Old*

There are similarities between Jenny and Jetta (*The Price of Lis Doris*) in their attitude to marriage: both consider it a means to attain social status. The father-son conflict – essentially between pragmatism (the father) on the one hand and idealism (the son) on the other – is a recurrent theme, indirectly in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, also in *An Old Maid's Love*, *The Greater Glory*, *The Healers* and *The New Religion*.

In the following, it becomes obvious that Jenny has only been adulterous *in spirit*. What she considers as “All the rest has been sin.”(310) is the fact that she unwittingly continued to love Blass all her life, although they had never met again. From Jenny's standpoint, it therefore becomes immaterial whether or not she had had sexual intercourse with Govert *before* she met Steven. Accordingly, that question – crucial to the husband, Steven, with his male perception of possession – is left unanswered. Having married the man she did not love was, to her, a form of adultery in spirit, not in the flesh: this has been her sin. The discrepancy between the male and the female conception of adultery is touched upon. Again we are left to ponder upon the question whether the author's idealistic concept of womanhood gets the better of him, or whether we are given proof of his profound understanding of the differences between the sexes. Jenny had acted in the wake of a misconception, adding a shade of the tragic: she had sincerely believed that the old love was dead. There is human failure, but there is also the blindness of human fate. All is utterly beyond control, and we find ourselves again at the crossroads between morals and modernism. In *Harmen Pols, Peasant*, it opens the way to the apologetic atmosphere with which the novel ends: Blass is invited into the house.

II.14. The adulterous woman: Maartens' last novel: *Eve. An Incident of Paradise Regained* (1912)²⁴⁰

Maartens begins *Eve* with an introductory announcement, rather fittingly called “The Gambit”: “The central fact of this volume is ancient and eternal as the dream of Paradise. But my resolve to develop it on the lines here followed dates from the evening when I finished

Maid's Love (Madame de Mongelas singing to Arnout) and *Dorothea* (The impact of Giulietta's voice on Egon).

²⁴⁰ *Eve: An Incident of Paradise Regained* (London: Constable, 1912; Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1912). In the novel, the heroine is also called Eva. Goetsch assesses that, while the popular contemporary novel dealt with the pro-and contra of religious convictions, with a tendency to recommend an emancipation from all too rigid dogmas, as that would solve all problems, the loss of faith, as well as doubts and trepidations about religion became the central theme of the serious novel. Amongst Maartens' novels this would count in particular for *Eve*. Goetsch goes on to say that Hardy, Gissing, Bennett and Butler belong to this latter category, who sometimes endowed their older characters with more positive qualities than those belonging to the younger generation, who have become doubtful in matters of faith. See *Romankonzeption*, 440 ff. Burdett stated that, after *Lis Doris*, it would be “a descent to dwell on either *Harmen Pols* [...] or the tale of the repentant adulteress in *Eve*, Maartens' last published novel.” (Burdett, 127) Having come to the close of his already lengthy article, it seems that Burdett had to be brief for reasons of space – hardly because these novels were, as he suggested, not worthy of any more attention.

reading Theodor Fontane's famous novel 'Effi Briest'. I there and then diffidently but deliberately set myself to attempt the same thought, with a difference. The result is this book." Adultery had become an increasingly recurrent theme in literature ever since Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). When it was legally banned for its treatment of the issue, that novel had become famous overnight. By the turn of the century, adultery had become one of the topics of the day, in particular in those classes, which were in a sufficiently independent position to question their own standards of social respectability. Published in 1896, Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* had quickly established itself as one of the most famous treatments of the subject in literature.²⁴¹ While visiting the United States in 1907, Maartens referred to the impact of his books on many female readers in an interview:

[Evidence] contained in the hundreds of letters that come to me from every quarter of the globe, that has made me humanly acquainted with your people before I visited them. These letters have been written to me by women who have found in my books [...] some note of understanding and sympathy. In these stories I have tried to depict the feminine heart. I have tried to show the unhappiness and tragedies that come about by the inevitable laws that rule the relations of man and woman. [...] Once a woman has taken the step, and perhaps – in fact, very probably – made a mistake, there is no redress. [...] And so there come the disappointments, the soul hunger, the depressions that are the result of ideas destroyed, of needs unknown and unanswered.²⁴²

“The step” referred to by Maartens is not the adulterous act, as one might assume, but the institution of marriage itself: in most cases the result leads up to inexorable defeat. Its inherent deficiencies lie dormant from the very beginning, waiting for the apt moment to come to the fore. This is the theme of *Eve* where, in its ultimate consequence, defeat means adultery. The antagonism is typical for Maartens: we are aware throughout that the adulterous act is considered a moral failure, therefore it has to be rejected. At the same time, however, by its simple and straightforward style, the story turns into an apology for Eve, and for the many

²⁴¹ For a comparison between *Eve* and *Effi*, see: O.W. Tetzlaff, “Effi Briests Holländische Nachfolgerin”, *Fontane Blätter*, vol. 2 (1970), 116-119. Given the similarities in social background of the two heroines, Tetzlaff points out that the differences in the plot development, after adultery has been committed, are above all rooted in differences of character: The young Dutch woman is much more independent and passionate: she is totally involved in her affair with heart, body and soul. In sharp contrast to that there is a passivity in Effi's attitude even while she briefly exults in her affair. After being separated from her lover, she tries to forget him as quickly as possible. Tetzlaff points out that it is not his aim to rescue Maartens from oblivion, let alone to put him on a level with Fontane. He merely wants to draw attention to the existence of a Dutch novel written in English that was directly inspired by *Effi Briest* to deal in its own fashion with the question of adultery. Far from assuming any feminist stance, *Eve* may not be put on a level with the ultra-conservatism explored by Valerie Sanders in her book *Eve's renegades: Victorian anti-feminist women novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1996). By way of comparison, see also the treatment of this theme by Maartens' famous compatriot, Louis Couperus (cf. Elsbeth Wessel, “Louis Couperus: *Eline Vere*: Ein Beitrag zum europäischen Gesellschaftsroman”, *Etudes Germaniques* 37.4 (1982), 411-429.

²⁴² *The Washington Post* (21 April 1907); there is no trace of any of such letters, many of which were anonymous, as Maartens states in the same interview.

women in a similar situation. Adultery is implied to be the logical consequence of certain antecedents: highly understandable but not easily pardonable.

In *Eve*, Maartens tackled a subject that had had a long gestation and that he must have dreaded: female adultery. Carefully approached in *Harmen Pols*, and never in explicit terms, it now finally and unequivocally becomes the issue at stake. The author not only actually supersedes his own moral inhibitions, but above all, it is the negation of his own – long upheld – ideal of womanhood: that long cherished ideal of unquestioning devotion, subservience and purity which, up to this point, he had never succeeded in overcoming as a writer.

We have grown familiar with a certain pattern in Maartens' father-daughter relationships: Eve's father, the affable Melissant, is not essentially different from the Colonel in *Dorothea* in his pragmatic hedonism. Eve, like Dorothea, grew up, sheltered from the surrounding 'evil' world. Dorothea lived separated from her father, tucked away in surroundings governed by strong moral principles. By contrast, Eve is entirely raised in the spirit of her father's practised principle of the lightness of being. Such had always been her life at home, a life without worries: 'sans-Souci' indeed, as the country estate of her family is called. The final stage of their unperturbed idyll is at the beginning of the book: in a conversation with his wife, Melissant precludes upon the expectation of trouble to come:

The sun that had been awake for hours – that barely gets to sleep in these young days of July – the sun streamed its warm radiance over the garden, licking up the dew-drops in their millions, illumining the shiny rhododendron bushes, making a great glow upon the cool green lawn. A cart passed in the sunk road, with a whistling baker's lad. Over yonder lay the river, an orange sail double against its placid glass. "The ring of Polycrates," mused Melissant, suddenly, aloud. His voice had changed. She looked up at him – he was just a trifle taller – with mild enquiry. He laughed. 'Tis an old Greek story; didn't you hear about it in the school-room?" "No. Remember they taught me nothing, just as they tried to teach you too much." "And the result is the same. But this story has stuck in my brain. Everyone must have his share of trouble, it says. If the Gods forget your share, try to select it. Otherwise they're apt to make up for lost time. So Polycrates flung his greatest treasure into the sea." "What was his greatest treasure? I shall never dare to go yachting with you again." "A ring. A fisherman found it in a fish. So Polycrates was slain that night." But she only laughed, a brighter laugh than his. "I like your 'so.'" He persisted. "No, really, we have been too happy. Look around. The gods give and take." (vol. 1, 9-10)

For some mysterious reason, it is no longer possible *not* to worry about the future, as the Melissants had vowed to do and had kept up for a long time. When Melissant throws away his ring, it is not only to confirm his premonition of impending catastrophe, but also that of the reader. He threw away his most cherished possession, the ring he had worn ever since Eve's birth as a token of the bond with his wife: he had not always been faithful. The throwing away

of the ring also symbolises the exodus of his daughter from the shelter he had given her, his responsibilities now virtually having come to an end. Maartens' play upon Schiller's ballade on the myth of Polycrates is shown in the irony of having the ring taken back to Melissant first by his own dog, who retrieves it, then by Eve herself. It makes him realise his guilt once more, as well as his commitment to his daughter. In the following, the symbolic meaning is further deepened. In a parody of Wagner's "Ring" presented as a sketch by the children to their parents on the occasion of their wedding anniversary, the son, Fritz, is made to resemble his father while playing the part of Siegfried. It was Siegfried who squandered the all-important Ring, token of fidelity to Brünnhilde, thereby betraying her. But in the parody, it says: "the Rheintochter Eva drew the ring from Brünnhilde's willing finger and flung it with the cry, "Zurück vom Ringe!" into the Rhine-gravel at her father's feet. He stooped to pick it up, amidst a final crash of the "Götterdämmerung." With growing anxiety he had followed the grotesque story. He held aloft the ring. Its emerald caught the light. "Good God, my own ring!" he said. For a moment, at the chill blast, the uproar of laughter and singing froze around him." (*Eve*, vol. 1, 55-57). The reader anticipates the way the plot unfolds, opening up like a path leading from the blissful heights of the beginning downward to the depths of utter despair in the end. As usual, all the Maartensian 'paraphernalia' – by now so reassuringly familiar – are added as icing on the cake. Naturally they often make that path less steep than we would have desired: we recognize some in the many types of people described. The stubborn Baron Knoppe for example, Rutger's uncle, calls to mind Baron van Trotsem in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*.

It is not easy to conjecture why Eve should be interested in Rutger Knoppe at all. Apparently he awakens in her the potential desire for a more serious life, away from the superficial trivialities of Sans-Souci, a desire deeply rooted in her character. What first impresses her is the calmness of his being, not to say stolidity, strengthened by his age and experience. Obviously, he is hard working and ambitious. That he has no sense of humour – one of the most essential ingredients of her entire upbringing – she does not see yet, neither that there is only little room allotted to a woman in his life. These are only two of the bitter pills she willy-nilly swallows after the final and fatal step, marriage. Once married, she soon understands that she will never really be substantially a part of Rutger's existence – certainly not in an emotional way, assuming that his eruptive reactions point at suppressed emotions. She will never get any further than being a mere asset to his status and career, for the sake of social conventions rather than anything else.

A 'desire for the different', as one might describe Eve's longing for new challenges, is alien to Rutger. Extremely opposed views do not interest him, on the contrary, they appal him. That his interest in Eve increases has nothing to do with what *she* thinks or says of him, not even at the start of their acquaintance: marriage to an heiress is simply instrumental in the realisation of his plans. Even before their wedding, during a dinner party given by the Melissants, Rutger is bewildered by Eve's way of chatting in the liberal spirit of her upbringing. It shows the entirely new type of woman at the centre of interest, a woman conscious of her class, sure of herself and with a will of her own. This distinguishes her from the preceding Maartensian heroines, Dorothea, Ursula, Yetta or any of the others: a discrepancy between themselves and their *milieu* establishes the nucleus of their inner conflict. Breaking of the bonds of that environment had always been a step forward in the process of their own growth, voluntary or involuntary. That is why it is hard not to consider Eve's marriage as the reverse of the process that leads to self-fulfilment. We expect her to be hampered by it, as is indeed the case. The marriage-proposal taking her by surprise, and circumstances favouring a positive answer, she is in a way talked into it by her own relatives. That she should marry this man, where there is no more than a shimmering of love between them, proves her naive outlook on life. The author combines artistry with psychological insight when, not long after the dinner party, Eve is found by Rutger after she had hurt herself, cycling with a friend. The accident helps to establish the illusion of a togetherness that momentarily eclipses the actual discrepancies between their worlds:

All his interest seemed centred on the swelling he was handling with such care. [...] "You must have fallen on your wrist. It is just a little dislocated. It's getting worse every minute. That means it'll be a long, slow rather painless affair. If I set it right now, at once, that'll hurt – but the swelling'll go down." "You are sure?" He flashed up his eyes at her, straight. "If I doubted, would I try?" "Do it," she said in complete abandonment. (vol. 1, 77)

Eve is of the kind that, rather than acquiescing in their lot, they abandon themselves to fate. Acquiescence would have implied that she passively accepts her fate, in spite of the awareness of what is at stake.²⁴³ What follows is but the natural consequence of her willingness to surrender to the illusion of the moment, to render it real. Simultaneously, the banal reality *and* the illusion of two people falling in love are evoked in the narrative:

She was silent: a great repose came over her, a great tenderness, in the lull. She could bear the silence no longer. She opened her eyes to the sunshine, on the greensward, in the heat. "So [...] you became a village burgomaster." [...] "There's heaps to do – if one likes, you know – among the people. And somehow, it looks more real than parade." "And I don't think I quite understand," she said humbly, "about real life and parade. I should like

²⁴³ This is, precisely, the difference between Eve Melissant and Fontane's heroine, Effi Briest.

to.” [...] She avoided his eyes. She knew that he was trying to look deep into hers. He could see the pulses at her neck as she turned away. “I shall keep that,” he said., “to run after you. Wherever you are.” He folded his own handkerchief. The dog watched. “You are brave,” he said. “I had no idea. Sensible and brave. One wonders, would you dare?” “I can see the dog-cart coming along the dyke,” she replied, “A thousand thanks for mending my hand so well. I shall always remember – ” That I was the first man to hurt you,” he said. His tone stirred unknown depths of her being; she turned whiter than in the worst moment of her pain. “And to find out how brave you are. And sensible. I had no idea. I saw how lovely – ” He stopped blundering; he had taken her hand again, to place it in the sling. He held it. (vol. 1, 81)²⁴⁴

Now that the roots of the plot have been established, the author assumes a leisurely pace in their development, taking his chance to indulge into the kind of narrative we have long grown familiar with. The many scenes at the burgomaster’s house have their purpose not so much in what is being said, than in the sheer rendering of comedy. In her new position as the burgomaster’s wife, Eve needs to get acquainted with all sorts of provincial dignitaries. It provides the author with an excellent occasion to meander in an area where he excels: his creation of country types. This satirical comedy allows for a Thackerayan kind of social criticism: stinging, but not necessarily negative, let alone cynical.²⁴⁵

The character that exemplifies this kind of satirical criticism is Rutger’s aunt, the Freule Imka Lexma, who supervises her nephew’s domestic well being.²⁴⁶ The old lady, now deprived of part of her domestic duties, has taken to Rutger’s young and inexperienced spouse with spontaneous sympathy. She magnanimously takes it upon herself to introduce Eve to her duties as the new ‘head of the household’. Her permanent presence facilitates Eve’s social integration into her new environment. As the narrator proceeds, his words “the smooth old voice” would evoke Thackeray’s universe also without the reference to *Vanity Fair*:

Humans of your own set are never quite uninteresting in their sayings and doings. Especially not, when discussed and illumined on the long way back, by so compendious a social dictionary as Aunt Imka. The old lady was not spiteful: she was worse: she was accurate. She didn’t mind what she told, as long as she could vouch for it. To Eva she became an astounding revelation of humanity. She had eighty years to talk about. She had forgotten nothing and forgiven everything. To Eva, in that first winter, the change was a step from a populous paradise to a window on Vanity Fair. [...] During the long-drawn drives, through mute mists or sobbing rain-storms, the smooth old voice spun in its dark corner tales of long dead silliness and sullenness and sin. (vol. 1, 157)

By a number of subtle inferences, the reader is psychologically prepared for what seems like predestination: Eve is still at an early stage of her marriage; nonetheless Aunt Imka’s stories

²⁴⁴ There is a similar pattern in *An Old Maid’s Love*: the stalwart male Arnout helping and protecting the helpless woman, Mme. de Mongelas, instantly creating some sort of a union between them that otherwise would not have come about.

²⁴⁵ For a detailed examination of the influence of Thackeray, see Ch. III.

²⁴⁶ A recurrent pattern, cf. for example. *God’s Fool* (Johanna and Elias), *An Old Maid’s Love* (Suzanna and Arnout) and *A Question of Taste* (Joris and his mother).

already enkindle in her the “confused murmurings of a new romance.” In a conversation about a female acquaintance who has committed adultery, Freule Imka Lexma is prompted to quote her father in a provocative way: “The unfaithful wives, of all classes, should be burned at the stake. That would keep them cool.”²⁴⁷

More and more often, little domestic scenes between the couple imply the – ever so subtly – increasing incongruity in their perceptions. This is enforced by Rutger’s patriarchal manner, epitomised in his manner of addressing his wife with the term “child”. There is the scene in which Eve is trying the new grand piano, Ruther’s present to her, for the first time (170). It is the beginning of the gradual breakdown of communication between them. Really disconcerting to both of them, to the point of agitation, is that they feel threatened, each in his own way, in (what they conceive of) as the most precious good they possess: their set of values. To Eve, morality is above all an aesthetic value, whereas, to Rutger, it essentially represents social convention. The immensity of the difference is spread out like a tablecloth before the reader.²⁴⁸ This is but one example of excellent drama, gradually escalating into a situation that is hardly bearable for Eve any longer. On the other hand, as we still live in times where woman is expected to acquiesce, it is not so much a strain for Rutger.

Having reached the end of the first volume, the plot is revolving more around Eve’s increasing frustration. After many digressions Eve’s emotional perception is almost exclusively at the centre of interest. Before, we had witnessed the creation of an independent

²⁴⁷ *Eve*, vol. 1, 146. Apart from describing the contents of Maartens’ novels, Van Maanen was mainly preoccupied with types and characterisation in Maartens: Of the four pages in his dissertation on *Eve*, he rather exaggerates Freule Lexma’s importance, filling almost an entire page describing her, adding: “It is a pity that, in the sequence of the story, we do not hear much more of Freule Imka, and do not get her comment on the final rupture.” (109-110)

²⁴⁸ *Eve*, vol. 1, 171-173: “She came back to put her arm round his neck. ‘My beautiful piano!’ she said. ‘My good, kind husband!’ – then with as complete change of tone: ‘I’m going out to the flowers! Thank Heaven there are flowers again at last!’ [...] She came back a moment later, her arms full of hyacinths, masses of white blossom against the dark blue of her dress. ‘What are you going to do with all those?’ He had waited to collect some papers before going to the parish-hall. ‘Put them about the room in vases.’ ‘My dear child, in this low room! The scent would be murderous! You don’t want to kill yourself and me!’ ‘The rooms are low,’ she said, dubitating. ‘At Sans-Souci we put them everywhere. We like the smell.’ ‘Your healths are wonderful; you feel nothing. These would give me a racking headache in no time.’ ‘You?’ she cried, amazed. ‘Yes, me – big strong countryman that I am!’ ‘Big, strong countryman that was!’ – she could get no pity in her voice, had she wished it. A couple of flowers fell to the floor. He picked them up for her. ‘I shall take them away,’ she said, ‘I found a letter from my mother in the hall. She offers me, as a birthday gift, a fortnight with her in Brussels.’ [...] ‘I can get all my summer things in Brussels,’ she said. ‘Do you think, Rutger, they would move the old piano now, at once? I should like that.’ ‘I will see about that. But I shouldn’t get the things in Brussels.’ Again she stopped, wide-eyed, with her flowers, in the door. ‘Why not?’ He hesitated. ‘You asked how you could help me,’ he stammered. ‘I – look here, it wouldn’t be fair, if I didn’t speak out – would it now? You see it’d set their backs up here! I don’t mean the village-dressmaker, but the people at Kykstad. Kykstad’s in my district; they’re all on the look-out for you here. And they’ll object to Brussels, for other reasons. I must be off now; we’ll talk about it’ – ‘By all means,’ she said on the stairs. ‘But I quite understand, Rutger. It’s nice to feel I’m helping – oh, it is!’” Rutger refers to his ‘district’ here because he is considering to campaign as candidate for the constituency, expected to be vacant soon. ‘Kykstad’, derived from the Dutch ‘kijken’ which means ‘to watch’ or ‘to look’, is a fictitious satirical name that might stand for any middle-sized provincial town.

female character, like a flower budding and blossoming in its own soil. Now, in an alien environment hostile to such qualities as spontaneity, generosity and aesthetic perception, its unique beauty is slowly crushed.

Eve has been thrown into a void; above all she must believe in her husband. That general quality of all of Maartens' heroines, complete devotion, is one of the determining motives that, subsequently and logically, give the plot its poise. For the first time though, Maartens does not simply imbue his character with this – his own – favourite quality of femininity, thereby merely establishing the prerequisite for total subservience of woman to man. This has the danger of turning heroines into mere types. Eve's insecurity markedly fosters her sense of devotion towards her husband; it does not harp on the reader's nerves however, as it follows organically from the plot structure and does not exclude the increasing rebellion she feels within.

The author consistently dwells on the two dominating currents in the stream that carries Eve's still weak personality forward. While we observe her in the wake of a self-imposed decision to give up her individuality, that same individuality is enhanced by several unexpected incidents. There is her discovery of art in the church of Volda, one of the neighbouring villages. In the long run it will prove to be a revelation, crucial to her quest for entirely new religious perceptions. It implies a further removal from her husband, another instant in her struggle for self-liberation, while at the same time she craves to submit herself to him. The next incident, her encounter with Udo Gallas, introduces the second half of the book. Accordingly, the interest immediately shifts to her relationship with Gallas and the heavy impact of that relationship on her personality.

The first half of the novel centres round Eve's endeavour to submit herself to the conditions inherent to her new status as a married woman, a submission in spite of the almost equally persistent undercurrent in her personality to resist those conditions. She is darkly aware what her marriage meant in reality: a form of self-denial, as it totally clashed with the spirit in which she grew up.

At the beginning of the second volume, another confrontation with Rutger creates the dramatic tension we have been anticipating for quite some time. In spite of the appalling weather Eve, now pregnant, takes it upon herself – against Rutger's wish – to go to the library she had set up shortly before. Subsequently she is taken ill and has a miscarriage. Her husband blames her personally for this miscarriage; it strikes her as a terrible accusation for which there can be no redress. From this moment onwards, resignation takes root in the innermost recesses of her being:

“If you don’t feel guilty,” he said stiffly, “then, certainly, do not let us speak of it. Every word would be hopeless: let us try to forget. Yet how can we do that? To me what you have done looks very like murder.” “You have spoken,” she said. The ground was littered with pink blossoms: her hand sank to them. He made one more desperate attempt. The tears were in his voice. “But surely you can see – ” he stuck. “I have told you all I can see. Quite. Dear Rutger, I am very, very sorry. Very, very wretched. But I don’t believe – oh, I won’t believe! – that it had been quite different, if I hadn’t gone on.” She held out her arms to him. “Kiss me!” she said. “Well, it would have been,” he answered, keeping back. Then, swiftly, he repented and bent over her, kissing her young forehead and her cheeks. “But you deceived me,” he said, unwilling, yet resolved to say it. “That is worst. You deceived me. For God’s sake, don’t do that again!” The agony of the loss burned deep down into her heart: the agony of the deceit lay outside her. (vol. 2, 6-7)

The degree of dramatic tension is once more increased by Rutger’s subsequent demand. “The one thing” he asks for, that she should give up her library. To him this is, in fact, but another of his concessions to social convention. To Eve, it represents his ultimate rejection of all her endeavours to be of use to the community she seeks to become part of, while at the same time gaining some amount of self-respect.²⁴⁹ The library which he wants her to give up had “cost her too much”, implying that her husband’s reproaches might, in the end, have led Eve to accept the blame of her miscarriage. Whether Eve is conscious of that or not; at any rate her reaction indicates a feeling of deep sorrow that stands in shrill contrast to Rutger’s extreme lack of understanding, utterly unaware as he is of the pain he is inflicting upon his wife and the irreparable damage his words are causing to their relationship. The dramatic tension attained at this point will never again entirely recede to its previous lower level. However, resignation is not the only thing resulting from what has happened between them. Simultaneously, her consciousness is shifting towards another vista: “It seemed to her almost as if, in her own nature, a new birth was taking place, an awakening that henceforth would refuse to be stilled.”(11-12) The reader’s interest has now entirely veered towards Eve’s awakening, the opening-up of a new horizon. Already at their first meeting, Udo Gallas made an impression on her because of his refreshing unconventionality. Gallas is an intriguing character whose presence invigorates the reader’s interest to the same degree as his impact on Eve is overwhelming. The reader’s willingness to suspend his disbelief is now as good as

²⁴⁹ Behind the invective of the narrative one senses the author, a social critic at heart: “One thing at least I want you to promise me,” he said. “To give up the beastly library – eh?” “Oh, no,” she answered quickly. “Oh no.” She added softly: “It has cost me too much.” “It has cost other people more! The vet’s wife has run away from him!” She laughed. To his horror she laughed. A frightened, nervous laugh, but a laugh. “Through reading one of your stupid plays”, he said furiously. “Your wicked plays, the Bigis would say!” “The Bigis! Mevrouw Bickert told me the woman had revelled in the ‘Doll’s House!’ – you remember Ibsen’s ‘Doll’s House!’ Don’t you? I thought everyone had seen it. We all went – how we laughed! That fool, Norah! You don’t mean that I can help that? It was your parson’s wife bought the plays. And there’s hardly a play in which some woman doesn’t run away from her husband. It’s the one subject on the stage and off.” “Eva, you can’t mean that!” “But I do mean it! So would you if you’d been to more theatres. And read more novels. And, moreover, the vet is a brute.” “Most people would call him a very good fellow.” “Well, he isn’t. He’s the sort of man a nice woman would loathe.” (Vol. 2, 8-9).

complete.²⁵⁰ One is in the benign position of being able to entirely identify with Eve in her struggle, now that, through her increasing intimacy with Udo Gallas, she becomes aware how deeply she resents the “permanent imputation of guilt” she feels burdened with by her husband. Significantly here, at the end of Maartens’ oeuvre, we have, for the first time, a heroine who – by her unheeded wishes to escape from the fate she naively accepted – is on the verge of an open combat against that persistent feeling of guilt that runs through the gallery of Maartens’ characters ever since *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*:

She planted a few wild-flowers [on their child’s grave] – buttercups, dandelions, in the hope Rutger would imagine they had sprung up of themselves. Most certainly she cared, even grieved for the sorrow, but she deeply resented the unrepeatable, permanent imputation of guilt. At the same time it braced her. She was awakened, to the wind and sun: to anger, to sorrow, to emotion, to love. She would not have gone back, if she could, to the old existence of case-hardened happiness. She felt the blood tingle, as a child with numbed hands, in the heat. Her woman’s heart was alive. (vol. 2, 23)

The author now fully concentrates on the above-described issues at stake, leaving room for side characters and scenes only insofar as they contribute to enkindle the interest. The narrative quite naturally progresses in that direction. Eve’s sister Marthe, for example, represents the type of the liberated woman, by no means with the author’s aim of idealising her, but simply to put her position in extreme contrast to Eve’s. The same is true for Piet Perk, the sensitive and critical neighbour and companion to the Melissant children, of whom it is merely implied that he is secretly in love with Eve: In this case no story follows to explain his antecedents – there is no need to – as might normally be expected in Maartens. Perk’s resentment against Hugo only serves the purpose of sharpening the profile of Gallas as an exceptional man, worthy therefore of Eve’s interest.²⁵¹ The reader’s suspension of disbelief proves that, for once, the narrative is completely subservient to the interest, and the reader-critic rejoices in the fact.

Eve’s father Melissant, a connoisseur of women, is the first to notice the change in Eve and, as he does not know anything about Gallas, mistakenly assumes her “to be in love with her

²⁵⁰ Suspension of disbelief: the expression was first used by Samuel Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*: “to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (*The Collected Works*, vol. 7.ii, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, 6).

²⁵¹ Teasingly, Eve calls her friend ‘Victor Hugo’ because of his poetic aspirations. The name ‘Perk’ recalls the renowned Dutch poet Jacques Perk (1859-1881) in his unsuccessful courtship of his beloved Mathilde, resulting in some famous sonnets: “Mathilde”, in *Gedichten* (1882). Possibly the choice of names alludes to the contemporary situation in Dutch poetry: the fervently neo-romantic Perk is likely to have deeply resented Victor Hugo (1802-1882) as the most lauded representative of French classicism. Here, Perk is another variation of the figure at the side of the heroine: secretly in love with her but belonging to a subordinate social class; cf. the head-gardener’s son in *The Greater Glory*, the priest Mark Lester in *Dorothea* and Lis in *The Price of Lis Doris*.

husband at last.”(59) When Eve realises that she has fallen in love with Gallas, it is already too late to resist, in spite of all her attempts. The more she feels the urge to resist, the more it becomes obvious to what extent her infatuation has already taken possession of her. When Gallas participates in the preparations for a theatrical performance in the village, the dialogues more and more cluster around that infatuation. During the rehearsal of a scene with two villagers who are supposed to fall in love, it turns into a declaration of love from Gallas to Eve, returned unwittingly by her embarrassed reaction, in a lovely interplay of directness and evasion (vol. 2, 69-71).

But the act of falling in love means much more to Eve; the new feeling is only the beginning of a profound *prise de conscience* encompassing all sides and layers of her personality. The narrative – unusual for Maartens – is close to being symbolic, evoking the inner forces at work. It is like a rebirth, a total regeneration of the body and the spirit. The love for Gallas, with the effect of a stimulating renewal of the senses, equally has a spiritual dimension, which, to Maartens, is the ultimate manifestation of love.

Unable to resist the flood of new sensations engulfing her, Eve returns to her beloved church at Volda. Upon her first visit she had noticed that she shared a particular aesthetic sensibility with the priest there, by the name of Father Bredo. There had been a certain confidentiality between them ever since. Now that confidentiality buds into a deepening spiritual intimacy. When she questions him about the petty little religious differences between Volda and Skilda, the two neighbouring villages representing Catholicism and Protestantism, he is ready to give guidance:

“Do not mind the differences, dear daughter. Listen to the Lives of the Saints!” She did so gladly. The lives of the saints had a wonderful increasing charm for Eve. They were a new world for her, the wide outlook, lifted high by a new power. The life of miracle and sacrifice, the life in God for mankind. The field blossoming with lilies where hitherto had been a stone court, in which the rich stood like tubed evergreens. She, listening, straining to fashion the sounds into sense. On no account would she have acquired the book and easily read it. Nor did the father offer to get it for her. “Yes,” she nodded. “Yes – again! His mansion – gave his mansion – *cut* his mansion? – oh, his mantle! – so he cut off half his mantle! That was very fine of him!” She looked down her long ulster. It would make a very unbecoming jacket, cut short. Today she could not listen at all: she could not catch his meaning: there was a film before her eyes, a buzzing in her head. The soft sunshine spread its warmth through the tracery of the chestnuts: the moist earth seemed awakening to meet it in its lengthening of the daylight. Summer was coming, for winter was slain. (vol. 2, 75-76)

The new feeling prepares the way to Eve’s spiritual epiphany long before the act of adultery is committed, the act itself being reduced, in fact, to no more than the conclusive culmination of a process initiated at her encounter with Gallas. Falling in love and spiritual awakening has become indistinguishable from each other. In all this, the suspension of disbelief is sustained,

even if we are aware of the author's concept of spiritual aestheticism looming up behind the experiences of his heroine: all this time it has not slipped from our memory that it was, after all, a lack of spiritual fulfilment that had driven her to the marriage with Rutger.

The narrative description that follows re-establishes the distance to the scene, dimming the contours of the train of events, as if a grey veil has been thrown over them, making them lose part of their colour and depth, before dialogue in Maartens always throws the reader back into the immediacy of the intensified emotions. On the verge of leaving for duties elsewhere, Rutger, is utterly astonished when he learns that his wife is determined *not* to go to her beloved parental home, Sans-Souci, for reasons quite unknown to him. When he tells her that Gallas would be coming at any moment now to say good-bye, she almost begs her husband to stay at least for tea, her conscience and sense of decency bidding her to brace herself against Gallas' overwhelming irresistibility. Yet, although the reader is a little longer kept at bay with his pent-up expectancy of the catastrophe close at hand, it is clear that Eve's subconscious wish to succumb to her desire is stronger while at the same time she is trying to ward it off:

"I have come in for a few words of farewell. I cannot forget that I have been in your sanctum, twice, the one you said you reserved for your friends." "Do not forget it," she said. "I want you to remember it. That you are in the sanctum I reserve for all my friends." "Thanks," he said, still unamiably, "a sort of inner court, full of worshippers!" "I know you don't take sugar. You mustn't demand too much. Everybody has a holy of holies, where nobody may intrude." "Your memory deceives you. One person may." She fought to keep the colour from her face. "I don't think we ought to talk like this. It is playing with sacred things. You must give my love to Celia. [His sister] Will you learn to fly at Nieburg?" "Yes. And I shall come here to show you. To take a turn with Aunt Imka!" "My husband will be at Nieburg. Arrange that with him." "You are coming?" A glad flame leaped from his throat. "I stay here. Did Aunt Imka –" "No more tea, thanks. I want to go away. Forgive my interrupting you. I don't care a damn about Aunt Imka." "Mynheer Gallas!" "I care about saying good-bye. That's what I've come for. I'm doing it. Oh, I'll do it quickly. I care to thank you for letting me do it. For letting me care. For – listening to me at all. It's all a blunder. I mean, I can't say it right. I didn't. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart for saying it wrong." He did not stop. He did not take her hand. He did nothing but go. She sat long without moving. She heard the voices of the faithful servants quarrelling in the kitchen. A few tears rolled down her cheeks. They came slowly. She had wept so little in her life. (vol. 2, 96-97)

When Gallas actually returns all of a sudden to show her what progress he has made in flying, the act of flying together symbolically anticipates their sexual union: "She felt the flutter of her inmost longing, like the flutter of a prisoned moth in its cocoon." (vol. 2, 105) We are now in anticipation, almost in complicity with the inevitable outcome.²⁵²

When the deed is finally done, the reader may utter a sigh of relief, and Maartens, as if in dread of having gone too far, hastens to have his heroine regress to familiar grounds: the

²⁵² This is similar to the mood of expectancy created by the very storm in Kate Chopin's short story "The Storm", published 1900.

abject and persisting state of bad conscience which we have encountered in so many of his preceding main characters. Although his allegiance to conscience as our moral guardian is what we had expected, we feel disappointed, even disillusioned. After all that Eve has gone through, we understand that she should repent, but at this point Edmund Gosse's verdict of *Eve* comes to mind. Gosse criticised Maartens for superimposing his own puritan ideal upon the heroine.²⁵³ Although it is a relief to see that Eve first goes to her father for help, and not to the priest, we sense the drawback as artificial, and it somewhat affects our suspension of disbelief. But Melissant's reaction, splendidly aphoristic, is a telling example of Maartens' talent of striking the complete image of a man, putting down, in a few sentences, his attitude, character and philosophy of life:

He drew a leather block-note towards him on the table: he splashed a blot of ink on it, in a purple smear from the quill. "There!" he said. "You see that? Parsons'll tell you nothing will clean it. *That's true*. But you can tear it off," – he did so, crumpling the little sheet – "and here's a fresh page to write on. K – Kiddie, I want you to listen. From to-day, mind you, your life mustn't be a memorandum, but a block-note."²⁵⁴

Since the typical Maartensian father-daughter bond of intimacy reigns between Eva and her father, it seems rather incongruous that Melissant, a man we have learnt to know as unconventional and individualistic, should threaten to repudiate his daughter if her adultery becomes known to the world. (*That* idea, we feel, Maartens would have been wise not to take from Fontane, where Effi was rejected by her father, in *Effi Briest*). Therefore, Melissant's act of ridding himself of the ring his wife had given him at their daughter's birth (cf. above, n. 123) not only symbolizes the end of his daughter's innocence, now that she has entered the "real" world (i.e. the world of sin, as Melissant, too, takes it), but also the end of his unconditional loyalty towards his child: He has started to distance himself from her, as implied by the fact that he does not even enquire about the identity of the man Eve gave herself to.

Parallel to Eve's growing inner despair, the Sans-Souci idyll is gradually cracking up, all of Melissant's children increasingly giving him cause to worry. At the same time his wife experiences the first signs, unknown to her husband, of a mysterious and incurable disease.

²⁵³ In the *Letters*, 312.

²⁵⁴ *Eve*, vol. 2, 116. Since the typical Maartensian father-daughter bond of intimacy reigns between Eva and her father, it seems rather incongruous that Melissant, a man we have learnt to know as unconventional and individualistic, should threaten to repudiate his daughter if her adultery becomes known to the world. (*That* idea, we feel, Maartens would have been wise not to have taken from Fontane, where Effi was rejected by her father, in *Effi Briest*). Therefore, Melissant's act of ridding himself of the ring his wife had given him at their daughter's birth (cf. above, n. 123) not only symbolizes the end of his daughter's innocence, now that she has entered the "real" world (i.e. the world of sin, as Melissant, too, takes it), but also the end of his unconditional loyalty towards his child: He has started to distance himself from her, as implied by the fact that he does not even enquire about the identity of the man Eve gave herself to.

Eve does follow her father's advice. With the suffering and the shame of her nights, she does not act as the woman she was, with her wealth and upbringing, i.e., in the Melissant family-tradition of 'lightness of being', implied by the very name of their estate, Sans-Souci. It is difficult to accept that Eve's suffering, as it appears, should be uniquely due to her 'sin', as one would have expected, and not due to the fact that she misses Gallas. Again, the suspension of disbelief is in jeopardy when, all of a sudden, her lover's importance declines in proportion to the increase of the impact of her 'sin'. After we have reluctantly come to terms with that fact, she obviously has no other place to go to than the church at Volda, to the shrine of the Holy Virgin she had admired so much earlier on, from a purely aesthetic point of view, but that now becomes a sacred object of worship.²⁵⁵

Eve's eventual conversion to Catholicism is not in the least due to Father Bredo, the priest at Volda. In Maartens' work he is an exception to the rule that priests are superficial and conventional abusers of their power to impose fear on their credulous flock.²⁵⁶ Father Bredo does not condemn her; on the contrary, he shelters her in compassion. The end of Chapter XII is a well-balanced blend of Maartensian ingredients: a little satire against doctors and supreme irony, combined with the sense of life's ineluctable contingencies:

“Can I be of any assistance? Hermus [the servant] came to tell me you were here,” said the kindly, grave voice of Father Bredo. She told him that she had become unconscious, suddenly, in the small space at the back of the altar. And now again she was giddy: she had never thus felt before. “Perhaps it is the Virgin Mother's response to your prayer,” replied the Father calmly. In a full voice of quiet sympathy he added: “You must go home now, and to-morrow morning ask your doctor. I feel sure you are not seriously ill.” No; the hesitant doctor declared next morning he felt sure, despite the collapse of all his theories, that Mevrouw was not seriously ill. An hour later she received her bronzed husband, by the doctor's advice, at her own door, and not, as she had wished, at the station. And she hid her countenance deep down upon his shoulder, as she whispered of a possible blessing, perchance sent to make a whole life worth living, from the very heart of the purest mother who ever breathed. (vol. 2, 129-30)

The “possible blessing” Eve demurely avows her husband is, in reality, her pregnancy by Gallas. It luckily averts the plot from the stagnant waters of religious idealism, making all events fall into an acceptable pattern, for the time being. The rumours and intrigues by the servants take their share in that pattern, always quick to tie preconceived bits of suspicion into a knot at the slightest unusual behaviour of their masters. Oddly enough, the different way in which Eve and Rutger react to such ‘machinations’ helps Eve to understand that the gap

²⁵⁵ *Eve*, vol. 2, 129: “She prayed. Without words, without sequence. Only in a yearning for a stronger, a better than herself. Her eyes were drawn up towards the eyes that shone down on her – wooden eyes, painted eyes – eyes in which the long dead artist had sunk his living spirit, eyes which the appeal of sad women, through the ages, had filled with such response as lies deeper than tears. And she wept as she had not wept till then – not in pity only for herself, but – contrition.”

²⁵⁶ The other exception is Father Bulbius in *The Greater Glory*.

between her and her husband has existed all along. Ironically, it takes a misunderstanding to save the situation: Whereas Eve is repenting her adultery, Rutger believes she is apologising for her flying escapade with Gallas:

“My dear child!” Ruther drew himself up to his full height, with all the old military bearing. “You surely do not think that our happiness is in the hands of the servants’ hall?” “No,” she stammered. “No. Still, to feel that the servants –” “The servants speak evil till one hears them, and then one sends them away. But there is just this. I am so much older than you: you must let me say it. There are appearances we do better to avoid. That – harmless – escapade was a mistake.” She looked long at him. And it seemed to her distraught imagination as if a vision of the Father shaped behind him, finger on lip. “It was wrong of me,” she said. “I am very, very sorry. I have often wanted to say how sorry I was.” (vol. 2, 174)

There is progress in the inner psychological conflict we are now entering upon. As Eve realises that their relationship was purely based on illusions they cherished about one another, Rutger’s importance to her greatly diminishes; accordingly, the burden of guilt caused by her act of adultery. Yet at the same time, her faith not only compels her to accept the moral code that adultery is incompatible with the state of marriage, it also makes her realise that, in this case, guilt is no longer defined so much as emerging from an act against her husband, as from an act against *herself*.

As long as we have a notion of progress, as well as of inner conflict, the interest is sustained. Now that we are again under the impression of pursuing the character *at first hand*, we once more believe in what we see: Eve distances herself from Rutger, with no need of an intermediary, least of all the narrator himself. The ambiguity further increases the tension, arising from the hints given that Rutger might not altogether have been unaware of the truth, but that his fear might possibly have urged him to suppress his premonition.

When “the storm bursts” (vol. 2, 180), the inevitable catharsis follows the venting of her pent-up frustration like an avalanche. Although the train of events seen from Eve’s point of view remains plausible in its enormity, the whole thing has turned into a Moloch for the reader. Compared to that, Rutger’s instinct to save the status quo of their marriage at any price, however reasonable it may seem from his pragmatic point of view, reflects but the bleak mediocrity of his emotions.

In an overall sense, *Eve* is a lecture on the ‘marriage fallacy’, with a definitely modern outlook, as reflected in certain opinions and conversations. More often than not, they meekly disguise the author behind the narrator, taking up the defence of woman. Considering the moral reflections to be found not only in this novel, but in all of the previous ones, the views held in the following conversation between father and daughter is, to say the least, surprising. As is often the case, Maartens’ views, an ultra-conservative at heart, are embedded in the

narrative of social satire, but at the same time, his views are not left untainted by the atmosphere of transition of all values, characterising the period: “Father, if I had run away to Udo?” “I should have tried to forget you. And should have nearly succeeded. But don’t call up disagreeables that didn’t occur. That’s quite weak. However, as you speak of it, I would much rather you ran away elsewhere than were miserable at home. Mind that. I should not allow your disappearance – for you would disappear – to disturb my dinner.”(vol. 2, 195-196) Alleging, apologetically, that she was “only a child” when the adultery occurred, Melissant championed Eve, also in the knowledge of not having sufficiently prepared his daughter for marriage. The foolishness of her determination to ignore certain facts of life garishly stands out. We feel the narrator’s presence, strongly supporting her and, hence, in solidarity with all women in similar circumstances:

She thought of her own long resolve not to know she loved Gallas, of her sharp struggle against the knowledge, when she could no longer elude it, of her gladly piteous surrender in the end. The three stages stood serenely out in her memory. Our hearts are too strong for us. How foolish, how unpsychological to fight our own hearts! She had turned her eyes away and dreamed of peace, till the whole world around her was aflame with the sense of him: then she had wasted her strength in what seemed to her almost successful combat, and lo he had stepped in quietly, and conquered with a touch! (vol. 2, 210)

The end of the scene epitomises the crisis: The parson’s wife, Mevrouw Dickert, blackmailing Eve by threatening to disclose her adultery, forces Eve into a concession in order to further her husband’s career. We are shown convincingly to what extremes an ambitious woman can go, determined to reach her aims at any price. With its final acceleration of dramatic tension, however, the scene does not compensate for our disillusion with the heroine, who *not even this once* remains adamant and resists the pressures assailing her by fighting them openly. But the dialogue, again, provides an excellent example of the author’s instinct of the playwright (vol. 2, 241-45).

When Rutger brings the message that Gallas has died in a crash with his airplane, Eve utterly and ultimately surrenders. As the book draws towards its end, this final conversation epitomises their estrangement. She abandons the secular world and enters a convent, thus conforming to her father’s who wishes to appear respectable to the outer world.

Having witnessed “the story of a life that can never be a whole life story” (vol. 2, 214), our impression is ambiguous, awed on the one hand and irritated on the other hand with the Gosse dictum (“Too puritan to my taste.”) at the back of our mind.²⁵⁷ The author is close to rendering something noble, true and good, while at the same time there is that persistently deranging note of something out of focus. This discrepancy affects Maartens’ novels in

²⁵⁷ *Letters*, 11.6.1912, 311.

general. Burdett, who struggled with this problem in his own way, put it as follows: “Observant as he was of life, rich in creating character, endowed with a graceful narrative skill, something in his imagination itself was lacking for fusing all his gifts into a unity larger than themselves. [...] Consequently, there is something spiritually overwrought in most of the novels.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Burdett, 127.

III Comparing Techniques: Maarten Maartens and his Master, Thackeray (1811-1863)

“If there is anything behind my story-books, others must find it.”

“God keep me from success! There is nothing in the world more hopelessly, heartlessly cruel than a successful literary man. Exception: Thackeray.”
Maarten Maartens

III.1. Writing about one's own people: Literary influences within the tradition

“My master, I fancy, is Thackeray,” Maartens wrote to his publisher, George Bentley.²⁵⁹ This is the only reference to an English author by Maartens that is to be taken as an avowal of artistic indebtedness.²⁶⁰ There are only two other explicit references to authors, but on another level; they refer to resemblances of mentality and character, hence to artistic temperament: “My mentality is, I suppose, in closest sympathy, in its own small way – among the great of my time – with Tolstoi. Perhaps with less sentimentality – in the best sense of the word.”²⁶¹ . Not long before his death he wrote to his friend, M. H. Spielmann concerning Walpole's memoirs and letters: “Have you ever read Horace Walpole? He and I are as like as two peas, in feelings, experiences, tastes, affectations, sufferings, fads, fancies etc. etc. It often takes my breath away to realise, from some fresh trifle, how – when I thought some thought was my own – I am only a poor copy of H. W., after all ...”²⁶² The infatuation with Walpole illustrates Maartens' idea of artistic temperament. It was more than a sort of artistic sensibility they had in common and that went into their work: a writer's view upon the world was conditioned by his all – body, soul and mind. The idea was to console, amuse or terrify the reader, to make him cry, dream or think, under the condition that it be done in a fine form that suits the author

²⁵⁹ *Letters*, 21.11.1892, 40. A. Savkar Altinel corroborates John Loofbourow (*Thackeray and the Form of Fiction*, 1964) in saying that Thackeray's fiction is a manipulation of reality, not a reflection of it. This is, in fact, also Maartens' practised principle of satire: *Thackeray and the Problem of Realism* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986), 58.

²⁶⁰ In fact, since *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848), Thackeray was short of being considered a classic by outstanding critics. Consider in particular W.C. Roscoe, “W.M. Thackeray, Artist and Moralist”, *National Review*, and Leslie Stephen, “Life of William Makepeace Thackeray”, *Dictionary of National Biography*, xiii (New York: Harpers, 1899) and “Thackeray's Writings: An Historical and Critical Essay”, in Tillotson, Geoffrey and Donald Hawes, eds., *William Thackeray: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995), 265-85, here 266-270 and 358-383. In the introduction, Thackeray's impact is put in perspective: “He wrote at the prompting of his genius, but his genius did not prompt him to win the enjoyment of the general public. In the end he did succeed in creating, or rather recreating the taste by which he was enjoyed by his tens of thousands. He well knew that he could never hope for the sweep of the Dickens audience”, 7.

²⁶¹ “Interview”, 3.

²⁶² *Letters*, 17.2.1914, 343.

best, according to his own temperament.²⁶³ Evidently this explains his veneration for Thomas Hardy as well as his admiration for Edgar Allan Poe, even if Poe's method did not personally impress him. Paradoxically it enabled him, at the same time, to esteem highly an author as unlike himself as Guy de Maupassant, whose down-to earth perspective was often diametrically opposed to his own standpoint as a moralist.

Some time later, again writing to Bentley: "How I wish you could enjoy, in fair health, a X-mas of your own – by which we mean, I suppose, since Dickens, too much mince-pie and too much punch. However, I do not mean that, being Thackerayan and solid, not Dickensian and gaseous."²⁶⁴ In an earlier letter to his first publisher, there is this: "What will you say to me, when I venture to answer that I place Thackeray far above Scott? To me it seems that Scott looked at the world through any bit of prismatic glass of a gilded chandelier; Thackeray through the great pure pane (and pain) of his own clear soul."²⁶⁵

In a letter to his friend Harry Spielmann, Maartens actually made a comparison that underlines his opinion of Thackeray as the master, who set the example: "Sometimes I think my work is very good (for instance, after reading 'The latest success'), and sometimes I think it is miserably poor (for instance, after reading Thackeray)."²⁶⁶ Furthermore there is this reference in a letter to Mrs. Gosse: "[...] my naturally Thackerayan view of life prevents my painting the things around me as white and pink as some happy mortals see them."²⁶⁷ In another letter, to the same addressee: "Yes. I think that is Thackeray's chief *charm*. He absolutely wheedles himself into your heart."²⁶⁸ In the unpublished notebooks, there is only one entry referring to Thackeray, running thus: "Thackeray and George Eliot are, of course, the two greatest English novelists. Which is the greatest where both appear consummate? It seems to me that with George Eliot, wonderfully subtle as the analysis is, one always feels the

²⁶³ On Walpole's dramatic mood and his concentration on the passions and actions of his characters, cf.: J. M. S. Tompkins, "The Gothic Romance", in *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (1932), London: Methuen, 1969, 243-295, 254. In a review of *The Letters of Horace Walpole* (1840), Thackeray wrote that their charm consisted in giving insight into the characters of individuals in such a lively and entertaining way but that, oddly enough, Walpole's praise of women was 'one of his grossest affectations: his cold heart prevented his ever having an attachment to a woman: love was out of the question': *The Times* (March 10, 1840), repr. in Harold S. Gulliver, *Thackeray's Literary Apprenticeship* (1934) (Folcroft: The Folcroft Press, 1969), 230-232.

²⁶⁴ *Letters*, 13.12.1893, 74; David Paine deals with the controversy in "Thackeray versus Dickens in *The Book of Snobs*", *Thackeray Newsletter* (2000), 1-6.

²⁶⁵ *Letters*, 2.6.1892, 37-38; Like Maartens, the subjects that preoccupied Thackeray in particular were ambition, snobbery, money and marriage: Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period, 1830-1890* (London: Longman, 1985), passim.

²⁶⁶ *Letters*, 2.7.1894, 94-95.

²⁶⁷ *Letters*, 2.5.1895, 103.

²⁶⁸ *Letters*, 1.12.1896, 131.

analysis and sees the knife. With Thackeray it is the human life itself. With George Eliot it is the analysis of it.’²⁶⁹

It is obvious that Maartens, at an early stage in his career as a novelist, considered Thackeray the greatest of all English novelists, and there are no reasons to assume that his views ever changed. However as far as explicit reference to Thackeray is concerned, this is all we have. While it shows Maartens great admiration for the author of *Vanity Fair*, substantial literary criticism came from some of his illustrious contemporaries.²⁷⁰ Neither does Maartens ever go as far as to explain Thackeray’s impact upon his own concept of the art of novel writing. Maartens’ observations concerning his “method”, as he calls it, are equally scarce. He uses the term merely to distinguish himself from other writers, as in his “Note” to *The Greater Glory*. There he defends himself against the accusation that his books contain overt allusions to real persons: “I am aware that great masters of fiction have thought fit to work from models; that method must therefore possess its advantages: it is not mine.”

That there are strong influences there is no doubt; we have to examine closely the published works themselves. Our main purpose at this point is, however, not to make any evaluative judgments but to establish the criteria of Maartens’ method by means of a comparison with Thackeray’s.

Both authors are what might be called sentimental cynics, i.e., pessimists bringing their own sentiments into play – if not sentimentality – employing the narrative to alleviate the burden of their unalterably gloomy views. This holds true for both, regardless of the gaps that exist between their ways of putting these views into literary practice. It follows that both authors should be taken at par, not merely as artists but as men as well. At the root of their personalities there is an inborn sense of blending humour with satire and vice versa.

From Schwartz’ earliest correspondence it is clear that his caricature-like observations are similar to Thackeray’s. Poignant descriptions of Dutch people and their social scenery are accompanied by illustrations, in anticipation of the future satirical writer. Sketches enliven the

²⁶⁹ Private Notebook 2, 143. Many critics of the period deemed George Eliot as exemplary in the revelation of the universal and eternal truths beyond the layers of facts. It was considered of even greater import – as Eliot had equally done – when the author managed to suppress the impulsive need to insert his or her own views: see Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 38-39.

²⁷⁰ For these critics Thackeray’s literary reputation was not always beyond reproach, such as William Dean Howells, who wrote that Thackeray ‘could not help being a man of his time. He put on a fine literary air of being above his business; he talked of fiction as fable-land, when he ought to have known it and proclaimed it the very home of truth, where alone we can see men through all their disguises; he formed the vicious habit of spoiling the illusion, or clouding the clear air of his art, by the intrusion of his own personality [...] he came short of his great possibilities by his willingness to dawdle (and shall I say twaddle?) over his scene when it was strictly his affair to represent it, and by his preference of caricature to character, and sentimentality to sentiment’: ‘Thackeray’s Bad Heroines’, in *Heroines of Fiction*, vol.1 (New York: Harper, 1901), 190-202, 191; another critic was Henry James, see John Charles Olmsed, Introduction to *Thackeray and His Twentieth-Century Critics: An Annotated Bibliography 1900-1975* (London: Garland Publishing, 1977), xiii-iv.

letters in anticipation of the characteristic types of people that were to appear in the novels of Maarten Maartens.²⁷¹

Exemplary of a certain tenor in recent Thackeray criticism, Robert Kiely states that Thackeray attempts to create a natural and authentic voice by means of his humour, a voice that reflects and captures real experience. Kiely adds to say: “Thackeray’s humour is not cover-up, a simplification of reality, but an evocation of complex, even contradictory responses. In his view, the seriousness and sadness of the true humorist show through his best jokes, not in spite of them but in subtle combination with them”²⁷². This, as well as Thackeray’s own reflections quoted above perfectly complies with Thackeray the artist, but they might just as well be applied to Maarten Maartens:

If humour only meant laughter, you would scarcely feel more interest about humorous writers than the life of poor Harlequin, who possesses with these the power of making you laugh. But the men regarding whose lives and stories you have curiosity and sympathy appeal to a great number of our other faculties. The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness; your scorn of untruth, pretension, imposture; your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost.²⁷³

Thackeray’s daughter, Lady Ritchie, wrote the following lines about her father – lines which Maartens’ daughter might have written about her father because they testify so perfectly to the similarity of temperament of the two writers:

One peculiarity which has always struck me in my father [...] was his personal interest in others and in their actions. He seemed to feel in a measure responsible for the doings of anyone he was concerned with. His admiration, his appreciation, were extraordinary keen for things which he approved and loved; in the same way his feeling of real suffering and

²⁷¹ ‘Letters to Herbert Warren’. Originals of the nine unpublished manuscript letters (written by the young Joost Schwartz to his friend Herbert Warren in England after his return to Holland in 1870) are kept in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. These letters are not the only ones accompanied by illustrations. Such caricatures adorn, for example, the letters he sent to his daughter Ada in Holland, when he was travelling abroad. Also, his private notebooks contain numerous drawings. They were a way of preparation, of mentally giving shape to a type of person before they were integrated into one of his books. However, Maartens did not illustrate his own books like Thackeray.

²⁷² Robert Kiely, “Victorian Harlequin: The Function of Humour in Thackeray’s Critical and Miscellaneous Prose”, in *William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 19. Cf. also John Charles Olmsted, *Thackeray and His Twentieth-Century Critics: An Annotated Bibliography 1900-1975* (London: Garland, 1977).

²⁷³ W. M. Thackeray, *The Lectures on the English Humourists*, ‘Introduction to Swift’, Centenary Biographical Edition (London: 1910-1911; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968); abbreviation used henceforth: CBE, vol. 11, 128. Thackeray’s proclaimed object was more biographical than critical, as he remarked in the section on Gay that it was “rather to describe the men than their works; or to deal with the latter only in so far as they seem to illustrate the character of their writers”, another aspect that may have been of particular interest to Maartens, as it deals with the question of temperament (Philip Collins, ed., Introduction to *Thackeray: Interviews and Recollections*, vol. 1 [London: Macmillan, 1983], xxiii). For a comment on Thackeray as an illustrator, see: D. J. Taylor, “A scrapbook of ghosts: Thackeray’s lost career as an artist”, *Times Literary Supplement* (24 September 1999), 15.

emotion over the failures and lapses of those with whom he lived was intensely vivid. This made his relations with others anxious at times – indifferent, never.²⁷⁴

Their affinity lies in the critical attitude they have in common toward their own immediate surroundings: “When a man goes into a great set company of dinner-giving and dinner-receiving snobs, if he has a philosophical turn of mind, he will consider what a huge humbug the whole affair is: the dishes, and the drink, and the servants, and the plate, and the host and hostess, and the conversation, and the company – the philosopher included.”²⁷⁵ Or, as Maartens put it, recollecting a dinner-party at his own home: “Today Ada [...] said something utterly ridiculous (in Dutch) and the man [the servant], just handing a dish, lost all control of himself, reckless. [...] But again it struck me how absurd is our conventionality. Why must the poor fellow feel utterly miserable, because he laughed when I laughed? What a stupid thing the whole idea is, under God’s heaven, between the common cradle and the grave.”²⁷⁶ And there is this: “Often, I find myself in the company of a set of monkeys, myself chief.”²⁷⁷

These comparisons already point in a similar direction: reading either Maartens or Thackeray, the reader detects a certain cynicism with a touch of sentimentality in the characters of both men. At the same time, there is a mixture of sympathy for each individual human being as well as a disdain for society, made up by the sum of those very individuals. The sympathy is reflected by the sentimental attitude; what accounts for the cynicism is the author’s disbelief in a possible turn for the better. It is but a step from their affinity in personality to a similar artistic approach: “It is impossible not to be charmed by the merry homily as it remains to us, by the profusion of natural lively characters that go dancing by in such droll processions”, Lady Ritchie wrote.²⁷⁸ This is equally Maartens’ strength. Also there are, in the midst of the waves of mirth and satire, sudden turns to seriousness – the seriousness of the moralist appearing behind the sentimental cynic. There is a perspicacious comment on this by M.H. Spielmann, Maartens’ first serious critic who became his friend, in the aftermath of writing this review:

Few writers in our day – few, indeed, since Thackeray – have turned upon snobbery of every kind so copious and fierce a stream of scornful satire, or when unworthy of scorn, of simple banter. Nevertheless his cynicism, even as the cynicism of Thackeray, is born of a burning love of right, justice and self-respect [...]. In many a passage we have the exquisite fooling of a man of deep sense and wide sympathy with a world of kindly sprightly humour and good-natured pity that with a smile invites the guiltiest of us poor

²⁷⁴ W. M. Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs*, Introduction by his daughter, Lady Ritchie, CBE, vol. 9, xxx; the best proof for this mentality in Maartens are his *Letters* throughout.

²⁷⁵ *The Book of Snobs*, 96.

²⁷⁶ “To Nellie Gosse”, 5.1.1896, *Letters*, 121.

²⁷⁷ Private Notebook 1, 1.

²⁷⁸ Introduction to *The Book of Snobs*, CBE, vol. 9, xxx.

society sinners to sit by his friendly side: a touch of the old spirit of Dickens and of Thackeray – not yet, doubtless, fully developed.²⁷⁹

Having thus established, along broad lines, the conspicuous common ground between the two authors, we will consider them not as master and pupil, but as artists – each of them in his own sphere and light. Maartens' ideal would have been to be regarded as the Dutch Thackeray, the show-master of the Dutch vanity fair, Thackeray 'in his own small way', as he would have put it, i.e.: studying his method, employing his technique, adapting that technique to his own needs.

In order to focus more closely on the various aspects of this method, Geoffrey Tillotson's seminal study of Thackeray's method was used as a basic guide for reference. First published in 1954, it is nowadays considered a classic, a useful critical compilation of the principal elements that are constitutive of Thackeray's art.²⁸⁰ Thackeray's popularity as an author who is still being read has been in steady decline. No monograph dealing with his narrative technique in general has been published in the last forty years.²⁸¹ In the following section, these elements will be discussed as compiled by Tillotson, after which they will be applied to Maartens. Thus, it will be possible to arrive at a first assessment, in more general terms, of the impact of Thackeray's method on Maartens' novels.

III.2. The principles of method

According to Tillotson, any critic of Thackeray's novels "must from an early stage seek to define the Thackerayan oneness." Even though every one of his novels is unique, there is a unity in his fiction as a whole. He continues to say that this unity is strongly felt by the general reader wandering from novel to novel. The question to answer is how that awareness of unity comes about. Tillotson enumerates the links he discovered between them. First, he refers to the 'consanguinity' of the recurrent characters. To quote one example: "Lady Kew,

²⁷⁹ M. H. Spielmann, "Maarten Maartens and His Work", *The Graphic* (5 Jan. 1895). Spielmann (1858-1948) was, like Maartens, of Polish extraction, editor of the *Magazine of Art*, member of council of the Royal Society of Literature, contributor on literature and art to various leading papers, magazines and reviews, author of works on literature and art, cf. *Letters*, passim. Concerning snobbery, Maartens does not beat about the bush, in one of the letters to his wife: "This morning I went with Richard Bentley to St. George's Chapel, that temple of English snobbery, whose Bible is the Peerage, overloaded with worship of everything but God" (unpubl. TS, Maartens archive). Probably considered too critical, the letter was omitted by Ada van der Poorten-Schwartz.

²⁸⁰ Geoffrey Tillotson, *Thackeray The Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1963); initially published by Cambridge University Press in 1954; henceforth referred to as "Tillotson".

²⁸¹ With an exception being made, perhaps, for Edgar F. Harden's *Thackeray the Writer: From Journalism to "Vanity Fair"* (London: Macmillan, 1998). Dealing with aspects of narrative technique throughout, Harden finds for example that "Thackeray's narrator moves in and out [...], deliberately blurring the distinction between what we call "life" and "fiction", 126, cf. Edgar F. Harden, "William Makepeace

important in *The Newcomes*, is the suitor of Lord Steyne, who is important in *Vanity Fair*, reappears in *Pendennis* as the friend of Major Pendennis, and is mentioned in *The Newcomes* and *Philip*.²⁸² To illustrate this he quotes Chesterton: “The habit of revising old characters is so strong in Thackeray that *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes* and *Philip* are in a sense all one novel. Certainly the reader sometimes forgets which one of them he is reading.”²⁸³ This is not the case in Maartens’ novels. If a name reoccurs, it is only indirectly, as a reference to a family.²⁸⁴ No character actually reappears on the scene of another novel. Each of the novels has its own set of characters, and if there is continuity, it is of a different kind: almost identical concepts about morality and behaviour return in the characters of the different novels.

Another aspect referred to by Tillotson is Thackeray’s “geographical and historical principle”, as he calls it. The reader has the impression that there is an outward impulse in Thackeray, as if he wants to away from his English setting. The action in the novels often takes place in English towns such as London and Brighton, but also in Brussels or Baden-Baden. The map he unfolds at our feet is also enlarged by providing imaginary scenes such as ‘Pumpnickel’, counterbalancing London and England, where the majority of the events occur.

In Maartens it is rather the opposite perspective. The central focal point of the novels is Holland. This name takes on a purely emblematic meaning, as the narrative reaches far beyond the Dutch setting, endeavouring to encompass more general structures of social conventions and traditions.²⁸⁵ Within that “tucked away little corner of Europe” geographical locations are not given very precisely. There is the ‘city’ in contrast to ‘the country’, usually in the shape of the larger local town that dominates its rural surroundings socially and commercially. In all the novels where the central events take place in Holland – with the exception of *Joost Avelingh* – scenes occur that take the reader across the Dutch borders – to

Thackeray”, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 21: *Victorian Novelists before 1885*, ed. Ira B. Nadel and William E. Fredeman (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983), 258-293.

²⁸² Tillotson, 5.

²⁸³ G. K. Chesterton, *Introduction to Dickens*, quoted by Tillotson, 6. Tillotson observed that ‘revising’ should perhaps read ‘reviving’.

²⁸⁴ Examples are Freule Borck in *The Greater Glory* and Count Roden Rheyne in *Dorothea*. In this way, Maartens strengthens the impression he wants to convey of the relative smallness of the Dutch aristocracy as a secluded class, a self-centred community, where everybody is somebody, and knows everybody, as it were.

²⁸⁵ As Maartens put it in his “Note” to *The Greater Glory*: “[...] the morals I seek to describe are those of the entire human race. It is only by the merest accident that my scene is laid in Holland, a country whose inhabitants, I suppose, are no better, nor worse, than their neighbours”; cf. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes, eds., in their introduction to *William Thackeray: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1: “Thackeray’s writings were soon translated into French and German, not surprisingly – their ethos, unlike that of Dickens, was from the start as much European as English”; for the contrast between the two authors, see also: Judith L. Fischer, “Ethical narrative in Dickens and Thackeray”, *Studies in the Novel* 29.1 (1997), 108-17; this might partly explain Maartens preferring Thackeray to Dickens.

Paris, the French Riviera, Italy, etc.²⁸⁶ Although geographical detail is rudimentarily interspersed, there is that same pleasant feeling, as in Thackeray, to be able to imagine the background of the people occupying the scene. The universal perspective is what Maartens had in mind. In the opening of *God's Fool*, it says: "This book is dedicated to *ALL MY FELLOW-KOOPSTADERS* in the four vast quarters of our mean little globe."

If a comparison of the 'geography' of both writers is justifiable in the sense that they both locate their fictional world, this is not possible with regard to the weight given to history – on the whole or, more particularly, to distinct historical events. As Tillotson remarked concerning Thackeray: "Along the stretch historical detail is sown thick, and almost always it is accurate."²⁸⁷ According to Burdett, the lack of historical and geographical detail in Maartens' novels partly accounts for a certain thinness of the author's canvas: "Character was his chief interest, and he was content with character. This, oddly, makes his books appear flat. The characters seem to live indoors."²⁸⁸ The social scene is not furnished with historical detail because, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an historical background. The action of Maartens' novels is contemporaneous to the time of their publication. Occasionally, the narrator vaguely refers to "the nineteenth century" as the time of the action: the novels are not located in a particular period in the past.²⁸⁹ In Thackeray, however, the distance in time is one of the devices used to create a distance to the scene.

Another factor that helps to sustain the awareness of unity directly concerns the narrative: it recalls Henry James' notorious verdict upon large sized novels.²⁹⁰ Maartens shares "the untiring delight for taking in details" with his master, but this is as far as the comparison goes. He can never limit himself to Thackeray's linear conception, i.e. a continuous stream of narrative, of *petits faits vrais*, because he adheres to the traditional plot structure that might be

²⁸⁶ Oddly so, the scenes never take place in England, not even in the case of *Her Memory*. Here the main character, the Englishman Sir Anthony Stollard, goes off to live in Italy soon after his wife's demise which occurs at the beginning of the novel. There is always a link between his settings and autobiographical experience in Maartens, but he apparently did not deem the years he spent in England in his childhood – as well as his later brief sojourns there – instrumental in that respect.

²⁸⁷ Tillotson, 9.

²⁸⁸ Burdett, 123.

²⁸⁹ Instances of Maartens referring to a recent past in the manner of Thackeray are seldom. Notwithstanding such references, the reader will always have a sense of contemporariness, due to the author's interjected commentaries: "In those days the train de luxe – was there ever name invented more appropriately vulgar? – did not reach Nice till afternoon" (*Dorothea*, 50). Although the action in *Dorothea* can be dated back twenty years at the most, the phrase "in those days" suggests a somewhat greater distance from the present.

²⁹⁰ "What do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically mean?" (Henry James, "Preface" to *The Tragic Muse*, in *The Novels and Tales*, New York Edition, vol. 7 [New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1936], x). These novels may be 'loose' and 'baggy', but they are not 'monsters', as there is not that awkward craving need, as in James, to consciously dig even deeper, to analyse even further, thereby threatening to sterilize the spontaneity of the narrative. Tillotson: "Thackeray was at home in vastness and never-endingness of time – at home in them because of an untiring delight for taking in details [...]" (12).

called cyclical: at the end one arrives at the situation of the beginning with the difference that, now, circumstances leading up to the final climax having become intelligible.²⁹¹ The abundance of details – everybody gets his little say; nobody is forgotten – engenders that particular feeling of intimacy with the setting, of being present as one of the guests, at the fireplace that is being described. By dint of this artistic impulse as an emulator of Thackeray's satirical mode, Maartens is equally determined not to be taken too seriously, neither as author, nor in the guise of the narrator.²⁹² It was the similar artistic point of view that led him to regard himself, indeed, as a Thackeray on a smaller scale. He wanted to present a vision of the Dutch 'vanity fair' to the world. In some way or other, his novels all contribute to the accomplishment of that vision.²⁹³ Thackeray's method unites both authors in principle, if not in the actual size of their novel. As Tillotson observes, "Thackeray needed an immense size of novel because the proceeds of his imagination (the hundreds of people and their countless actions) were subjected to the attentions of the understanding and the emotions together."²⁹⁴ Maartens' novels are also crowded with people and events and, as with Thackeray, the reader has the same sense of an insatiable author at work. But he works on a smaller scale because the desire to let himself be carried away by the stream of his own narrative undermines the idea of a central plot. This idea necessarily departs from the concept that the universe he seeks to render is endless, but the material and social limitations are limited, from which the writer has to select according to his priorities.

The idea of completeness in Maartens is not so much of a material and social, but rather of a psychological order: at the core of interest are the emotions. They provide the impetus for the action and, combined with a moral sense, determine their justification. Where preponderance is given to central plot, Maartens moves away from Thackeray. For entirely different structural reasons, however, there remains, as in Thackeray, a sense of unlimited vastness or a 'lack of edged shape'.²⁹⁵

Maartens' products of the imagination are many, and the size of his novels is large, but they are not immense in the 'endless' sense indicated above. In actual number of words they

²⁹¹ The *petits faits vrais*, a pivotal point of Stendhal's concept of the novel, as particularly demonstrated in his famous novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830).

²⁹² In his "Interview", 3, he states: "Half the things I say I don't mean, and the other half I meant differently." This surely is one of the crucial aspects he holds in common with 'the master'. It corroborates with his artistic credo that his views take account of life "as seen through a temperament" ("Interview", 2). As he wrote to Mrs. Gosse: "[M]y naturally Thackerayan view of life prevents my painting the things around me as white and pink as some happy mortals see them" (*Letters*, 2.5.1895, 103).

²⁹³ With the exception of *Her Memory*, *The Healers* and the *New Religion*.

²⁹⁴ Tillotson, 13.

²⁹⁵ Tillotson, 13.

measure about half the size of Thackeray's; from the onset, it was his intention that they should have "edged shape."

In content as well as in form, the Thackerayan idea of continuity did not come natural to Maartens. That continuity is implied in Thackeray's observation: "I can repeat old things in a pleasant way, but I have nothing fresh to say" (referring in particular to *Philip*, his last major novel) as well as in Roscoe's remark: "*Vanity Fair* is the name, not of one, but of all of Mr. Thackeray's books."²⁹⁶ Continuity is, in a sense, constant repetition. There is the impression that whatever is being told, a lot has happened or may have happened before, and that even more is bound to happen afterwards. Thackeray epitomises his own desire for continuity as follows: "What I dislike is beginning a new novel. I should like to have a novel to read in a million volumes, to last me my life."²⁹⁷ Among the critics Tillotson rebuked for their negative reaction to this question of continuity, he singled out F. R. Leavis for his remark that Thackeray's novels were a "mere going on and on."²⁹⁸

The reader gains the impression that the author simply wrote on the spur of the moment, without any preconceived design. This precisely is one of the landmarks of Thackeray's craftsmanship: his books are lengthy of necessity. Even at moments when one heaves a sigh over the abundance of detail, one is still fascinated by all the wealth displayed; it is not a sign of impatience with what seems an unnecessary detention of the plot.

In Maartens, however, the sense of his "going on and on" causes impatience in the reader, resulting from an insufficiently propelled plot. Carefully deliberated, the plot dictates, in its turn, that the author be a master of economy. In having opted for a plot-centred narrative, Maartens does not follow Thackeray's principle of continuity. The reason why he diverted from that course was simply because he considered the plot structure the most expedient device to develop his underlying central moral idea. Yet on another, deeper level, his impulse towards satire is tenaciously and continuously active, again and again surging towards the

²⁹⁶ Thackeray's reference to *Philip* is in Gordon N. Ray, ed., *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), vol. IV, 242n. The quote from Roscoe is in R. H. Hutton, ed., *Poems and Essays by the Late William Caldwell Roscoe* (1860), vol. 2, 281. It contains an extensive 'Memoir of the Author' by Hutton, who was Roscoe's brother-in-law.

²⁹⁷ H. Allingham and D. Radford, eds, *William Allingham: A Diary* (1907), 293, quoted in Tillotson, 20. Compare this to: "We are ending our history, and yet poor Clive is but beginning the world", which opens ch. XXXVI, approaching the end of the book (CBE, vol. 13, part 2, 433).

²⁹⁸ Cf. Tillotson, 25. It seems as if Leavis persistently refused to see that Thackeray's reluctance to work from one central plot was only consistent with his concept of continuity. Earlier this had been clearly stated by Percy Lubbock: "He wrote his novel with a mind full of a surge and wash of memories, the tenor of which was somehow to be conveyed in the outward form of a narrative. And though his novel complies with that form more or less, and a number of events are marshalled in order, yet its constant tendency is to escape and evade the restrictions of a scenic method, and to present the story in a continuous flow of leisurely, contemplative reminiscence" (*The Craft of Fiction* [1921] [London: Jonathan Cape, 1966], 93-94). Cf. also Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity, 1811-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

surface of his moral intransigence. It compels him to be diverted from this ultimate purpose, only to return to it and be distracted again: two aesthetic forces not merely at work simultaneously but also trying to outdo each other. Like Thackeray, Maartens primarily takes the standpoint of the observer. In time as well as in space, both authors position themselves at some distance from the scene. Their style – choice of vocabulary and fabric of sentences – aims at pure entertainment for its own purpose.²⁹⁹ That the reading should be enjoyable is a *conditio sine qua non*: style and content are inseparable, like the two sides of a coin. Both are considered equally essential for the reader to gain an all-encompassing aesthetic experience. Therefore both authors write lightly, swiftly and briskly, consistent with a content that is mostly light. When, all of a sudden, the story takes a ‘serious’ turn, this has no noticeable impact on the style, but it requires the reader to adapt his attitude. Very often with Maartens this happens when the reader is unprepared, lured as he has been into satirically toned lightness. Often in Maartens, satire is concealed by self-protective irony: Henceforth the seemingly light tone. Given that there is so much more dialogue in Maartens than in Thackeray, the narrator watches out more often, together with his reader, for the next thing to happen. Maartens’ narrative is considerably more dramatic in an immediate, theatrical sense. At the same time he was enthralled by that unique quality in Thackeray’s style, which he called its *charm*. Consequently he tried not merely to capture that quality by means of emulation, but by adding his very own quality. According to Quiller-Couch, Maartens’ strength lay the very charm emerging from the style, from the “nerve of the narrative” and the “jolly way of putting things”, as in Stevenson.³⁰⁰ That particular charm only holds true when the author does not feel indifferent to the world as such; that no matter how far he may seem to stand apart, he is still ensconced in it. In spite of the social criticism, the satire, the caricature, there is something in these sentences emanating this particular Thackerayan charm that keeps them intimately in touch with the world they capture, for at least as long as the ‘cosiness’ of that world lasts, however tainted by the effects of change.

²⁹⁹ According to Mary Lascelles, Thackeray’s force stems from a “natural affinity with the age of Anne, and partly by the skilful use of its forms of speech at selected points [...] allowing himself abundant material derived from the nineteenth century” (*The Story-teller Retrieves the Past* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980], 155).

³⁰⁰ Quiller-Couch added that “our leading critics just now have little concern with narrative and little with Maarten Maartens as a brilliant practitioner in it” (*Letters*, “Preface”, xx); concerning the term ‘gentlemanly’ (equally applicable to Maartens) as well as ‘charm’ *The Critical Heritage* on Thackeray notes “How often the reviewers noted that [his] authorial personality was ‘gentlemanly’! [...] Another critical term of the nineteenth century is ‘charm’. The reviewers applied it to Thackeray’s authorial personality as Carlyle applied it to Elizabethan and seventeenth century prose, and Arnold to writings as various a those of Chaucer, Milton, Voltaire and Shelley, and Henry James to those of Scott. By ‘charm’ they meant the power to attract, to be found likeable, and it therefore largely replaced the endearing eighteenth century critical term ‘elegant’” (15).

The social sphere depicted by Maartens is still strongly embedded in its natural surroundings. Brilliantly evoked, but seldom explicitly described, the natural world not only encompasses that social sphere – it is crucial to its entire fabric.

“Often what we recall in reading Thackeray is that epic device of a calm, staring but tender objectivity in narrative”, Tillotson opened his exposé on Thackeray’s treatment of imagery. This “tender objectivity” is inseparable from the Thackerayan charm referred to above: objective in a strangely coloured way, and therefore, seemingly, subjective. In this, Thackeray has been particularly successful, and there is no doubt that it had a strong impact on Maartens. He too wished to render human life itself in such a way that it “absolutely wheedles itself into your heart.”³⁰¹ Maartens precisely succeeds in doing that; at the root of his creativity, in the shape of satirical comedy, there is an all-pervading sense of humour. Intimacy and familiarity with the surrounding world are taken for granted, a world in which ordinary human existence takes its course, constituting the epic dimension of the narrative: narrator as well as reader are familiar with a setting in which the fate of each mortal lies embedded, engulfed in its daily turmoil and strife, its moments of relief and joy.

Thackeray applies an epic device to bolster and enhance the narrative. He does not aim at epic imagery. He uses epic imagery occasionally, however, as if to remind us not to forget to keep the whole in view when details overwhelm us: a shift back, as it were, from the microscope to the telescope. Then, paradoxically and simultaneously as it seems, the device of epic as narrative method draws in on the detail, focussing solely on the object chosen. Now that we have seen the whole, we keep it in the back of our mind while looking at the detail. The epic panorama remains present all the time. As in *Vanity Fair* drawing towards its close: “So there came one morning at sunrise, when all the world got up and set about its various works and pleasures, with the exception of Old John Sedley who was not to fight with fortune or to hope or scheme anymore, but to go and take up a quiet and utterly unknown residence in a churchyard at Brompton by the side of his old wife.”³⁰² With the exception of *Esmond*, all of Thackeray’s novels are large-scale satiric enterprises.³⁰³ This comparison focuses on *Vanity Fair*, generally considered to be the epitome of the Thackeray’s art as a moral satirist. In Maartens’ novel *My Lady Nobody* there is a scene in which one of the minor characters, Mopius, is trapped at a masked ball by Harriet, disguised as a goose-girl. Imperturbable in her stratagems to attain her goal, i.e. to marry the wealthy Mopius, she reminds us of Becky

³⁰¹ *Letters*, 1.12.1896, 131.

³⁰² *Vanity Fair* (CBE, vol. 2, 324); page numbers of this edition are added in brackets to the quotations given.

³⁰³ In *Esmond*, as Barbara Hardy aptly puts it, “the disengaging arts of comedy are extremely muted.”: *The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray* (London: Peter Owen, 1972), 15.

Sharp.³⁰⁴ As soon as Mopius has been abducted by the “Goose”, the view swiftly changes to the larger panorama:

The cold December dawn had not yet achieved more than the hope of its forthcoming when the Goose took away Mynheer Mopius in a cab to a quiet hotel. Behind them still echoed the loud talk of the young officers. They passed, in the fearsome streets, a troop of roysterers from a gin-shop. “We won’t go home till morning!” rang hideous on the patient night. Here and there a window shone out, fully lighted, with its message of suffering or suspense. Up above – far, far above – stood, silent, God’s eternal stars, watchful, serenely waiting, in the darkness whence we came and whither we return.³⁰⁵

Quiller-Couch explicitly referred to the passage above to illustrate his general observation:

From Maartens’ humorous chapters (sometimes reminiscent of Dickens, oftener of Thackeray, and not always felicitously) he has a way of ‘pouncing’ and recalling us with a shock to his own more habitual mood of deep seriousness. The reader who recalls the close of the certain famous chapter in *Esmond* may here feel a certain strain in the note: as some of the pastoral passages in *Harmen Pols: Peasant* (a favourite of mine) may strike him as too romantically felt for their setting; too violently, or at any rate too abruptly, opposed.³⁰⁶

The personal quality of the style, as well as such recurrent instances of epic imagery, help to unify the fiction in the sense that the Dutch world presented – the Maartensian scene – remains visible throughout to the reader’s inner eye: the author’s creation of a world of its own, as for instance in this passage from *An Old Maid’s Love*:

The New Canal, like most of the canals of the good old town of Overstad, sleeps the sleep of dignified repose. Its sluggish waters dribble lazily around the doors of the cellars down below. You can hang over the iron railings and wonder whether they move. High up above them runs the street – no, the word is of all others most unsuitable – lies the street, on both sides of the deep-sunk line of gloomy water, a rough roadway of boulders, between two neat stripes of little bricks. The trees that border it are green and leafy; the grass that creeps across it is also green and fresh. The tall houses, that rise up in straggling rows, nod quietly to each other. They are many-storied; the canal is narrow; the sky is grey. Never, in that drowsy nook, forgotten of the nineteenth century, does a man go by who looks as if he had anything to do, or would be anxious to do it, if he had. [...] And sometimes, on rare occasions, a ragged street-boy, lost out of the life of to-day, will come tearing down the middle of the road, across the grass-grown boulders, hoarsely shrieking, “Extra telegrams!” “Latest foreign news!” But nobody ever buys of him. Not on this canal.³⁰⁷

While being not essentially different from the sort of introductory description that – traditionally in the novel – sets the tone for the scenes to be presented in the first chapter, the quotation above is Maartensian in the sense that it evokes a strictly Dutch scene. As the

³⁰⁴ Cf. Roy Meador, “All’s Fair in Love and Vanity: Thackeray’s Blithely Bad Becky Sharp”, *Biblio* (1998), 14-15.

³⁰⁵ *My Lady Nobody*, 269-270.

³⁰⁶ *Letters*, xxiii. The *Esmond* reference is to the end of part III, ch. XII, passage titled: “The Meeting at the King’s Arms” (CBE, vol. 10, 499-500).

³⁰⁷ *An Old Maid’s Love*, 365-367.

narrator continues the description of Overstad, the passage lingers with the reader by dint of its subtle inner voice, always, at such instances, with a blend of irony and mellowness. To illustrate that the same effect is achieved by introductions not bound to the limitations of Dutch scenery, we quote part of the description of Nice, at the beginning of *Dorothea*.³⁰⁸ The passage is not inferior to Thackeray in its power to evoke a period with its irrevocable flair and charm in an impressionist manner. It ends – equally not unworthy of the master – in a shrill sudden invective on the ‘King Snob’ of the current age:

In our days of middle-class supremacy, we dub our new lodging-houses “Palaces”, that King Snob, for a guinea a day, may fancy himself to possess some few gilded inches of royalty. And, indeed, ‘tis an excellent plan, affording much innocent gratification; so we stamp the hotel sheets and candle sticks with the same royal cipher and coronet, that King Snob, as he sinks to his slumbers, may dream that he snores (like his constitutional compeers) on a throne.³⁰⁹

With Thackeray, the style is a particularly powerful agent in the continuity of the narrative he wishes to purport. The constancy of that style allows his sentences to run on and on, so the flow of enumeration of things seen and heard, deplored and enjoyed, is never interrupted. As Quiller-Couch put it – in his own literary ‘conversational’ style, casually yet eloquently and to the point:

The secret [of Thackeray’s style] lies, if you will follow his sentences and surrender yourself to their run and lull and lapse, in a curious haunting music, as of a stream; a music of which scarce any other writer of English prose has quite the natural, effortless, command. You have no need to search in his best pages, or to hunt for his purple patches. It has a knack of making music even while you are judging his matter to be poor stuff; music – and frequent music – in his most casual light-running sentences.³¹⁰

Quiller-Couch implied that the power of Thackeray’s style resided in its consistency. Whatever Maartens admired in Thackeray, he does not share with his master the desire to sustain an equally ironic distance to the scene as it unfolds in the course of the narrative. The difference of approach is reflected by the style itself. This is also apparent in the observation

³⁰⁸ *Dorothea*, 69: “Every one who has been to Nice knows, by sight at least, the Villa Buonarotti, that used to be, and perhaps still is, the property of the Prussian Count Riesenthal. It stands half-way up the Cimiez hill, on a terrace, in a great wide spread of luxuriant olives, half-hidden at equal distance from the old road and the new. A long pink house with flat roofs and fancy parapets, and innumerable green shutters, big or little – one of those up and down Italian Villas, whose gaudy porticos and loggias suit the golden southern landscape as no modern brick or stucco palaces can ever aspire to do. There was a time, not a dozen brief years ago, when the leafy solitudes of the lovely hill of Cimiez afforded shelter to many thousand singing birds, and also to a few score favoured strangers who had perched secluded nests between the olives, where they too could dwell in quietness among God’s beasts and flowers. Occasionally, perhaps, as you wandered along the rippling rivulets that babbled to themselves in idly listening glades, or turned swiftly up crooked paths, that drew you unconsciously higher, you would hear the tinkling of descending bells and come upon a swarthy countryman, thoughtfully wending downward beside his laden ass. In those times they still gave you good-day, as they passed on their way among the oil trees. [...]”

³⁰⁹ *Dorothea*, 70.

Quiller-Couch made about Maartens: “Maarten Maartens’ habitual style, while delicate and scrupulous in the choice of words, yet at ease with our English idiom ‘as to the manner born’ is plain, straightforward, businesslike. His pages abound in bright cut-and-thrush conversations which directly advance the business of the story.”³¹¹

Maartens wishes to be as objective as his temperament allows for: positioned at a certain distance but not excluded from the community described. Like Thackeray before him, he takes his place in a tradition of literary gentlemen, sustaining the attitude of the intimate connoisseur of the scenes before their eyes, which they narrate with detachment as well as amusement. In general, Maartens modifies that tradition by adding an unexpected cool ‘matter-of-factness’ to his dialogues as well as to the conversational tone of his descriptions. Yet often there is a stylistic scission between lyrical outbursts of narrative description and direct conversation – the latter being extremely clear-cut and businesslike. It is as if the contrastive style is meant to cut as neatly as possible, showing the discrepancy between the rigidity of the conventions that beset these people on the one hand and the extreme beauty, freshness and innocence of the natural world that surrounds them on the other hand. Nevertheless, the style is one of the assets, which stimulates the reader’s interest. In spite of his modern matter-of-fact approach, Maartens manages to sustain a link to that typically eighteenth century tradition that began with Fielding. That link is sustained above all in the narrative descriptions permeated with satire and wit. It gives the style its freshness and swiftness and its modernity whenever it points to the dramatic rhetoric of the approaching twentieth century.

All the important writers of the eighteenth century are present in Maartens’ library. Not only from Thackeray did he learn that particular blend of irony and seriousness. It characterises his style as well as Thackeray’s, but without Thackeray’s sentimental touch. This is another, superimposed form of irony. That Maartens saw Thackeray as his master follows from that unique blending of style and narrative, resulting in an almost constant flux of charm and

³¹⁰ A. Quiller-Couch, *Charles Dickens and Other Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 151.

³¹¹ “Preface” to the *Letters*, xxiv; regarding Maartens’ style, contemporary reviewers and critics took a similar position. Later, some of the few remaining ones grew more reserved. Considering the absence of the lyric element in the narrative, Osbert Burdett remarked that Maartens’ style was “fluent and conversational, but with no beauty peculiarly of its own. Where it charms us is its wit; where it moves us we are drawn to the man more than to the writing, to that high soul whose spiritual ambitions were cruelly at odds with the world under his eyes” (127). James A. Russell quite incongruously compared the quality of Maartens’ style to that of Joseph Conrad’s, thereby superficially ignoring their immense differences of scope and method. Referring to Maartens’ command of the language, Russell is of the opinion that “His English was never based on the same adventurous love of the language, and remains often stiff and staccato in manner; bookishly correct, it may be, but bearing witness thereby to the painstaking and not wholly free foreigner in the use of another tongue.”: *Romance and Realism* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris N. V., 1959), 133. Cf. also H.R. Klieneberger, *The Novel in England and Germany* (London: Oswald Wolf, 1981), passim.

satire. Although he did not seek to imitate that mode in his style, he aimed at a similar effect. Their similar moral attitude was given expression in different narrative approaches. Consequently, they lead to differences in appreciation by the reader.

III.3. The Author's standpoint

In his time Maarten Maartens was admired by his fellow authors as well as by the reading public. A factor enhancing that appreciation was the position of the narrator in his stories who, mostly present at the scene himself, induced the readers to accept the illusion of reality as he perceived it. The first person narrator appearing in that genre of art belongs to the fictitious world and is not to be confused with the author. If an author wishes to express his own thoughts or sentiments – for example about the work of fiction he is presenting – he may use the narrator as his mouthpiece, but he can do so more openly in a preface or a note.³¹² Simple as this fundamental principle may sound in theory: in practice, it is unavoidable that the authorial narrator presents a kaleidoscopic prism of his own personality, opinions and beliefs. Flaubert's famous dictum, 'impassibilité', will always remain an ideal: the writer's sublime indifference to his object the ultimate goal.³¹³ Venturing to get closer to that ideal, the author has to embody more than one *persona*. When he interferes with the story as a fictional persona, he necessarily places himself between that fictional world and the reader. Even if, in the flow of the narrative, the intrusion is hardly noticeable, it will reduce the immediacy of the fictional experience, thus giving the illusion a crack. Still, the reader must be beguiled into giving credence to the author's invention. The necessity to believe is part of his nature, as well as his inclination to disbelieve at the slightest inconsistency in the given slice of life. While reading, he desires to take this fictional world as reality: he seeks to believe that what he reads is true. It is his ardent desire that his inherent disbelief (for he knows, all the time, that it is only a story) should be suspended throughout. The less the narrator intrudes, the larger the chance that the suspension of disbelief remains intact. Principally this is, however, neither Maartens' method nor Thackeray's.

In the following section, Maartens' concept of the narrator will be explored and compared to views expressed by Thackeray. Compared to the praise and acknowledgement Thackeray received in England, Maartens would have rejoiced in receiving any recognition in his

³¹² As Maartens did in his novels *The Greater Glory*, *Eve* and *An Old Maid's Love*.

³¹³ See for example: B. C. Bart, "Flaubert's Concept of the Novel", *PMLA* LXXX (1965), 84-89, for a concise description of Flaubert's criteria, or, more extensively, John A. Ramsey, *The Literary Doctrines of Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola: A Comparative Study* (Illinois, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1956); cf. also: Vasily

country at all. The following letter by Thackeray, to one of his readers, reflects something of what Maartens might have felt in a similar situation:

I assure you, these tokens of what I can't help acknowledging as popularity make me humble as well as grateful and make me feel an almost awful sense of the responsibility which falls upon a man in such a station. Is it deserved or undeserved? Who is this that sets up to preach to mankind and to laugh at many things which men reverence? I hope I may be able to tell truth always and see it aright, according to the eyes which God Almighty gives me.³¹⁴

Amongst other things, it is due to this awareness of a responsibility towards the public that Thackeray needs to get away from the book as its author as far as possible if he wants to say what is on his mind. After completing *Pendennis*, he wrote: "Mr. Pendennis is the author of the book, and he has taken a great weight of my mind, for under that mask and acting, as it were, I can afford to say and think many things that I could not venture on in my own person, now that it is a person, and I know the public are staring at it."³¹⁵

According to Tillotson, *Pendennis* was designed as a first-person narrative by the author to rule out the danger of being personally made responsible. This had happened in *Vanity Fair* where Thackeray had unequivocally introduced himself as the engineer of it all, while at the same time proclaiming the distance between himself and his characters:

In that passage from *Vanity Fair* he attempted to force an entry into the frame of his novel as an historical person, forgetting that a novel asks its reader to suspend his disbelief and that the obliging reader is at a loss if the obliged author fails to honour the other side of the bargain. To attempt to stop the voice of the narrator for another is to risk throwing the reader's good will to the winds. That good will, where Thackeray and *Vanity Fair* are concerned remains good only by the reader's wilful misunderstanding of Thackeray's suspected intention, by his refusing to take the 'I' as denoting anyone but the storyteller.³¹⁶

Even while Thackeray introduces himself as the 'show-master', his excuses are a pretext because, from the outset, Thackeray's aim in *Vanity Fair* had never been a continuous suspension of the reader's disbelief. Even if he wishes to hold on to an illusion of reality, he does not want his readers to take things too seriously. He wishes his readers to feel – while reading – as if the real story will only take place once the author has put his pen down.

M. Tolmatchoff, "Flaubert, 'Slice-of-Life' Aesthetics and Naturalist Novels about Art", *Excavatio: Emile Zola and Naturalism* 16.1-2 (2002), 284-290.

³¹⁴ W. M. Thackeray, To Dr. John Brown, "Contributions to *Punch*" (CBE, vol. 11, Part 2, xxxiii).

³¹⁵ *Letters and Private Papers*, vol. IV, 436.

³¹⁶ Tillotson, 63. Thackeray felt he had come too near an offence due to the resemblance of his character, Lord Steyne, to the late Marquis of Hertford. Consequently, he withdrew a rather pertinent sketch to this effect from the second issue of the first edition of *Vanity Fair* (cf. Tillotson, 63). Compare this to Sir James Barrie's advice to Maartens, concerning his novel *My Lady Nobody*, "not to abate one jot of vigour in your expression of what you consider the rotting thing in Dutch life" (*Letters*, 15.7.1895, 108). Not having taken similar precautions, the narrative ambiguity – is it the author who is speaking? The narrator? The protagonist? –

Thackeray expects his readers to assume the same distance to the events narrated as he himself does. The authorial voice narrating – is it the author, the narrator who is speaking? – is of minor importance. The reader is kept in check all the time by a chain of events that seems endless. While this is taking place, there are moments when even Thackeray is unable to hold back his moral indignation. It comes as a surprise when, all of a sudden, the narrator condemns Becky Sharp's behaviour as a mother, in a manner that seems out of proportion to the ongoing tenor of the narrative. One cannot but think that these are moments when the moralist got the better of him. Such rare moments are, however, but mere exceptions to the rule that the narrator is speaking to the reader about a fair of vanity he is watching. Broad and large like a map, he spreads out that fair in front of the reader. The 'sentimental wink' finds expression in the charm of his romantic make-belief, although, ideally, it will not turn into romantic comedy: we expect this sentimental wink soon enough to be but the gilded plaster over society's putrid body underneath.³¹⁷

Thackeray the moralist does intrude, but it is a difficult matter to ascertain whether – in the case of the aforementioned condemnation of Becky's behaviour – this is the face of the narrator under the mask of a moralist, or the author himself intruding as moralist. This is one of the crucial points of Thackeray that cannot have failed to fascinate Maartens: his knack of always – even if ambiguously – placing himself at a distance from the scene. This distance was being kept constant by frequently recurring intrusions, made more forceful by the very style in which he chose to clothe them.³¹⁸

Before venturing to evaluate Maartens' art by comparing his method to that of Thackeray's, we want to assess that method, i.e., to establish a sort of inventory of the writer's techniques.³¹⁹ Concerning the question of authorial intrusion, Percy Lubbock noticed in Thackeray a "positively wilful pleasure in damaging his own story by open maltreatment of

was taken as an offense or misunderstood by some reviewers in Maartens' home country, cf. for example W.G. van Nouhuys, *The Nederlandsche Spectator* (17 February 1890).

³¹⁷ Edgar F. Harden provides many examples of the forceful satire that emerges in *Vanity Fair*, consistently provoked by the narrator, either contemptuously, or by his sympathy and pity: *Thackeray the Writer: From Journalism to Vanity Fair*, London: Macmillan, 1998, 175-183, here 176-177. Another critic, Donald D. Stone, sees Thackeray as a realist who repressed his own romantic feelings. In his view, Thackeray still embodied the Romantic spirit, even if he attacked Romanticism (*The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980]).

³¹⁸ According to Edgar F. Harden, these are the reasons why he considers the narrator in *Vanity Fair* the most important in all nineteenth literature, see his chapter 6: 'The Narrator', in *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 71-94, particularly 77-82; see also Sister M. Corona Sharp, "Sympathetic Mockery: A Study of the Narrator's Character in *Vanity Fair*", *English Literary History* 29 (1962), 324-336.

³¹⁹ With regard to comparative criticism, I corroborate Tillotson's viewpoint: "It is a law of criticism, however numerous the exceptions to it, that one can see truly only what one sees in and for itself; that a contrast seized on as handy, though perhaps not so certainly a comparison, usually depends for its existence on the falsification of the minor term" (Tillotson, 72).

this kind.”³²⁰ By means of his intrusions, Thackeray consciously kept the suspension of disbelief at a level slightly below that required for the realistic novel. Speaking of “doing damage to his own story” presupposes a critic, Lubbock in this case, who claims that the author’s aim of complete suspension of disbelief should be a *conditio sine qua non*. This, however, is not the case with Thackeray, as he wilfully destroys the illusion of reality and makes readers aware of the fictitiousness of the world presented by the narrator. It is precisely this technique of creating a distance between reader and text that fundamentally constitutes the satirical writer. In satire, it is difficult at times to assume that it is not the author who is speaking most of the time, but his narrator. The ambiguity arises from the fact that the author, i.e., the person writing, as well as the narrator, i.e. the person telling a story, not only report what they see and hear, but also comment upon it. As long as the satirical distance is sustained, the voice that tells the story does not occupy the centre of the reader’s interest. The reader is aware that a mediator is telling him something that he should take with a smile. This narrator, pointing at hilarious or ridiculous things, silently assumes that both himself and the reader share the same opinion about these things.

The satirical viewpoint requires that the distance towards the narrated scenes be continuously sustained. This is not consistently the case in the novels of Maartens. The satirical requirement collides with his need to sustain at the same time a suspension of disbelief. There is a shifting of standpoint, causing perplexity in the reader when he feels that the balance is being disrupted. A striking example is the following sudden narrative intrusion in *God’s Fool*. After the narrator has lead the reader into Elias’ inner world, it has the effect of a deliberate disruption of the reader’s illusion:

He was a fool. He thought that dead people were still alive. And he forgot that you must have money if you want to buy bread. And the life of love, without beginning and without ending, was the one reality of his soul. And you, if you loved him, perhaps you would understand him better. And yet, as you do not love him – Nay, throw down this book. There is the evening paper just come in, with to-day’s stock exchange. They’re up, I believe.³²¹

Let us consider the priorities of the writer and examine how he determines his own position in the narrative. Thackeray, too, takes his liberties, stepping in and out of the story as is his wont. His authorial movements do not considerably affect the position of the narrator. After the vastness of social variety which the reader has experienced, he comes to the last sentence of *Vanity Fair*, where it says, good-humouredly and with self-assurance: “Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.” The reader is at ease, because

³²⁰ Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, 87-88.

³²¹ *God’s Fool*, vol. I, 173-174.

his idea is confirmed that, in reading the novel, he has been dealing with puppets all along. Their creator never had the intention of creeping *inside* them in the first place, into their minds to the extent as to lose his control over them or to make it appear that way.³²² In other terms, regardless of the position Thackeray's characters take in the course of the narrative: they never step out completely of the satirical frame the author has set up for them from the outset, no matter the increase or decrease of their importance: ultimately, everybody remains a type in *Vanity Fair*, from Becky Sharp down to any of the minor characters. The creating and describing of types instead of characters is a Thackerayan priority principle; it requires that he does not dig too deeply into the psyche of his protagonists. Additionally, his attitude allows him to take the ironical stance towards himself as author. He is confident that the reader knows how to understand the bracketed remark as for example in the following quotation: "Being an invalid, Joseph Sedley contented himself with a bottle of claret besides his Madeira at dinner, [...], and certainly (for novelists have the privilege of knowing everything), he thought a great deal about the girl upstairs."³²³ Precisely because novelists are supposed to know everything, the author does not care to find out too much: He does not feel the need to pretend or to declare that he knows everything. In the end his irony always helps to consolidate the story as a fiction in the reader's mind. The portrayal of his characters as types serves the same purpose. It is not inconsistent with the rendering of his types to present his stories as a kind of social historian. Thackeray's humble moral attitude – i.e. not pretending to possess the authority of the omniscient judge – prompted his method of writing like a historian who presents the facts, thus implying simultaneously a degree of objectivity and distance. This counterbalances the imaginary character of a whole scene but it does not disrupt it. On a much smaller scale Maartens applies a similar technique. Being primarily a satirist, like Thackeray, Maartens wants first and foremost to present a world that is in itself as complete as it can possibly be, stuffing the scene with types.³²⁴ Self-imposed limits of introspection are a first condition for the creation of a type à la Thackeray. They delineate such self-imposed limits of the types by accentuating their most outstanding characteristics.

³²² Cf. John P. Frazer, "The Creation of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*", *Dickens Studies Annual* (1998), 227-244.

³²³ *Vanity Fair*, CBE, vol. 1, 46.

³²⁴ Regarding the question of type-creation in Maartens' novels, the critic M.H. Spielmann observed in his long general introductory article: "The choleric baron in *Joost Avelingh*; Alers and the Lossells in *God's Fool*; in *The Greater Glory*, the old Baron van Rexelaer, the Marquis de la Jolais (surely in a sense the Colonel Newcome and Steyne of Dutch literature, [...]) All these and score of others live for us in his pages with a vividness that makes it hard to believe that they have no counterparts except as types" ("Maarten Maartens and his Work", *The Graphic* [1895], 16).

Similar to the sort of type-character we imagine George Osborne's father to be in *Vanity Fair*, an early example, in Maartens, of the creation of a type is Diederik van Donselaar in *An Old Maid's Love*:

When his father died suddenly and left the affairs of Donselaar & Sons, coffee-brokers, in sad confusion, young twenty-year old Diederik at once took the management into his own hands, sending his incapable elder brother about his business, which had never by any means been the firm's. He supported his mother and his seven sisters with relentless propriety, making the old woman's life a burden to her by his tacit air of injured innocence [...] And then the model son became a model husband. He offered his hand to a timid little cousin who had been the admiring spectator of his virtue since her childhood; and she, too frightened to refuse him, accepted, and never quite recovered from her fright. She obeyed him with heart and soul and body; and when she could no longer continue so arduous a task, she did what she knew to be her duty – she died. She thought everything admirable what he said and did. I believe she would have loved him, were it not that love casteth out fear. She could never get as high as that. But when he once told her – late in life – that his heart had been another's, she admired him for the confession. She felt that if he had not married earlier, it was for the sake of those at home. In fact, he was virtue personified, virtue in its most satisfactory form of perfect self-righteousness. He had never done a wrong thing, or, worse still, a foolish one.³²⁵

There are numerous examples of accumulative narrative in Maartens' novels *The Healers*, *The New Religion* and, to a lesser extent, *A Question of Taste*, the novels that are predominantly satirical. Without introduction or preparation, strings of details impose themselves upon the reader, giving the entire setting a tone of grotesque comedy. This converges with one of Maartens' chief aims, i.e. to criticise certain aspects of society in a satirical as well as a comical manner. The relentless flux of the narrative, often strewn with alliteration, gives that tinge of the grotesque to the unfolding of the plot. The following example was taken from *The Healers*. Kenneth, son of the famous Dr. Lisse and a medical man of repute like his father, fears that his mind is affected by a kind of hereditary cerebral deficiency on his Italian mother's side. His friend Maria MacClachlin tries to disprove his apprehension by assembling and transporting the entire family to Kenneth's house, in order that he should check for himself how 'crazy' his hitherto unknown family was. Part of the lengthy description of that company is quoted here:

There were, first, in a corner by themselves, seemingly apathetic, but not devoid of a certain dignity, two blear-eyed, rather broken old men, with parchmety faces, lean, grizzled, in a black-stockinged country dress, and, in company with them, a bright-visaged, restless old spinster, as lean, as parchmety, but with a rainbow-coloured scarf and a brilliant red bundle. Not far from these – to the spinster's [Maria MacClachlin] evident satisfaction – was seated a portly, perspiring village priest, bucolic, black-habited, in buckles and a hat like a boat. The priest's eyes were brown beads, and he betrayed a benevolent interest in everybody and everything. More consciously authoritative, with a profession to assert, a lantern-jawed, yellow-cheeked individual, probably an attorney,

³²⁵ *An Old Maid's Love*, chapter X, 58-59. For the comparison with George Osborne in *Vanity Fair*, cf. CBE, vol. 2, 83-84.

had taken up a position where everyone could see him, fussing with blue papers and documents, in and out of a shiny leather bag.³²⁶

Once the dominant features have been determined, they are given weight by the accumulation of additional details. These enhance the reader's notion of the type. Take, for example, Thackeray's presentation of Amelia's elder brother Joseph Sedley:

He was lazy, peevish, and a *bon-vivant*; the appearance of a lady frightened him beyond measure; hence it was but seldom that he joined the paternal circle in Russell Square, where there was plenty of gaiety, and where the jokes of his good-natured old father frightened his *amour-propre*. His bulk caused Joseph much anxious thought and alarm; now and then he would make a desperate attempt to get rid of his superabundant fat; but his indolence and love of good living speedily got the better of these endeavours at reform, and he found himself again at his three meals a day. He never was well dressed: but he took the hugest pains to adorn his big person, and passed many hours daily in that occupation. His valet made a fortune out of his wardrobe: his toilet-table was covered with as many pomatums and essences as ever were employed by an old beauty: he had tried, in order to give himself a waist, every girth, stay, and waistband then invented. Like most fat men, he *would* have his clothes made too tight, and took care they should be of the most brilliant colours and youthful cut. When dressed at length, in the afternoon, he would issue forth to take a drive with nobody in the Park; and then would come back in order to dress again, and go and dine with nobody at the Piazza Coffee-House. He was as vain as a girl; and perhaps his extreme shyness was one of the results of his extreme vanity.³²⁷

In her study on Thackeray's narrative technique, Barbara Hardy suggests that this accumulation of detail is as such fundamentally critical of society, but her book's central aim is to show that the purpose of such accumulation goes beyond mere fundamental criticism. As a functional asset in the revelation of the destructive dynamics a society can have upon its members, this accumulation is radically critical. It is through accumulation of detail that the themes Hardy enlists – which, by the way, are central to Maartens too – namely rank, class, trade, commerce, money, insincerity, artifice, the corruptions of hospitality, fellowship and love, are given shape. The descriptions can be morose, on the verge of smothering the satire, turning it into cynicism. They can even be openly denouncing.³²⁸ Amassing of detail is primarily instrumental in the creation of the type, i. e., in the 'stuffing' of a shape of a particular kind of person. Of such shapes we all have preconceived notions, emanating from our own social experience. K.C. Phillips observed that the amassing of detail, as a typical Thackerayan device, has various significations. Amongst other examples he gives a quotation of a room description in *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.*, which "serves both to reflect a certain grandeur as well as to undercut it with irony"³²⁹ The tenor is similar, for example, in

³²⁶ *The Healers*, vol. 2, 142-143.

³²⁷ *Vanity Fair*, CBE, vol. 1, 25-26.

³²⁸ Barbara Hardy, *passim*.

³²⁹ Cf. K C. Phillips, 14.

Maartens' *The Price of Lis Doris*. Otto Pareys knows that all his wealth will not buy him the genius he lacks to be a great painter. His studio is described in such a way that, behind the colourful artificiality of his surroundings, all the hollowness of the man himself appears:

One side was an immense studio-window, high up against the ceiling: all the rest was Chinese embroidery and Japanese lacquer: a rainbow mass of variegated glitter against old rose-colour and dead gold. Enormous dragon-bowls stood everywhere, full of soup-plate chrysanthemums. Fretted lanterns hung low from the silks of the ceiling: little cabinets lurked in draped corners, bright with porcelain and bronze. Charming as many of the objects were, the whole room left an impression as if a gigantic kaleidoscope had fallen to pieces through the roof. The owner of these accumulated wonders lay on an open-work gilt Burmese settee, undoubtedly effective in his red silk against the tarnished mandarin cushions. A couple of Chinese chows nestled in safe corners and snarled, if their master moved.³³⁰

When the piling up of detail in the case against society leads to nagging, as is occasionally the case in Thackeray, it may be regarded as a downside of his method. It happens for example when the criticism is too overt in its direct manner, putting at stake – and sometimes obliterating – the subtle underlying tone so typical of Thackeray. At such moments, rare in *Vanity Fair*, the author himself is speaking, rather than the narrator. When, for example, Old Osborne is pleased with his grandson's behaviour at school – thrashing other children – the narrator takes the opportunity to remark:

It is difficult to say what the good old man saw in these combats; he had a vague notion that quarrelling made boys hardy, and that tyranny was a useful accomplishment for them to learn. English youth have been so educated time out of mind, and we have hundreds of thousands of apologists and admirers of injustice, misery and brutality, as perpetrated among children.³³¹

The author has a way of almost inconspicuously embedding his own opinion in the framework of the entire chapter, so that the underlying humorous tone is, for a moment at least, suspended if not affected in essence. Maartens too has his own way of nagging when, for example, his predilection for lashing out at the medical profession gets the better of him. This, as Quiller-Couch put it, “spoils the artistry of his two novels *The New Religion* and *The Healers*, turning them to satire, almost to propaganda.”³³² Quiller-Couch failed to perceive Maartens' main objective in these novels: there is an almost unprecedented desire for satirical

³³⁰ *The Price of Lis Doris*, 58. The atmosphere of decadence evoked is reminiscent of some of the décor descriptions of Des Esseintes' home in Huysmans' *A Rebours* (1884), the novel that instantly set the tone for such new avant-garde approaches in art. Cf. also G. A. Cevasco, *The Breviary of the Decadence: J.-K. Huysmans's A Rebours and English Literature* (New York: AMS, 2001).

³³¹ *Vanity Fair*, CBE, vol. 2, 264.

³³² Arthur Quiller-Couch, “Preface” to *Letters*, xxiv. One is almost tempted to assume that Quiller-Couch did not read *The New Religion*, as he refers to Maartens' two “possessions”, namely his hatred of “religiosity cloaking itself under religion and hatred and contempt of all medical ‘specialists’” (ibid.), whereas it is obvious that *The New Religion* has nothing to do with religion or religiosity at all. The title is a sneer at the acquired status of medical science at the start of the twentieth century.

exuberance. The satire is not the issue here, but the accumulation of black humour, particularly in *The Healers*. Maartens had had many bad experiences with doctors: why should he not have felt entitled to turn this object of his frustration into an entire novel? The reader can adhere to that, but irritation arises when there is sudden nagging at a point *in medias res* dissonant to the ongoing narrative tone, as is frequently the case in this novel. That is one of the reasons why one is inclined to consider *The Healers* Maartens' weakest novel. In her review of *The New Religion* Virginia Woolf commented on Maartens' narrative that its invective against the humbug of the medical profession took too ludicrous a turn to be still effective as social criticism. But she also pointed at the charm that radiated from precisely this piling up of critique through which Maartens made his points "with considerable vivacity", indulging in a "delightful irresponsible mood which neglects all the missions, and charges nobody with the disagreeable duty of abolishing shams."³³³

Accumulation of detail is intrinsic to the process of conveying as strongly as possible a panoramic concept of reality. The larger the number of objects in focus, the stronger the illusion of the real world, even if it also means that, as there are more and more objects, there will be less opportunity to study them each at close range. Similar to Thackeray, Maartens' envisaged objects to take the form of separate scenes in chapters, within which other, smaller scenes appear, giving his books the impression of a continuous succession of scenes rather than the gradual completion of a plot device. In Thackeray, the sense of a panorama is never lost beyond the scene being presented, even while the narrator slows his pace in order to focus on a single scene. He may diminish his speed at such instances, but never actually stops. Epic awareness of a scenic totality is above and around all we are being told. Thus, in combining distance and speed, an inner 'centrifugal' plot-structure is rendered redundant. As there is no such thing as a plot in that particular and traditional sense, the narrator stopping at a single scene cannot convey a sense of detaining that scene any longer than its fragmentary quality

³³³ Virginia Woolf, "The New Religion", in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, 1904-1912, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 149. This is how we are being introduced to a type of doctor in *The New Religion*: "Dr. Nathanael Russett ('Gunpowder and Jam' at the Hospital) stood, hard at work, before his library fire. His full life had many labours, none perhaps so entirely engrossing as this concoction of a new sauce in a little silver pot. He was a man of connoisseur-ships, but the culinary headed them all. As he stirred the rich mess with a crystal "mixer," he was laughing heartily over the story he had just told his laughing wife. He was a fine-looking personage, past sixty, florid and flowery, of stately presence and most courteous address. Sugary he was to everybody, except in his occasional outbursts – whence his sobriquet. He had invented the "mixer" and also a complicated and absurdly costly "cooker" for the "chicken-porridge" he recommended to all his (non-hospital) patients. The recipe for that restorative (equal to Brillat-Savarin's) can be found on an early page of his "How to dine well and keep healthy" (37th thous.), and also in his "Nerve and Nerves." Besides these standard works, Dr. Russett has written a charming little book on "Tintoret" (second edition); and the well-known pamphlet on "Motor Clothes" is his. When you have read "Motor Clothes" (as every hygienic motorist has), you go and buy your things at Cavendish's; though the name doesn't occur in the essay. And you can only get the cooker in Paris at Fagelle's" (vol. 1, 77-78).

allows for. This contributes to the notion that, in essence, Thackeray's novels are, "without a hero", as the subtitle of *Vanity Fair* announces. Due, however, to the persistent ironical distance, the scene nonetheless retains its panoramic aspect, a distance equally sustained by shifts of the narrative voice, i.e., when the narrator suddenly reappears addressing himself to the reader as if he were the author personally, adding a comment not necessarily dealing with the ongoing action itself. All this is in accordance with the reader's expectations, and therefore aesthetically perfectly justifiable. It is his wish to share that distance with the narrator and remain, like him, charmed by all those puppets, bustling about that large panorama, aware of his privilege to supervise at the author's side.³³⁴

Author or narrator? In Thackeray there is an intrinsic ambiguity concerning the identity of the narrative voice. Although we come across that ambiguity in Maartens sometimes, it is not to the same extent as in Thackeray who he insists on his freedom to say what pleases him by way of intrusions: the ironic distance is noticeable, but Maartens does not share Thackeray's almost apologetic attitude – as if he wished he could have avoided appearing on the scene himself.

III.4. The author's various ways to veracity

Lengthy digressions in the Thackerayan manner are rare in Maartens, but the narrator occasionally indulges in general comments, allowing himself to be led into side issues that are in some way or other connected with the main idea.³³⁵ With Thackeray, the reader does not always have a clear notion of the identity of the speaker when such comments become longer, i.e., whether the author is speaking through his narrator. Such ambiguity is unlikely to occur in Maartens, because usually his interferences consist of no more than one or two clear-cut sentences, abruptly and briefly stemming the flow of the narrative. Even if Maartens' smile is present in his satire, there is less of the Thackerayan benevolent sentimentality, which is neutralised by irony even while it occurs. Rather than being unassumingly yet persistently, present throughout, Maartens' social criticism bursts out unexpectedly in aphoristic intrusions.

Interferences with the plot take the shape of extended commentary, i.e. when his plot requires him to analyse to the full the conditions accounting for his main character's attitude or

³³⁴ Jack P. Rawlins devotes several chapters to Thackeray's narrative technique that revolve around the principle that 'the reader must share Thackeray's awareness of the artistic process; ultimately the degree of insight into the inner workings of fiction granted to the reader by Thackeray, and expected from him, is a very high one' (*Thackeray's Novels: A Fiction That Is True* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 147-186, here 151).

actions. As has been said before, there is no doubt that the lawyer in Maartens also determines the author's aesthetical approach to his material. This is evident from *The Black Box Murder* onwards, where the narrator analyses, in the guise of a private detective (i.e. deductively, and in retrospective) the antecedents and motives for the murder at the beginning of the book. Interestingly enough, this novel in the shape of a crime-story, in which the narrative standpoint is almost consistent throughout, stands by itself among Maartens' novels.³³⁵

As a psychological realist Maartens turned from the *Black Box Murder* to his first 'case of conscience'. From the beginning of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, minor characters appear as caricatures and exponents of local colour. However, these characters are relegated to the background as Maartens is still too preoccupied with his main protagonist, Joost Avelingh, to give much attention to the other characters. As his interest in the Thackerayan panoramic scope increases, satire and caricature will gain in significance. As Thackeray himself, Maartens needs to distance himself from his object, in order to be able to write in that mode. Thackeray wished to remain there, and accordingly managed to keep the distance, even where it concerns his main protagonists. Maartens turns into psychological realism when he slips into his protagonist, Joost Avelingh. We have long stretches of untainted narrative voice, occasionally even slipping into indirect speech (as in "Has he a right to such esteem and honour?"). In such instances the suspension of disbelief is not once interrupted.³³⁷ The commentary is intimately related to the content as such; Maartens is not yet letting his characters speak for themselves, as he is bound to do later. At this point, his commentaries

³³⁵ An example of such a digression is the treatise on stepmothers in *God's Fool*, vol. I, 69-72.

³³⁶ There is only one lapse: when the author interrupts his narrator to add that the French have totally succumbed to the psychologist Charcot – an information that could easily have been integrated into the narrative without the suspension of disbelief being affected, see *The Black Box Murder*, 184.

³³⁷ *Joost Avelingh*, 221: "During all those weeks of prolonged suffering, the physical side, so to call it, had scarcely troubled his repose. The imprisonment, the restraint, the deprivations, he had hardly counted these at all. His ordeal had been altogether a moral one, and besides the inevitable separation from his wife, it was in the judgment which the world had passed upon him that his torture had asserted itself, as his punishment would have lain there, had the law finally condemned him. It seemed then, when once, in the silence of his cell at evening, he heard a passing street-boy call out: "Long live Joost Avelingh!" that the windows of Heaven fell open and filled the dark earth with light. It was not that he cared for the silly cry and the ephemeral popularity it brought him, but that in the thought that once more his fellow-men esteemed and honoured him he drank as it were the new wine of life. Had he a right to such esteem and honour? He could, perhaps, scarcely have told himself. In the novel delight of living which came over him during these wonderful days he would certainly have answered yes, but he would not have accounted to himself for the answer. The circumstances of the trial had worked a great change in his nature, subverting to a certain extent his ideas of right and wrong. A man does not pass through such an experience and come out unharmed. He had learned – he would have been surprised, had he known how unexpectedly and how thoroughly – what a difference there is between calling one's self a sinner and being called a sinner by the law. He knew well enough that he was not a good man. Above all, he had had weighing upon him for many years the half-admitted consciousness of a great transgression."

cannot yet be taken out of their context, to be read for their own sake, as is the case with many of the aphorisms.³³⁸

Throughout the novels there is abundant commentary by the author – as a direct interference or in the narrator’s guise. These comments may be purely informative, providing details about a current topic. Writing mainly for English and American readers, especially in his earlier novels, Maartens deemed it useful to supply some information about Holland and its people. Frequently, when commenting on the matter at hand, the narrative voice is unmistakably the author’s. There is aphoristic commentary, adding a wider significance to the actual fictional setting. Standing quite apart from the descriptions of setting (they are seldom), as well as outside the dialogues (they are many), all these commentaries together establish their own strain of narrative, with the effect of further alienating the reader from the scene.

The Sin of Joost Avelingh is not as ‘Maartensian’ as its successor, *An Old Maid’s Love*, in the sense that there is yet little of the typical blend of humour and satire. The plot-movement is still too predominant to allow for more than the odd anecdotal digression. There is little aphoristic comment. The second chapter opens with a detailed description of a feast that is still an event in Holland nowadays: Santa Claus.

An hour or two later the big room was lighted up, and full of movement and conversation. A buzz of excitement round a table laden with parcels, large and small, some unwieldy, some fantastic: flowerpots, cigar-boxes, pails of water, piles of plates. It is the custom in Holland to send these Santa Claus presents, done up in so-called ‘surprises’, no gift being in reality what it seems at the first moment. A book is a box. A cigar-case contains six real cigars and one imitation one with a breast-pin inside it. A plate full of food has a false bottom; an oyster hides pearl ear-drops; a dead mouse in a trap is caught with its neck in a diamond ring. [...] Years have robbed the feast of much of its simplicity. There is no limit now-a-days to the present-sending from house to house, and the things themselves have grown costlier and costlier, till the whole custom threatens to become a nuisance.³³⁹

In due course mere information is supplemented with authorial commentary. Thackeray, on the other hand, occasionally takes a scene as an opportunity to make a comment that can be read as an aphorism but which is, in fact, a way of inserting social criticism: “Sin in man is so light, that scarce the fine of a penny is imposed; while for woman it is so heavy, that no repentance can wash it out.”³⁴⁰ The following is a Maartensian example of an aphoristic comment, taken from *An Old Maid’s Love*: “It is when we sink lowest into despair that we

³³⁸ Together with her selection of *Letters*, Ada Schwartz proposed her father’s principal publisher, Constable, to publish a selection of aphorisms taken from Maartens’ works. While the *Letters* were accepted for publication, the aphorisms had been turned down earlier on, as well as a choice of uncollected short stories (“Kyllman to A. Schwartz”, 26.2.1924; unpublished letters, Maartens archive).

³³⁹ *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, 10-11.

³⁴⁰ *The Newcomes* ch. xxviii, quoted in Tillotson, 130. In Maartens, this recurrent theme of different standards in questions of morality is exemplified for the first time in *An Old Maid’s Love*, ch. XII, 131-147.

leap highest towards new hope. And when the stream of life stagnates for a moment, we cry, beneath its bursting pressure, that it were better still. But often, almost before the words have left our lips, it is leaping away again perhaps beyond its proper bounds, but with fresh strength from the brief delay.³⁴¹

Whereas informative interferences strengthen the fiction of reality, both other forms of comment are used to create distance, as in Thackeray. Very often in Maartens' novels, however, the reader is reluctant to be detracted from what has fuelled his interest in the narrative: the plot and the events that give the plot its forward-pushing momentum or, as the case may be, the actions of the main character at the centre of that plot. Percy Lubbock had a similar opinion with regard to Thackeray's method: "When one has lived into the experience of somebody in the story, and received the full sense of it, to be wrenched out of the story and stationed at a distance is a shock that needs to be softened and muffled into some fashion."³⁴² There can be no question of such a shock in Thackeray, as his intrusions have no actual impact on the distance already existing: when Thackeray presents his characters, they have already been mused over and judged; there are, as it were, no blanks to fill.

Tillotson frequently referred to William Caldwell Roscoe (1823-1859) as perhaps Thackeray's most lucid critic during the author's lifetime. Roscoe wrote that Thackeray "never penetrated into the interior, secret, *real* life that every man leads in isolation from his fellows".³⁴³ To require this of Thackeray is to ask him to abandon his commitment to the tradition of the eighteenth century.³⁴⁴ He is still far removed from indulging into the psychological explorations of his own time and after, ultimately leading to the extremities of a moment-to-moment analysis of the interior life. Starting to write at the last decade of the century, Maartens is already too much wrapped up in this development not to take its significance and impact into account.³⁴⁵ To an extent, the very existence of psychological realism and its bearing upon the art of the novel necessarily distances him from Thackeray.

Maartens shares with Thackeray the critical attitude: they are critics, not merely of certain aspects, but of everything they invent. Writing in the satirical mode, the narrative voice inevitably becomes an instrument of criticism at any given moment, even while it is itself

³⁴¹ *An Old Maid's Love*, 125.

³⁴² *The Craft of Fiction*, 88.

³⁴³ W.C. Roscoe, *William Makepeace Thackeray, Artist and Moralist* (1856), 40. For an introduction to Roscoe, as well as a reprint of the article, see Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, eds., *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 147-199.

³⁴⁴ According to Raymond Chapman, Thackeray's praise for the eighteenth century was part of his strategy in attacking his own century; there is no doubt that he preferred the eighteenth century (with its elegance, gentility, prudery, etc.) to his own time, cf. *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

being caricatured. From this attitude it naturally and inevitably ensues that the authors impose their own view of society and, in a wider sense, their private philosophy of life. This is the opposite of authorial impartiality. It would not well comply with the requirements of satire to sustain narrative distance throughout; on the contrary it would suspend it.³⁴⁵

Most of the time Thackeray manages to hide successfully behind the mask of his narrator, to modulate the narrative voice as he pleases: Very often there is no clear distinction between authorial intrusion and narrative voice. The reader finds himself enveloped in a continuous stream of narrative from which the author seems absent, regardless of the ironical sub-tone, which is not always devoid of cynicism. The message passes objectively that we live in a thoroughly materialistic universe, as a matter of fact, hardly ever as a subjective assertion.

The stretches of narrative where Maartens sustains his distance, in the Thackerayan manner, are frequent and long: the passages in which he resolutely and most consistently takes the satirical standpoint. As in the passages quoted, his narrative flows as gently as Thackeray's, be it in a neater, more clear-cut style. He is not unequal to Thackeray in the leisurely manner in which he intersperses the narrative with authorial comments. Problems arise when these are felt as intrusions. The remark by Lubbock, quoted earlier on, would apply to Maartens rather than to Thackeray. After that intrusion, there is no "softening and muffling" of the shock but, more simply, a narrative shift, usually in form of a return to the previous mode. For a moment, the intrusion robs the reader of his cherished illusion, leaving him somewhat bewildered. The only kind of interference that has a less immediate intrusive effect, causing the action only seemingly to come to a halt, is when the author inserts general information as, in Maartens, about the Dutch, like in the previously quoted example from *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*.

Interferences are acceptable to the reader when they merely effectuate a pause in the story. Like Thackeray, Maartens is not particularly "in a hurry to get his business over with."³⁴⁷ With Thackeray, there is no such sense of interruption of the flowing continuity of the stream of events by his narrator's commentaries. It is as if the narrative proceeds according to a gentlemen agreement drawn up between the narrator and his reader, the latter accepting the

³⁴⁵ Even if he publicly rejects the 'psychologists', e.g. Ibsen, and 'naturalists' and 'realists' like Zola and Maupassant.

³⁴⁶ On the other hand, it must be considered that "the narrator regulates the distance between reader and events, and in doing so brings about the aesthetic effect of the story. The reader is only given as much information as will keep him oriented and interested, but the narrator deliberately leaves open the inferences that are to be drawn from this information" (Wolfgang Iser, "The Reader in the Realistic Novel: Aesthetic Effects in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*", in Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Makepeace Thackeray's Vanity Fair* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 37-55, here 41; As to the impact of satire on the view of society, see Robert E. Lougy's "Vision and Satire: The Warped Looking Glass in *Vanity Fair*", idem, 57-82, particularly 63-69.

interspersions as an integral part. On the other hand Thackeray identifies with his reader as *primus inter pares*, his narrator converses with him, excluding neither himself nor the reader from the very criticism of a community of which they themselves are part. In reverse, the reader is always aware of the narrator's presence. When there is no direct explicit intrusion, it is implicit in the criticism generated by the narrative mode itself. In that case, the narrator's comments are intrinsic to the narrative itself and, as such, their presence is not felt as an intrusion. Maartens shares a similar form of confidentiality with the reader whenever he has his narrator assume shared feelings between him and the reader. In such passages, the narrative voice is frequently modulated. The following quotation, again from *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, shows how the narrative voice is briefly interposed with a value judgement addressed to the reader (in italics) before lapsing into indirect speech:

Joost Avelingh drove back to the Castle, with his head in a whirl. He drove fast, recklessly fast, as was his habit when under strong excitement. *His agitation will be forgiven him by all who have ever been in a similar position; and to few men has the great decision come so suddenly.* But an hour or two ago, he had been firmly resolved to wait, and do nothing in a hurry. If anything could have kept him back, it would have been Mynheer van Hessel's manner, but how charming and innocent and thoroughly girlish she [i.e. daughter Agatha] was when she looked up at him and said 'Joost!' There was a little mockery in it, perhaps, never mind; there was plenty of affection and good-nature. Who could resist her? Not he. And so he was actually engaged!³⁴⁸

Notice the Thackerayan manner of inserting subjective phrases of indirect speech in "but how charming [...] etc." There is no satire in this passage, and the narrative flow remains uninterrupted, because the modulations of the narrative voice constitute an organic part of that flow. Long stretches of narrative, subtly satirical, testify to the narrator's presence on the scene. Again, the reader is at leisure to enjoy the superior ease with which Maartens evokes, with a few lines of narrative, the impression of a secluded, hitherto unknown world. The narrator's presence is taken for granted as the preliminary condition to the presumed shared feelings between narrator and reader. Each scene or dialogue adds up to a totality. The narrator, being so familiar with that secluded world, increases the reader's share of intimacy with it by his fresh comments. Corroborating the opinion of the critic mentioned earlier that the charm of that world lies in the soberness of the people, the flatness of the landscapes and the greyness of its skies, Maartens is aware that such impressions should be communicated to the reader accordingly, by a matter-of-fact style. Story and commentary are thus intimately connected: they need each other as aesthetic counterparts to sustain the ironical distance.

³⁴⁷ Cf. A. Quiller-Couch, "Preface" to *Letters*, 9.

³⁴⁸ *Joost Avelingh*, 56-57.

Tillotson quoted at length from *The Virginians* to show “how effectively Thackeray turns the great wheel of writing, in and out of the story (itself touched with commentary) and commentary (itself half story).”³⁴⁹ Maartens’ wheel may be of a smaller size, but compare – as shown in our last quotation from *Joost Avelingh* – how he has a way of working himself in-and-out of the narrative in the guise of his narrator.

Having fulfilled the condition of objective distance, the narrator nonetheless presents himself as part of the scene by force of his familiarity with it. We may unremittingly apply to long stretches of Maartens’ prose the very words Tillotson attributed to Thackeray as a whole: “His books have blitheness and their abundant repose is partly owing to their commentary, which suggests a cool timelessness overarching the happy, the fierce, the indolent flow of the narrative.”³⁵⁰ When Maartens is describing a sober, neat, conventional and law-abiding community (as is usually the case), there is but little room for Thackerayan exuberance: That would be out of balance. Still, in many passages, he can be read as a ‘tuned down’ Thackeray. At the beginning of *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, in the chapter called ‘The Ice Party’, Joost and his best friend Kees have been skating in silence, overwhelmed by the feelings aroused during their previous conversation. The subdued tone of unspoken thoughts is sustained in the description of their surroundings:

They were nearing their destination. They had been skating on and on along the narrow river which lay as a gleaming band across the flat, frozen landscape. Barren it was and hushed as if in death, beneath its white coverlet, but not bleak. The wintry sun shone out too cheerily for that from his pale, silver-blue sky, lightning up every sparkle in the wide expanse, and sweeping great shadows – you could not tell whence – across the iceband down the middle. The rare trees along the banks – a cluster of poplars, a row of straggling willows – stood out, black and gaunt, against heaven. Here and there untidy bushes formed a sort of fringe. From these a bird would start up occasionally and shoot on ahead over the river. In the full, clear winter stillness they could hear his parting rustle; the notes of bells came ringing from peaked church-towers in the distance. Children called out to them, standing among the hens before red-roofed, snow-bedizened cottages along their road. And as they passed the full-bellied Dutch barges, motionless by the frozen river-bank, a head with a pipe would lift itself slowly from the companion and lazily follow them, and half-a dozen chubby, red-comforted children, pottering about on their own small skates, would come after them with a merry hue and cry, trying to keep up with the older skaters.³⁵¹

If there is none of Thackeray’s melody in Maartens’ style, he at least manages to stay aloof from any possible drabness of realism by his almost permanent laconic attitude reflected by a

³⁴⁹ Tillotson, 107-108; this process of ‘turning the great wheel’ is facilitated by a narrative that succinctly looks towards the past, thus persistently rendering the effects of time. Lord David Cecil pointed out that Thackeray had a special sensibility to the relics of the past: “what more poignant emblems are there of man’s transitoriness and vanity? Old pictures, old toys, old letters with their yellowing paper and browning ink [...]” (*Early Victorian Novelists* [1966], [London: Collins, 1970], 77).

³⁵⁰ Tillotson, 110.

style as freshly green and neatly trimmed as the Dutch alleys and lawns. Like Thackeray, he gives us people speaking as they do in their social environment. Often they are people who are not in the habit of saying much at all. Yet even if they have little to say: more than Thackeray, Maartens is willing to let them speak for themselves, preferably by means of dialogue or by indirect speech.³⁵²

Being first and foremost a satirist, Maartens presupposes the existence of a generally accepted moral code. Consequently, the narrator either confirms what his readers already know or suspect, or he increases their knowledge with information that either corroborates or corrects their views. When, for instance, he deals with the upper classes, the narrator dwells on what he knows to be their great prerogative: their wealth. The lives of his upper-class protagonists are presented in such a way as to make them void of meaning in the eyes of the socially less privileged – but not necessarily less cultured – middle-class readership.

In his preoccupation with the power of money, Thackeray is a typical representative of the Victorian novelists; the presence or lack of money superseding all other considerations: political or social, with the exception, perhaps, of moral respectability. The presentation of types required that there should be a balance between the satirical distance on the one hand and, to a certain extent, the suspension of disbelief on the other hand. It is not possible for the reader to identify with a particular vision of reality without a plausible representation of that vision. In other words: up to a certain point, the reader must believe in what he reads. In the process of reading, his latent and fundamental disbelief needs to be suspended: fiction mirrors itself in reality. Readers had to be able to imagine the characters as actually living, in Holland or at any of the other foreign sites where the action took place. The characters are alive in this – Thackerayan – sense, that we can imagine them to turn up any time precisely because we perceive them from a distance. Due to that very distance, we do not know too much about them. Yet we have a clear enough grasp of their contours to believe in each of them as a type of person we have come across with in real life before. Maartens' readers enjoyed the

³⁵¹ *Joost Avelingh*, 43-44. This chapter is a perfect example of the kind of prose passage that Arthur Quiller-Couch calls "suggestive of beautiful short stories" ("Preface" to the *Letters*, p. xxii).

³⁵² Notice how indirect speech and narrative voice are intermingled: "When Suzanna had closed the door of her room she sat down in the dark. She was stunned. She must think it out. It was true, then. This thing which of late she had always put away from her as too ridiculous, too terrible to be possible, was there, before her very eyes – a fact to be faced, and fought. There was question of impure passion between the strange Frenchwoman and – Arnout. How, or in what degree she could not tell. But there it was. She had seen it, this evening. And it suddenly made clear many things to her which she had not understood before. Out of the confusion of the last two days it grew forth and took definite shape, and it illuminated what had lain in the dark. She was a simple woman, was Suzanna, a woman who thought simply and broadly, who divided the ideas with which she came in contact into good and bad, false and true, right and wrong. And, therefore, she did not always make nice little distinctions, which were plain enough to less single eyes, and the wise people of the world were apt to call her blind". (*An Old Maid's Love*, 179).

experience of realizing that those – mainly Dutch – upper middle class types were not all that different from their own.³⁵³

Reading Maartens this day and age, we get a lively picture of Dutch communities and their inhabitants a century ago, particularly the rural ones. It now seems odd to think that, in Maartens' day, the functioning of the social system with its conventions, rules and traditions within the seclusion of a community was still largely unaffected in spite of change on all levels. Even within Maartens' deliberately old-fashioned framework, it takes some effort to imagine a main character like Suzanna Varelkamp in *An Old's Maid's Love*. When going into the country, be it Holland or anywhere else, we might however come across the odd spinster, surprised to find she is still around. Like Thackeray's readers, for whom it was not difficult to imagine they might meet any of his characters in the street, at a party or elsewhere, similarly Maartens' English readers seemed to think they would encounter his Dutch people provided they took the trouble of going to Holland. In fact, there was a sense of enjoyment in the belief that they knew the Dutch and their country through his books without actually going there.³⁵⁴ Adding to that, it was probably a comforting experience – all too human – to recognize, in some of Maartens' types, people very similar to those one knew personally. Also, there was enough common ground to identify with a certain type oneself. This caused a feeling of being 'found out' even while being charmed with one's own habits and culture. It was the awareness of "how like ourselves!" that referred to a social community as a whole and its types of people: their attitudes, behaviour, opinions, and prejudice.³⁵⁵ It is only when we gain access to the character's inner life – i.e., the 'character', instead of the 'type' – that we have the sensation of "how like myself!" When the idiosyncrasies of an individual character rather than the outer appurtenances of a human social structure are at the centre of interest, we are

³⁵³ The Dutch, on the other hand, believed that Maartens was ridiculing them. Maartens wrote to Mrs Gosse: "It never struck me that I was describing the Dutch for the English, and expected to write up the subjects accordingly. But under these circumstances, if I am to produce, not my best attempts at pictures of life, but prospectuses, writing becomes impossible, and I don't write" (*Letters*, 13.1.1895, 103).

³⁵⁴ As we saw Thomas Hardy did in his appreciation of *Harmen Pols: Peasant* (*Letters*, 26 Oct. 1910, 291-92). On Hardy's journey to Holland, see J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 24, 92, 93, 262, as well as his infatuation with Dutch seventeenth-century painting, 13-30; see also Lennart A. Björk, ed. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1985), entries 1483-1490, 194-195; N. J. O'Connor, in his Memoir to the *Letters*: "To his wife he [Maartens] once wrote, 'Did I tell you that Howells told me my descriptions of Holland had sent the family there (in 1898, I believe)? Someone else told me they were going on that account. That is the American and English view.'", xlvi; the letter itself was not retraceable. Earlier, Howells had written in his article "My favorite Novelist and His Best Book": "Oddly enough, though there are no German novelists to speak of, there are very good Dutch ones. Maarten Maartens, who writes in English, is perhaps the first of them; and he is my favorite novelist while I am reading him" (*Munsey's* [April 1897]; rpt. in *W.D. Howells as Critic*, ed. Edwin H. Cady [London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973], 272).

³⁵⁵ With regard to the veracity of his types, Maartens expressed himself with apparent satisfaction: "Only last week Germans who could judge told me that the Germans in "Dorothea" were "the real thing, from

on a different level altogether: the level of psychological realism. The manners, morals and customs which conditioned the ways of speaking, dressing and behaving of these characters may since long have gone; yet we want to know about them for precisely that reason. When character is concerned, however, the more such differences in time are apparent, the less they become material on another level in the process of our involvement with them: In these characters we behold the human condition as such. We are aware that human beings have not really changed where it concerns the inner life of emotional perceptions. As for technique, in the rendering of these emotions, Maartens mainly uses dialogue. Meaning is evoked rather by implication than by description. The type emerges from a particular setting within socially and culturally strictly defined boundaries. These conditions have changed in the course of time. Accordingly, some types have come to be more or less eccentric specimen of days gone by. They may have lost their actuality, like Mejuffrouw Varelkamp, but they are the ones who ‘survive’.

Maartens felt irresistibly drawn to Thackeray’s world because of “the human life itself”, i.e., the observer looking at a panorama while at the same time being part of it. The charm is of course in the style, but also in the impression that not all has been told, that there would be so much more worthy of being included in the narration, that the story could go on forever. The melancholy charm of such sentimentally flavoured lines touched the very core of Maartens’ splenetic nature. Imagine the strong fascination they must have held for him:

Ha! I look up from my desk, across the street: and there come in Mr. and Mrs D. from their walk in Kensington Gardens. How she hangs on him! How jolly and happy he looks, as the children frisk round! My poor dear benighted Mrs. D., there is a Regent’s Park as well as a Kensington Gardens in the world. Go in fond wretch! Smilingly lay before him what you know he likes for dinner. Show him the children’s copies and the reports of their masters. Go with missy to the piano, and play your artless duet together, and fancy you are happy!³⁵⁶

Maartens felt equally impressed by the Thackerayan urge to be as consummate as possible. Evidently, he too had that need to go on and on, telling all he knew as if it were one endless anecdote. The following comment by Tillotson is equally applicable to Maartens:

Thackeray was interested in providing completeness also on the score of psychology. To his moral interest in hypocrisy he added a more wholly scientific interest in exploring what used to be called ‘the heart’. I have already shown how he preferred to give the results rather than the exploration itself – the results of their bodily signs. He prefers, like Fielding, to look at the face of the clock and to read the time on it, but like Richardson

the inside.” English friends, by the by, have said the same thing about my few English, e.g. in “Her Memory” (“Interview”, 1).

³⁵⁶ W. M. Thackeray, *The Virginians*, CBE, vol. 16, 277.

has made the works, though he usually keeps them hidden. But with this distinction he gives us men complete in body, mind and heart. He plumbs the mind of Pen.³⁵⁷

This is also an assessment of the concept of the type in the fullest sense: the illusion of completeness “in body, mind and heart” is only possible within the range of observation from the outside – at a distance. Maartens’ method however is ultimately based on dramatic implication by means of dialogue, rather than description. When dealing with his minor characters, he naturally sustains the Thackerayan satirical distance. The difference is that he puts them down more sharply, even brusquely at times, with a few strokes of the pen. Like Thackeray, his interest in them is limited, and the qualities attributed to them do not extend beyond those immediately apparent, visible or to be expected in accordance with their status. That is the usual satirical procedure, as we have seen in the case of Hendrik Donselaar in *An Old Maid’s Love*. Still, Maartens does not always stop there, as shown, for example, in the depiction of Parey’s manservant in *Lis Doris*, Jacob Boonhakker.³⁵⁸ Jacob, or Job, is a minor character, of significance only in his total subservience to his master, Pareys. He is of some importance because of the mysterious intimacy that exists between him and his lord and master. True to his concept of veracity, Maartens proceeds to have the unfavourable qualities of his character ‘counter-balanced’ by indications of circumstances, enabling us at least to comprehend and thus empathise with the character in question. This is not to say that we sympathise with him or her. However short-lived our empathy may be, never do we feel the same way for any of the “puppets” in *Vanity Fair*, as Thackeray chose to call his characters. Yet no explanations of motives are given: the characters merely *act* mechanically, matter of fact, in accordance with the circumstances.

Successively appearing on the scene, minor characters have but minor contributions to make to the kaleidoscopic panorama in which they move. When a major character like Juffrouw Varelkamp in *An Old Maid’s Love* is concerned, that character is essentially no less a type than Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. The probing of the minds of his major types is added to their description, accumulating action and detail that is consistent with their frame of mind.

³⁵⁷ Tillotson, 129-130.

³⁵⁸ Vol. I, 213: “Intended by nature for evil, his weak will, when released, sought the pleasantest wrong. His enchanter was fain it should be so, advising him always to do what he liked best. His mother added the counsel to repent before dying, but he had long got beyond any impression from that. His impressions were simple: pleasing yourself, when you needn’t please Pareys. But the latter task was a labour of the Danaides. He worked in the sweat of his brow. Often his juvenile training here came to his aid: he would pray earnestly, whilst believing in nothing, for Divine Help to execute his despot’s evil commands. Pareys slept like a child, often eight or nine hours. In the night, then, Job Boonbakker had leisure to drink, anywhere, or otherwise amuse himself. In the morning he would glide from the cupboard next to his master’s bathroom and, clean, subservient, with eyes downcast, he would say the day was fine. He had orders to say so always, that Pareys might get up. If the view revealed rain, the figure in pyjamas as often as not flung some missile at “the liar!”: a book or a bootjack. The

Maartens is already on a different level when he his narrator explains *why* a character, – as in the case of Job Boonhakker, given above – acts as he does. At that moment the author is no longer writing in the satirical mode.

Traditionally in the novel, plot generates an accumulation of action. Both plot and action effectively diminish the distance between reader and fiction, which, accordingly, increases the illusion of reality. As far as Thackeray is concerned, he does not wish his readers to suspend their disbelief entirely, i.e., there are no turns towards anything like a ‘centrifugal’ plot device. He opts for a panoramic view of existence, presented as a never-ending succession of events, with neither end nor beginning. There is no plot pushing the reader to go on; there is only his curiosity, again and again excited to see and enjoy as much as possible of the panorama being offered. Maartens works differently. He conceives a plot-structure for each novel *a priori*. In the process of reading, it becomes increasingly evident that the plot is propelled forward and motivated by events prior to the beginning of the story. From the *Black Box Murder* onwards there is a cyclical plot structure, intrinsic constituent of Maartens’ method and, as such, distinctive from Thackeray’s. In *The Black Box Murder*, a psychological story of crime, apparently mysterious actions gradually become comprehensible as the motives leading up to them are being revealed. The reader is drawn closer towards the action, as if taking pictures of the scenes themselves.³⁵⁹ The traditional device of action determining all the decisive turns in the plot is at work: deeds rather than thoughts of the characters count.

On the contrary, Thackeray’s constantly sustained distance to the scene reduces the dynamic impact of the action on the plot. He fills his panorama with people whom he considers worthy of putting in, providing many “interesting particulars”, about them, to use his own expression. Maartens does the same thing, with the difference of letting them speak much more for themselves. Increasingly, instead of descriptions and comments, dialogue becomes the dominant vehicle of the narrative.

While aiming at completeness, Thackeray’s meticulous descriptions oddly enough do not help to get close to his figures. By contrast, Maartens’ dialogues put the reader in the front row. Whatever the characters do or say testifies to their moral stature; all actions and all dialogues serve this purpose. Still, also in Thackeray does the interest ultimately reside in the moral disposition of the characters. The fact that there is an element of exaggeration in most of their

big fellow quietly put these away. Every morning, after some escapade, he approached his lord in a white terror of discovery. His life, in a word, despite its debauches, was a hell upon earth.”

³⁵⁹ For the contrast as well as the fusion between the picture at close range and the over-all scope in Thackeray, cf. Robert P. Fletcher, “Visual thinking and the picture story in *The History of Henry Esmond*,” *PMLA*, 1998, 379-94, passim; cf. also Victor R. Kennedy, “Pictures as Metaphors in Thackeray’s Illustrated Novels”, *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* (1994), 135-147, passim.

actions (and more so even in what they say) is a way to mould them into a certain shape, to make them straightforward and to the point. Paradoxically, this increases their verisimilitude – not dissimilar to the exaggeration of action and dialogue in a film. This is equally implicit in Tillotson’s observation of what he describes, in Thackeray’s characters, as their one-sidedness: “Seeing his characters as static, Thackeray subscribes to the Popean doctrine of the ‘ruling passion’. The danger of this doctrine for any writer wishing to represent human life with the Thackerayan truthfulness is that it encourages him to take men and turn them into ‘humours’ of the narrowest sort.”³⁶⁰

Maartens may be equally considered to be one of the subscribers to this doctrine in the sense that he equally draws a character around one central emotion. There are ‘side-passions’ grouped around the ‘ruling passion’, whereby the ruling passion is given its conspicuous profile as the driving force in a particular character. The ruling passion does not merely constitute a link with the plot. In a ‘centrifugal’ plot-structure it is, to an extent, the very driving force that propels the plot forward. As no such plot can be found in Thackeray, there is not the same necessity to turn a ruling passion into the active driving force. His aim is first to create and then to consolidate the satire appertaining to a particular character.

The perspective of satirical distance has consequences for all elements of the narrative. Rather than “always feeling the analysis, seeing the knife” as Maartens described George Eliot’s method,³⁶¹ Thackeray looks through binoculars, seeing all at once, the edges becoming rather blurred, the colours breaking up as in a kaleidoscope. Thackeray called them his “puppets”, because the interlacement between types and descriptive detail makes them seem imprisoned, of being unable to act on their own accord: Analysing these puppets as they appear on the scene in *Vanity Fair* is not so much a question of detecting the good and bad qualities that keep each other in check, as it is a matter of observing their compulsion to act in a particular way. This counts as long as the authorial standpoint remains the same. The qualities, either good or bad, are attributed to the characters from a distance by the narrator. In doing so, he

³⁶⁰ Tillotson, 155. Pope’s distinction between the male and the female temperament in the “Argument” to his second epistle, “*To a LADY. Of the CHARACTERS of WOMEN*” evidently serves his satiric stratagem: “Tho’ the Particular Characters of this Sex [the female] are more various than those of Men, the *General Characteristick*, as to the *Ruling Passion*, is more uniform and confin’d” (*Moral Essays: Epistles to Several Persons*, ed. F. W. Bateson [Routledge: London, 1993], 44). One illustration of the ruling passion, given further ahead, instantly calls some of Maartens’ heroines to mind: “Now Conscience chills her, and now Passion burns: And Atheism and Religion take their turns. A very Heathen in the carnal part, Yet still a sad, good Christian at her heart” (54). The ‘ruling passion principle’ is equally evident in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Maybe Emily Brontë not only inspired Maartens in his descriptions of the Dutch heath in *The Price of Lis Doris*, but she also may have had an impact on the way in which he conceived his types, since her characters, too, are basically ‘possessed’ by one dominant emotion – love, hate, devotion or whatever.

³⁶¹ Private Notebook 3, 31.

enjoys the reader's company and vice versa, at ease as they feel in the awareness of their mutual interest.

Within the large space of the panorama, where each character takes the amount of space according to his or her part in the scene, there are no heroes or heroines in the traditional sense. In the lack of a central plot, each of these characters heaves his bit of the plot into the next chapter. From thence another character, or group of characters, taking turns at the front of the stage with either a new bit of plot, or proceeding with something that had started earlier on. Reading Thackeray is like watching a grand carrousel as it turns around. Standing very close to it, each detail becomes very clearly visible while it is already moving away from us. Knowing that a figure is very likely to turn up again, sooner or later, there is no reason why we should want to linger with a particular one, rather than with another. Neither are we in a hurry though, as there is no plot urging us to want to reach the climax as swiftly as possible. At the most, there will be, for the time being, a *dénouement*. All we see is these puppets waving at us, some larger and more richly dressed than others, more compelling in the act of revealing themselves, all equal, however, as they are on the same carrousel waiting to turn into view again, where the spectators are watching. The master of the carrousel has no interest in slowing down, let alone stopping, to give us sufficient time to look at one of the puppets more closely. He will stop at the end of the ride, only to set his machine going for a fresh round with the old puppets, and maybe with one or two new ones.

The novelist looks at the world and chooses to communicate a vision that he has imbued with as much truthfulness as he could. His interest lies in the characters as the purveyors of that truth: It is a human world, and his vision is a vision of humanity. Maarten Maartens admired Thackeray because of the omnipresence of the *human* condition of society. He perceived the irrefutable reality, reflected in all of his works, that there was something thoroughly amiss with that society, that its very weakness lied in its human substance. Hence it was but a step towards the absurdity of its laws and social conventions, the incongruities of which had to be intelligible at every page. This is not to say that Thackeray's characters are simply victims. It is true that there is a human weakness in each of them, which helps to understand why things are as they are. There is no reason to attribute a particular plot constellation to one character only. Although Thackeray's narrator assumes a distant perspective, he does not, for that reason, fail to reveal the soft spot hidden in each of his puppets. Thackeray believed in the good and the bad of mankind as it had been cast by the fate of each individual. However, the one flaw, i.e. the question of moral responsibility, remained unanswered.

As a satirist, Maartens has Thackeray's perspicacity of outlook of the shrewd and relentlessly keen observer of all human kind. The movements and attitudes of each and everyone are viewed according to the mechanical laws that propel them to behave and act according to their principles. For the narrator as well as for the reader, it suffices to see what is going on; certainly not always with admiration and love, nor intoxication with detail, yet without ever assuming an attitude of moral insensibility. By drawing a firm distinction between the philosopher and the novelist in him, Thackeray was able to define his standpoint more clearly: "If truth is not always pleasant; at any rate truth is best, from whatever chair – from those whence graver writers or thinkers argue, as from that at which the story-teller sits as he concludes his labour, and bids his kind reader farewell."³⁶²

The narrator's ironical distance being sustained consistently, perpetuates the narrative into ever new fields of scope and activity. Looking more closely, we see that he is not tempted to deal with matters such as religion, politics, education and the social sciences in any way other than within an – implicitly accepted – conventional framework. These human activities are *not* primarily to be regarded as social phenomena against which the narrator reacts through his comments. As a satirical observer, Thackeray will not let his mask slip. Concentrating on the satirical element, Tillotson frequently refers to William Caldwell Roscoe as perhaps Thackeray's most lucid critic during his lifetime. One may safely agree with Roscoe's assessment of Thackeray's significance, providing an apt definition of his principle of satirical realism:

The social human heart, man in relation to his kind – that is his subject. His actors are distinct and individual, – truthfully, vigorously, felicitously drawn; master-pieces in their way; but the personal character of each is not the supreme object of interest with the reader. It is only a contribution to a larger and more abstract subject of contemplation. Man is his study; but man the social animal, man considered with reference to the experiences, the aims, the affections, that find their field in his intercourse with his fellow men: never man the individual soul.³⁶³

From Thackeray's satirical point of view, man can perfectly be observed and portrayed "in his intercourse with his fellow men." An illusion of reality emerges from the interweaving of detail, i.e., the facts that constitute the characters with their good and bad characteristics. The reader's constant awareness that this is only a story after all, does not perturb the illusion of reality. The suspension of disbelief is almost sustained throughout, sufficiently enough to speak of satirical realism. Thackeray's method encompasses the satirical standpoint as well as the position of the realist. He achieves that goal, keeping the two approaches in balance by

³⁶² "Preface" to *Pendennis*, CBE, vol. 3, lv.

³⁶³ W. C. Roscoe, *Poems and Essays by the Late William Caldwell Roscoe*, ed. R. H. Hutton, vol. II, 266, quoted in Tillotson, 183.

means of persistent accumulation. The satirical mode – i.e., the truly Thackerayan one – is in reality Maartens'. His narrative intrusions, coupled with the caricature of types and the satirical exaggeration of trivial happenings constitute a mode that can be called satirical realism, albeit with some reservations. However, his indebtedness to realism stems from other sources.

III.5. The whole range of society in view

Maartens not only adhered to the Thackeray's panoramic principle, he also concerned himself with the privileged classes. Maartens, too, is a traditionalist in the sense that he also wrote for a middle class readership, aware – like Thackeray – that topics such as wealth and social predominance of the upper classes were the of particular interest to their readers. When Maartens' novel *The Greater Glory* was published in 1894, the interest of that readership had considerably shifted towards the discussion of the social standards that approached those of their own class. The gap – in time as well as in social class – that separated the fictional characters from their actual readers narrowed, thus facilitating identification with the characters. Like all the novelists who were influenced by the wave of realism then current, Maartens had certainly 'come down' to that middle class readership. He divides his aesthetic interest between lower, middle and upper class environment. Even so, upper or higher-middle-class characters continue to take the centre of his interest. In that respect, his novels were already somewhat dated at the very moment of publication, taking into account that the social and political self-awareness of the steadily growing reading public had developed considerably. This was not the case, at least not to the same extent, in Thackeray's days: he could still safely rely on complying with his reader's interest in creating anything that was greater, larger, and more colourful than the reader's own milieu. Both authors deal with snobbery in all its varieties. They demonstrate throughout that it is a phenomenon common to all levels of society. Thackeray reveals the continuous strife of people who try to climb up the social ladder, in which they hardly ever succeed. A high price had to be paid if they do. In Maartens, the overall predominance of class-consciousness is manifest, above all in the shape of exaggerated pride and, hence, disdain for anyone standing on a lower rung than oneself. A significant case in point is the portraying of master and servant and their underlying conflicts of interest. It is a way of illustrating class conflicts in society at large. With both authors, the servants manage to keep their self-respect under all circumstances, either by outright cheating of their masters, by cleverly outwitting them or by stubbornly sticking to their principles and opinions even while they are being bullied by their superiors. Aware of

the absurdities of the social structure as they manifest themselves in daily life, Maartens turned away from the Thackerayan ludicrous satire of a Mr. Yellowplush towards a more overt social criticism: masters bully their servants who submit in dogged silence. Once more we return to the servant in *Lis Doris*:

Like so many a farmer's son, Job was a poor walker: of these spurts, waits, and watchings he wearied unutterably, for never would he have ventured to utter a word of complaint. His lubberly figure was difficult to hide: he felt by no means secure that he had always succeeded in hiding it. He trembled at thought of failing to execute his master's commands. He lived two lives, entirely disjointed, and had done so for years. The one was all slavery: the other self-indulgence. Beyond the aura of his master he had licence to be himself.³⁶⁴

There are other instances when servants are portrayed satirically demonstratively and theatrically, quitting service at the very moment they feel a breach of their petty code of respectability. Examples of such types are Hepsibah in *An Old Maid's Love* or Aurélie in *Dorothea*.

Thackeray wrote much about the poor classes, especially in his minor works, because he “enjoys their ways with something of a Dickensian relish.”³⁶⁵ Arthur Quiller-Couch perceived a “touch of Dickens” in Maartens.³⁶⁶ In both authors there is genuine affection, beyond the satire, for the human dignity and simplicity of poor people. An example is Dientje, the servant-girl in *A Question of Taste*. She is drawn in a few lines only – like, for example, Becky in Thackeray's “Shabby Genteel Story” – and yet we instinctively know her and her ways. We fully share the narrator's joy in displaying her gift of intuition for all that is happening.³⁶⁷

While Thackeray's narrator never stops pouring his stock of interesting particulars about the London aristocracy on the reader, in Maartens' novels the narrator pauses whenever he is distracted by an incident that he deems worth his while. The intrusive quality of these digressions throws distinctions between the social classes in sharper relief, makes them stand out more sharply than in Thackeray, where the continuous flow itself is like a velvet cloth spread over differences and obstacles, thereby smoothening the entire surface.

There is a difference in the treatment of the poor classes. Neither of the authors actually ever lived with the poor and yet, while Thackeray's narrator limits himself mainly to the exploration of their situation of being in the service of the rich, the narrator in Maartens' novels does not hesitate to go into their homes. Maartens is once more a realist at such

³⁶⁴ *Lis Doris*, vol. I, 212-213.

³⁶⁵ Tillotson, 186.

³⁶⁶ *Letters*, “Preface”, xlix.

³⁶⁷ “A Shabby Genteel Story”, CBE, vol. 18, 69 and 108.

instances, with the artistic desire to get away from romance, tasting taste stale in an increasingly rough world. That realisation is reflected in his opinion on Maupassant: “I have been going through a systematic course of Maupassant. It is splendid work, the loveliest, perfectest [sic] mud-pies. Surely the man’s soul revelled in dirt. Yet how objective he manages to be.”³⁶⁸

Maartens’ narrator persistently holds the nineteenth century to contempt, and one strongly suspects he had rather lived in any other epoch than in his own, as Maartens himself: in Thackeray’s imagined eighteenth century at the latest. Yet in his concern about the affections of his characters – anger, fear, love, pity and hatred – Maartens is closer to the realism of the nineteenth century. He shows these affections more explicitly than Thackeray in his characters, by means of dialogue and action. Like in Thackeray, his narrator adds insights and opinions that do neither elucidate the ongoing scene nor the plot itself. These intrusions enable the narrator to recover the distance to the scene he held previously; a distance that constantly threatens to dissolve due to the continuous input of narrative modulating the plot movement. Another way to re-establish that distance is to provide commentary on a more general and therefore more abstract level. Comments provided by the narrator turn into truisms that are in fact moral commonplaces. The bond with the reader is once more strengthened, the narrator expects him to be pleased in sharing the privilege of watching another delightful little scene within yet another range of society. The narrator was permanently amused by his own remarks, keeping his readers happy in their turn. Instinctively this was what both authors had in mind: by increasing the distance, the reader’s involvement with the fate of each of the characters would diminish. It meant a return to the panoramic view. Time and again they renew the epic image of things unchangeable, of truths everlasting in society as a whole, offered for the reader’s delectation. Often the narrative takes the shape of aphorisms, opening up the epic horizon of a truth reaching far back into the past. Thoughts are conveyed in the midst of narrative and description. Compare these aphoristic reflections – first, by Thackeray:

The ladies – Heaven bless them! – are, as a general rule, coquettes from babyhood upwards. Little shes of three years old play little airs and graces upon small heroes of five; simpering misses of nine make attacks upon young gentlemen of twelve; and at sixteen, a well-grown girl under encouraging circumstances – say, she is pretty, in a family of ugly elder sisters, or any only child and heiress, or an humble wench at a

³⁶⁸ *Letters*, “To M. H. Spielmann”, 2.2.1894, 98. Henry James wrote about Maupassant that it was through the senses alone, or almost alone, that life appealed to him. It was almost alone by their help that he described it, that he produced brilliant works. He added that, if Maupassant was an interesting case because of this reason, it also made him an embarrassing one, embarrassing and mystifying for the moralist. Another point stressed by James was Maupassant’s power of implication, in: *Partial Portraits*, “Guy de Maupassant” (1888) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970), 243-287, here 250-254, 257.

country inn, like our fair Catherine – is at the very pink and prime of her coquetry: they will jilt you at that age with an ease and arch infantine simplicity that never can be surpassed in maturer years.³⁶⁹

And:

There are stories to a man's disadvantage that the women who are fondest of him are always the most eager to believe. Isn't a man's wife often the first to be jealous of him?³⁷⁰

The following passage, taken from *Philip*, could just as well serve as a to-the-point description of one of the typical kinds of Maartensian middle-class females:

A woman who scarcely ever does any wrong, and rules and governs her own house and family, as my – as the wife of the reader's humble servant most notoriously does, often becomes – must it be said? – too certain of her own virtue, and is too sure of the correctness of her own opinion.³⁷¹

Examples in Maartens are Mevrouw Romeyn in *A Question of Taste*, or, as in the following, the Dominé's wife in *Lis Doris*, who is satirically typified as follows:

The Ruler of Boldam was the Parsoness. She was the sort of ruler that insists on straight lines. She was also the sort of ruler that leaves a smart. To her own children she represented merely a Possibility of Unpleasantness. Not a Probability, because she usually ignored their existence. [...] The dominé had long ago accepted his wife. 'Tis the usual way. First the woman accepts the man, and then a year or two later, the husband accepts the wife. How seldom he runs away!³⁷²

The descriptive narrative often ends with a conclusive general statement, similar to the Thackeray example quoted above, as if the narrator, by means of such comments, seeks to be more objective.³⁷³ Such comments do not always comply well with Maartens' other aim: revealing the emotions of an individual character. In the guise of the narrative voice, suddenly turning into a commentator, he learnt from Thackeray how to steer clear of the web of the character's emotions that lay close before him. The narrative voice analyses deductively, as if we were listening to a lawyer who explains in detail how he proceeded to solve his case. However, that tone of a lawyer's exposition may turn into narrative analysis from the *inside*, from within the mind of the character: we are now in the region of psychological realism.

³⁶⁹ *Catherine*, CBE, vol. 24, 21.

³⁷⁰ *Pendennis*, CBE, vol. 4, 186.

³⁷¹ *Philip*, CBE, vol. 19, 319.

³⁷² *Lis Doris*, vol. I, 18.

³⁷³ Another example, taken from the same book: "The Parsoness believed in honest poverty, but not in honest pauperism. As long as you suffered in silence, she approved and was ready with not unkindly help, but a squeak was sufficient to mark you down a good-for-nothing, idle and impudent parochially supported bad example. It must be admitted, that a little of this mental attitude was required to make her life tolerable. We all overdo" (*Lis Doris*, vol. 1, 193); for the various aspects of social attitude concerning such issues as poverty, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Albert Knopf, 1991); cf. also *Victorian Minds* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968).

Taken by the reader as a matter of course, Thackeray's narrator, on the other hand, projects his characters as he sees them, with an air of infallibility: it makes him a master in depicting human affections. He narrates their attitudes, activities and gestures as he encounters them, but without explanation from the *inside*: there is no psychological analysis. Maartens' achievement is of no lesser purport, his narrator watching the events and reporting about them simultaneously from the exterior. All the time enjoying their company, we cherish the pleasant illusion of knowing these people intimately. They are set before us as they are, behaving naturally, unaware of any onlookers on the site. These first strokes of the brush are but the contours, yet to be filled with colours, which, magnificent in their brilliance, will never threaten to blur the contours of the outer form.

For the colouring of his canvas Maartens took less space than Thackeray. Other idealistic aspirations of an artistic kind required his consideration, imposing themselves on the form of his novels. Unfortunately the attempt at propagation of these aims had a negative impact on the result. His very idealism made him unable to foresee that it would be one of the causes for his rapid passing into oblivion. Maartens' talent as an observer of human affections embedded in social prejudice and behaviour, is beyond dispute. Yet taking into account his supreme worldly wisdom, it is mystifying to see why he persisted in his idealistic aspirations. On the one hand, the narrator superbly watches the scene around him as it drifts gently from one day to the next, on the other hand he must needs believe there is a larger horizon beyond the one his characters, and simultaneously his readers, are able to see. The impression is reminiscent of seventeenth century Dutch painting, where Christian idealism and worldly realism are often firmly juxtaposed on one and the same canvas.³⁷⁴

There is idealism in the author's aspiration that the reader should perceive that horizon as he reads along. However, the cool charm, wit and verve of the narrative make us feel so comfortable with what we see at first sight, as it is being placed before us, that we have no wish for anything more. To return once more to Thackeray, what charmed us there was his rococo style eloquence, the very musicality of the sentences that never misses in its benign effect on the aesthetic senses. There is no such elaborate finesse in Maartens. On the contrary, most of the time, his phrases are sober and poignant, more likely than not a result of his classical education. Still, he sought to invoke a similar atmosphere, with the result that the *feel* of charm is similar, if not the charm itself. The secret ultimately lies in the author's attitude: where Thackeray's effect springs from the very rotundity of his style, Maartens paradoxically

³⁷⁴ As for instance *The Adoration of Christ*, by the early seventeenth century Dutch painter Herman van Vollenhoven, in which the realistic features of the two peasants are put in shrill contrast to the unworldly softened image of Christ standing between them.

attains a similar result by means of a dryness in the narrative, enriched by his odd humoristic outlook as well as his wit. It shields the author against his own anger that needs to be kept at bay; digressions into moral reflections or cynicism are seldom, although not as seldom as in Thackeray. There is a certain irony in the way the soberness of Maartens' style reflects the inflexibility in the lives of his characters. As it is equally a fresh and *modern* matter-of-fact mode, it does so realistically and critically in describing their conventional habits.

In chapter VIII of *Vanity Fair*, it says: "The moralist [...] is bound to speak the truth as far as [he] knows it [...] and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking."³⁷⁵ There is something of an apology in this announcement, saying that whatever follows is inevitable and therefore needs to be accepted. When we consider the author's undisputed success, the sincerity of that apology can be taken with a grain of salt. The moralist narrator who merely sits among his readers, happily smiling at the procession going by, while also pointing at black stains here and there, does not run the risk of losing his popularity. He does not raise an accusing finger at anyone in particular. Thackeray was always aware of this. He wrote with the assurance that the reader would have been literally on his side if that were possible. His truth was the exaggerated truth of the satirist that should not to be taken at face value. Tillotson remarked that "it is often said of Thackeray that he selected certain bits of truth and failed to give us truth in the round." He corroborated this, adding Thackeray's view of himself that he was "created with a sense of the ugly, of the odd, of the meanly false, the desperately wicked."³⁷⁶

As a moralist, the satirist criticizes the totality of society as such. The act of revealing the absurdity of class conventions is, in itself, a moral call, subdued as it must be the very moment it is expressed, by the sheer immensity of the charge. If it can be grasped at all, then only in an over-all sense, by means of exaggeration and ridicule. Maartens assumes Thackeray's moralist position only as long as he is a satirist himself. It accounts for his own popularity as far as it goes. Ultimately, however, he did not identify with this attitude of *personal* moral neutrality. Had he done so, he could hardly have written to an English friend that he regarded himself as intrinsically belonging to a castigated class of authors "of which you had only a brief, and exotic, burst in your romanticists."³⁷⁷

At the end of the first version of his novel *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.*, Thackeray says that the novelist should describe "not only what is beautiful, but what is ill-favoured too, faithfully, so that each may appear as like as possible to nature. It is as right to look at a

³⁷⁵ W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 84.

³⁷⁶ *Horae Subsecivae*, Third Series, ed. 1882, 180, quoted in Tillotson, 207.

³⁷⁷ *Letters*, "To Sir W. R. Nicoll", 25.1.1912, 306.

beauty as at a hunchback; and, if to look, to describe too: nor can the most prodigious genius improve upon the original.”³⁷⁸ To be truthful in this contrastive, and perhaps even a little provoking sense, is part of the novelist’s task.³⁷⁹ In serving the interest of the picturesque element, Thackerayan truthfulness also has its justification: “To describe a real rascal, you must make him so horrible that he would be too hideous to show; and unless the painter paints him fairly, I hold that he has no right to show him at all.”³⁸⁰

Usually Maartens reveals the moral decay lurking everywhere behind the upper class facades in particular, but occasionally he ‘goes for the dirt’. There is, for example, the behaviour of the alcoholic mother in *The Price of Lis Doris*:

She laughed stupidly, and he [Lis] noticed for the first time, that even at this hour she was probably slightly fuddled with drink. But, as he caught the child up, he had seen a thing that impressed him more painfully than this. The little body was covered with bruises, great blue and yellow bumps, and livid scars. [...] “Let me pass,” he said haughtily, both arms round the bony little body. “Stand aside! I’ll take the child along with me and show her to the police!” The final word was unfortunate. She poured out a torrent of abuse. Words incredible, words indescribable, the filthy vomit of a seething soul. The evil epithets jostled each other: once or twice he vainly tried to stop her.³⁸¹

Far from saying that Maartens considered himself a romantic, he doubtlessly had an affinity for certain aspects of romanticism. However, when it concerns his own moral stance, he not only refrains from following Thackeray’s example of moral satire: he equally fails to sustain the initially objective level of the psychological realism.³⁸²

According to Maartens, it is not *à la mode* to have a moral conscience at the end of the Victorian era, a world reflected in the hardened attitudes and callous actions of the numerous types that crowd his novels. One day, moral conscience may be the potential force of humanity in a world still to come, but, for the time being, only his main heroes and heroines are in possession of such a conscience. They seem to live in a sphere existing behind the sphere of actual daily life, a sphere that, to Maartens, constituted the ‘final’ reality. He seeks to render that version intelligible particularly in the conduct of his main characters. From the outset, there are two contrasting points of view at odds with each other, at the crossroads in

³⁷⁸ The earlier version was called *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*.

³⁷⁹ Even if Maartens evidently adhered to these aesthetic views, they must be clearly distinguished from realism in the ‘negative’ sense, as practised in particular by Guy de Maupassant. As we have seen, he greatly admired the French master, even if his own method was decidedly different

³⁸⁰ Preface to *Pendennis*, CBE, vol. 3, liv.

³⁸¹ *Lis Doris*, vol. I, 173-174.

³⁸² As A. Quiller-Couch perceived, carefully venturing a criticism: “Always the main interest lies in some spiritual conflict, some battle in which conscience, charity, obligations of gratitude, stern duty, love, hate, superstition – religious, atavistic, or both – are involved and take sides. Often, especially in the early tales, the point at issue will seem to us casuistical, provincially ‘religious’, disproportionate with the amount of suffering it causes; as we feel the sufferer’s condition, while he works it out, to be somewhat morbid, and the author’s own solution not wholly acceptable to a reader of liberal mind” (*Letters*, “Preface”, xxii).

his works, and at varying degrees, but always present. On the one hand, there is the realist keeping his distance, presenting what he regards as ‘truth’ in a complete, general sense. Very frequently these observations are given a particular edge by means of satire.³⁸³ On the other hand, the idealist part in the man equally requires artistic execution. The plot reveals moral motives of behaviour by which an ideal moral state, existing beyond the present actuality of the given situation, is suggested.

Thackeray’s concept of fiction conceived of “people and their actions seen always with the moral eye, commented on always with the moral voice.”³⁸⁴ Given that statement, it is not essential that the reader should know the source of the voice, whether it is the author himself, his narrator or the protagonist. What really matters is its presence as such. In the case of Thackeray, it explains why his narrative is so extensively interwoven with commentary: it is his main asset to endorse the presence of the moral voice. Although there is far less such commentary in Maartens’ novels, we are aware of a moral voice, persistently, in the background. In *The Black Box Murder* as well as in *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, narrative standpoint is sufficiently consistent to sustain the reader’s suspension of disbelief. From *God’s Fool* onwards, however, there is a shift in that standpoint, subsequently leading to a change in moral perspective. When the satirist is unexpectedly replaced by the psychological realist, he finds himself at odds with the reader’s moral orientation. The interference seems unjustifiable. It is felt either as an advocacy of moral principles appertaining to the author himself, rather than to the narrator; more distinctly as inappropriate moralizing in form of general commentary. On the contrary, by dealing with his characters permanently from a distance, Thackeray right away gears the reader’s expectancy to a mode of *intrinsic* moralisation. He was aware of the possible dangers of this standpoint. He knew that moralizing about truth, as far as the novelist professed to have a claim to it, would only be welcome as long as he, as moralist, included himself in his judgement. But it was also a matter of competence: the novelist’s views did not reach much further than the ethics of common sense. If they did, he still had to communicate such views in a sufficiently intelligible way to his intended readership, i.e., by identifying with them. He nicely makes his point in the introduction to a review, slipping into the reader’s shoes. That reader addresses the author as follows: “I would much rather hear you on your own ground – amusing by

³⁸³ To recall his words to Mrs. Gosse, “my naturally Thackerayan view of life prevents my painting the things around me as white and pink as some happy mortals see them” (*Letters*, 2.5.1895, 103).

³⁸⁴ Tillotson, p. 215.

means of amiable fiction, and instructing by kindly satire, being careful to avoid the discussion of abstract principles [...].³⁸⁵

The quotation given above is perhaps Thackeray's most straightforward statement in which he expresses views, which Maartens would undoubtedly have subscribed to. Nevertheless, abstract principles loom in the background of all of Maartens' novels, but often in a too manifest – even oppressive manner, so that they collide with his other aim of “instructing by kindly satire”. The satirist is on safest grounds precisely when he deals with what he sees only, or when he gives the impression that he is not governed by abstract principles. If there is a ruling principle in Thackeray at all, it is the materialistic law of give and take – take rather than give, actually. This is the pivotal angle of the entire community he depicts. Since *everything* is subject to his moral criticism, the satirist realizes a kind of subjective objectivity, in which there is no weighing with different scales. As long as Maartens gives the impression that he merely reports what he sees in a satirical manner, he abides to the principle. In such cases, his style may be different from Thackeray's; his standpoint is not. A rupture occurs whenever his personal idealism compels him to imbue his main characters with a moral strength that lifts them above all the other characters, which, however, are being pursued continually in a satirical vein. Whatever else they may be, his main characters are also meant to embody the principles Maartens seeks to convey to his readership.

In the review quoted above, Thackeray explicitly stated that morals drawn from the visible reality form “a branch of all poets and novelists' business.” The satirist turns moralist because, implicitly, his writings pass a moral verdict over the community he describes: its incongruities, absurdities and inconsistencies. Taken as a whole, his comments are a preaching-in-disguise against the very state of affairs as he finds it: indeed he is criticising all the time. Social criticism is communicated to the reader whom he takes to be in agreement with his own views.

On another occasion, while still a collaborator of *Punch*, Thackeray reflects in a letter upon the attitude the periodical should take with regard to snobs:

To laugh at such [snobs] is Mr. Punch's business. May he laugh honestly, hit no foul blow, and tell the truth when at his very broadest grin – never forgetting that if Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love best of all. What I mean applies to my own case & that of all of us – who set up as Satirical-Moralists – and having such a vast multitude of readers whom we not only amuse but teach. And indeed, a solemn prayer to God

³⁸⁵ “Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve* – Comic Politics”, in *The Morning Chronicle* (3 April 1845), 5; published anonymously; quoted in Tillotson, 219.

Almighty was in my thoughts that we may never forget truth & justice and kindness as the great ends of our profession.³⁸⁶

The same letter bears witness to an attitude where the ‘hidden’ moralist in the satirist was equalled, if not supplanted, by the outspoken defender of ethical values: the preacher: “I should have sneered at the idea of setting up as a teacher at all [...] but I have got to believe in the business, and in many other things since then. And our profession seems to me to be as serious as the parson’s own.” This is Thackeray at the time of publication of *Vanity Fair*, the “novel without a hero”, which sealed his fame for a long time to come. Although it increased his awareness that his profession was not without moral responsibility, this was no reason to turn away from satire as his teaching device. Seeing what Thackeray did before him, it must have encouraged Maarten Maartens not to spare the reader his own moral opinions. However, he did not remain loyal to his satirist vocation to the same degree as Thackeray did. It has been shown that, as the novels succeed each other, there is a shift towards a stronger prominence of ethical principles. So much can be said at this point that Maartens always remained a satirist at heart. Satire would continue to take more or less space in relation to the number of appearances of minor characters, and as far as the framework of his story would allow for. Only after due credit had been given to the two main principles, satire *and* psychological realism, he would have his narrator insert ‘on a low scale’, as it were, his own moral comments.

III.6. Diversion from the Thackerayan method

If changes took place in Thackeray’s method that modulated his position and his commentary from his earliest novels onwards, they never led to an actual shift of his aesthetic standpoint. Essentially it always remained the same, although his sense of the importance of the elements quoted before – fun, truth and love – as well as of the balance between them deepened in the course of his artistic development.

In order to understand both the convergence and divergence of Maartens’ novels with regard to Thackeray’s method, we must bear in mind that in Maartens two principal perspectives – as a satirist and as a psychological realist – are instrumental to his method in all of the novels, from *Joost Avelingh* onwards. Furthermore, in the course of his literary career, his writing is determined by his personal development. It is part of the spontaneity of his artistic temperament that this experience is given shape in his novels in some form or other. The

³⁸⁶ *Letters and Private Papers*, vol. II, 282; cf. Mark Cronin and Henry Gowan, “William Makepeace Thackeray, and ‘The Dignity of Literature controversy’”, *Dickens Quarterly* (1999), 104-115.

balance of these two perspectives differs from novel to novel, as well as within each work, with the exception of his two largely satirical books *The New Religion* and *The Healers*. As far as they were intended to be predominantly satirical, these two novels might be considered his most Thackerayan works, were it not for the fact that he went over the top and poured too many vitriolic passages into his narrative.

Especially *The Healers* takes its acid bite from Maartens' own experience with doctors.³⁸⁷ Rather than in their quantity of invective poured over the medical world, these two novels have their aesthetical justification in their consistency of the satirical perspective. Tillotson explains at length that hatred of this meditated sort was outside Thackeray's scope: "Hatred in more than short occasional spurts was even unlikely on general grounds – a novelist deeply versed in ordinary human nature is too much aware of complexity, and too much fascinated by it, to find anything complete and unretrieved enough to incite hatred."³⁸⁸ When short occasional spurts of hatred occur at unexpected instances, as they occasionally do in all of Maartens' novels, they put the reader's infatuation with the story in jeopardy.³⁸⁹ While Virginia Woolf could still appreciate the sarcasm of *The New Religion*, the invective displayed in *The Healers* reaches a point too far removed from Thackeray to contain any further basis for comparison. Still, George Bernhard Shaw's praise of the book as a "scathing and quite justifiable exposure of medical practice" confirms its tenor of anti-propaganda.³⁹⁰ Indeed, the "artistry is spoiled" because Maartens' personal frustration has free play, and the hatred that subsequently possessed him. Our image is blurred of a writer we have cherished so long, with his peculiarly enchanting mixture of passion, fun and derision. Readers reacted accordingly, and we corroborate Tillotson's conclusion in this respect: "One great merit of the ordinary man is that he will not respect a writer who holds in his heart a treasure of meditated hatred. And to appeal, finally, to grounds the most general of all – no such 'treasure' is owned by any writer we can call great: not even by the much misjudged Swift."³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ While not generally dwelling on this aspect in his "Preface", Arthur Quiller-Couch was willing to recognize the preponderance of the satirical element in these works. Here he vaguely implied that Maartens belonged to a tradition "of presenting a serious story objectively" that was quickly losing its ground, particularly since the First World War. According to him, the mid-Victorian novelists Charles Reade, Henry Kingsley and – among the contemporaries – Stevenson belonged to that tradition; cf. "Preface", xx.

³⁸⁸ Tillotson, 227.

³⁸⁹ As, for example, in the invective against the Dutch attitude to literature,

³⁹⁰ G. B. Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (London: Constable 1911, rpt. 1947), "Preface", 62; cf. also for a general assessment of this theme in the literature of the period: Peter Morton, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination 1860-1900* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984); Janet Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves': Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁹¹ Tillotson, 227.

Fun, truth and love: they must stay in balance to produce a kind of general, one might say, a universal and ‘depersonalised’ morality. Thackeray’s characters act on the momentum determined by their social circumstances; they are not driven forward into action by strong moral convictions. The characters themselves seem strangely devoid of real passion, because the feelings they incorporate are not so much their own than that they reflect class conventions. The moralist attitude in Thackeray is in the narrative as such, suggestive of the fact that there is something tragically wrong with society as a whole. It emerges by advocacy of his own ethical cause, suggested through the medium of a character whom he *ultimately* created for that reason. Referring to Charlotte Brontë, he wrote: “I think Miss Brontë is unhappy and that makes her unjust. Novel writers should not be in a passion with their characters as I imagine, but describe them, good or bad, with a like calm.”³⁹²

To take a personal moral stance is not within Thackeray’s sphere. For that reason, Tillotson called him an “indecisive moralist”. Seen from that angle, Maartens could be described as a decisive moralist, because of his preoccupation with the morality of his main protagonists. It must be remembered, however, that the issue at stake is not so much the presence, or absence, of the author’s personal moral stance than the incongruity in the narrative, emerging from a compromising mixture of different aesthetic perspectives.

As he purports to be nothing else but a satirical moralist, no such disruptions occur in Thackeray, not even at such instances where there is an air of the preacher about him. To expect a kind of morality that lies outside his satirical scope would be thoroughly to misjudge him. Only as long as he is on the same track, Maartens equally is in this position of the ‘indecisive’ moralist, i.e. sustaining his authorial distance as a satirist. This position only will ultimately allow the author to retain aesthetically all that may be morally objectionable to him. In as far as he pursues this goal, there is a link with some of the great names, with Emily Brontë and Dickens, a link that can be extended back to Pope, since this is also part of Pope’s aesthetic stratagem in his moral essays. Generally in the novels, however, this principle holds good for Maartens only when dealing with his minor characters. Where the narrative distance is sustained, he does not eschew what is good or bad in them. He draws them as he sees them, of a piece, seldom with antecedents given or any kind of retrospect offered.³⁹³

³⁹² *Letters and Private Papers*, vol. III, 67. Maartens, too, was not a particularly happy man. One is also reminded of the similarity with Flaubert’s famous dictum of ‘impassibilité’ (‘impersonality’ of the author) with which, in fact, he initiated French realism at about the same period, around 1850.

³⁹³ The examples of types quoted earlier are exceptions in that they rather disprove this rule of economy: Diederik Donselaar in *An Old Maid’s Love* and Jacob Boonhakker in *Lis Doris*. The ambiguity of Maartens’ attitude to Carlyle provides a further clue to the duality of his own moralist outlook. On the one hand he had in mind to call him “the greatest of English novelists *after* Thackeray” (*Letters*, 94), precisely because of the unhesitating display of his moral calling, on the other he was outraged by Carlyle’s presumptuous moralism

The moral attitudes of both authors, Thackeray and Maartens, are conditioned by their moral principles as private human beings. When Maartens' narrator, however, steps forward as a 'decisive' moralist, his creator is at the parting of ways. Maartens believed that humanity would reach an ideal state through religion that would take it beyond the mediocre reality of mankind. It is the author's goal to convey this message by pursuing the process of moral experience of all of his main characters. Each of them has to grow into the awareness of that ultimate truth by means of his own consciousness.

In the act of recording conspicuous and interesting bits of reality, Maartens is not different from Thackeray, i.e., all the constituents of the exterior world are perceived by the characters through their sentiments and detected by the narrative voice. What justifies the recording of these constituents is not that they may possibly be interesting as such, but their significance as exponents of established conventions, as well as their function as generators of collective opinion.³⁹⁴ When Becky Sharp goes to church, it is not because she seeks spiritual fulfilment, but because she is required to do so by the social conventions that entirely make up for her natural sphere. Such are the dominating constituents that surround and determine the lives of all of Thackeray's people. Thackeray is primarily interested in increasing the reader's awareness of their impact upon all these little lives. Maartens' interest again is similar only insofar as it concerns his minor characters, the types who purely function within the social framework, untrammelled as it were by the basic question of moral consciousness. He is determined, however, to give aesthetic shape to his own concept of a reality as a religious dimension, not merely an existential fact, in the lives of the main protagonists.

The standpoint of the satirical moralist does not allow for the slightest removal from his position as an observer. Constant distance to the scene logically implies that his *private* ideals and beliefs have no place in his fiction; we are not interested in them. Maartens was not troubled by the lack of an idealist religious dimension in Thackeray's works. He appreciated him for his acute satire, yet so thoroughly human – not for any of the man's ethical principles. This is entirely in accordance with his own artistic instinct to which paradoxically, being an artist himself, he did not remain true. From the beginning, his own religious idealism sought an outlet, which he projected into the moral consciousness of his main protagonists. It leads him to expect much of them, too much in fact still to be credible to the sceptical reader, thus disrupting his suspension of disbelief. With all his other, minor characters, the difficulty does

(Private Notebook 1). According to Tillotson, Thomas Carlyle was amongst the prominent intellectuals of the day who criticised Thackeray for not showing enough moral strength (238).

³⁹⁴ Or as one critic puts it: "Although there is a pattern of growth and mellowing in Thackeray's writing, underlying his whole literary enterprise is a fairly well-established code of behavior" (John Reed, *Dickens and Thackeray, Punishment and Forgiveness* [Athens: Oxford University Press, 1995], 308).

not occur. Unbiased in any way towards any of his creations, he remains just as objective a satirical moralist as Thackeray. Thackeray never transgresses the limits of what is generally considered reasonable. The narrator's identification with his figures has no negative consequences, provided that the illusion of reality – i.e. the suspension of disbelief – remains intact.³⁹⁵ That illusion is partly destroyed by his satire: we see indeed a mirror held up to reality, but held from a particular angle; a mirror cracked at the fringes, as it were – yet producing a veritable illusion. The circle is drawing towards its close as we have arrived at our point of departure: a certain level of aesthetic distance is indispensable to sustain the illusion of reality. As long as Maartens contents himself describing in the satirical mode, he sustains a similar 'cracked' illusion of reality. This is the aesthetic distance that prevents him from getting 'personally' involved in the sense as indicated by Thackeray. Yet he is carried away, not so much with the character in focus than with his own moral conceptions, projected into that character. Hence, there is no genuine expectation as to how that character will eventually emerge on the basis of action taken solely of his – or her – accord. This process is analysed not merely by the omniscient narrator, but it has a tinge of the self-assurance of the lawyer, which, it must be remembered, is also part of Maartens, adding his own hypothesis in each particular case. There is a suspicion trickling into the reader's consciousness that the author only knew too well, if not all along, how the character in question was going to behave.³⁹⁶

The psychologist who does not expect too much of his clients is ultimately the more realistic one. When expectations are too manifest, one is, in fact, listening to a narrator who is too much the author's mouthpiece, instead of watching a character develop in the momentum of his or her own inner being. As a result, one feels further removed from the character than one is willing to approve, an obstacle one needs to overcome in order to prevent the collapse of one's suspension of disbelief. Having all the time been enticed into taking an interest *in this particular* protagonist, one now has the impression to be told *about the author himself*. Ultimately, one is denied the experience one had been cherishing in anticipation all along: of witnessing that particular character's process of self-discovery, from the confrontation with

³⁹⁵ For that reason, Flaubert could postulate his doctrine of '*impassibilité*' while at the same time maintaining his personal avowal: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi."

³⁹⁶ Another aspect of transition pointed at by Goetsch, which he defines as the principle of subjective realism: Considering the enigmatic phenomenon of existence, the author could no longer present himself as a "miniature Providence", endowing his characters with qualities corresponding with the traditional ethical and moral criteria of existence, and according to his own artistic evaluation of all their actions, or in the words of the pragmatist William James: "If we were readers only of the cosmic novel [...] we should then have the author's point of view, and recognize villains to be essential as heroes to the plot. But we are not the readers, but the very personages of the world-drama. In your eyes each of you is its hero, and the villains are your respective friends

life's ineluctable pragmatism up to the final catharsis. Maartens' main protagonists are ultimately bound to disappoint. The illusion has veered towards disillusion. One can only conceive of a character as 'character' with all the emotional turmoil involved, if that character – as protagonist – stands firmly on his own feet.

or enemies" (W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe* [n.p.: Longmans, 1909], quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 83).

IV The Art of Implication: Maarten Maartens' Short Stories

“Life is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel.” *Maarten Maartens*

IV.1. Introduction

After the turn into the twentieth century, short stories comprise a considerable part of Maartens' fictional output. With irregular intervals Maartens published stories in journals and magazines. There are four published volumes of stories.³⁹⁷ What unites all the stories is their central interest in human character: the setting, whether it has an immediate bearing upon their state of mind or not, contributes to unveil the psychology and emotions of the main protagonists. The form of the short story enables Maartens to concentrate exclusively on what intrigues him, unhampered by sub-plots that require attention and that distract from the central interest. Within the boundaries of the short story he naturally restrains himself to what is essential. Van Maanen pointed at the possible cause of their aesthetic success by observing that in that genre, Maartens was not in need to “give an appearance of the uninterrupted continuity of life, to picture the whole panorama and to always make its presence felt, even when the small corners of it are for the moment more fully exposed; never to let slip the most important threads out of one's fingers, and to keep up their tension throughout with the same force.” Maartens' novels he considered “more often than not like strings of short stories, more or less cleverly knotted together”, adding that “many a chapter in the novels would in itself give a good short story.”³⁹⁸

In the same vein Quiller-Couch admitted that he, too, had sometimes sighed “over the intrusion of characters [in Maartens' novels], which – while perhaps helping the illusion of real life – [...] are episodic and distract from the theme,” adding that “some of these episodes are [...] suggestive of beautiful short stories.”³⁹⁹ For several reasons, Maartens' short novel *Her Memory* may be regarded as a prelude to the period of writing short stories following its publication. The exposition of the cosmopolitan view, which he first set out to develop, is pursued without neglecting the Dutch element. Aesthetically speaking, they continue the

³⁹⁷ *Some Women I Have Known (Some Women)* (London: Heinemann, 1901); *My Poor Relations* (London: Constable, 1903); *The Woman's Victory* (London: Constable, 1908) and *Brothers All* (London: Methuen, 1909); abbreviations for the titles used henceforth are put in brackets. The stories Maartens published in journals and magazines have not been collected. For an extensive list of the uncollected – as well as the unpublished short stories – see Bibliography.

³⁹⁸ Van Maanen, 111-112.

³⁹⁹ Preface, *Letters*, xxii.

process of concentration on the psychological and emotional aspects of human beings in the particularly subtle and intriguing manner of *Her Memory*. Of the four collections, *Some Women I Have Known* and *The Woman's Victory* show the author's increasingly international scope: fourteen of the stories are set in England, three in Germany, and nine in France, one in Switzerland and five in Holland. *My Poor Relations* and *Brothers All*, however, consist exclusively of tales about Dutch people and Holland. None of Maartens' works characterises his profound insights into the complex psychology, particularly of his female characters, more than *Some Women I Have Known*. His skill in portraying them in this first collection of short stories instantly proves him a master in the genre. Fashioned with a minimum of descriptive narrative, they bring the best and worst qualities of his characters lucidly into play. From the very first sentence, the reader has the illusion of quickly gaining possession of their life history as a whole.

The growing popularity of the short story was closely connected with the increasing demand for periodicals offering an ever-widening spectrum of topics to the general public. Due to the increasing desire for more diversified ranges of information and fiction, the taste and demand for the three-decker novel declined. Stories became an indispensable part of the periodicals, as so many other topics of interest had to be considered, the space attributed to the story was limited.⁴⁰⁰ Consequently an increasing number of authors took to writing short stories. The new fashion triumphed as a genre in the 1880s. At the same time, however, collections of short stories by a single author, or even by more than one author remained sparse, because they did not sell as well as novels.⁴⁰¹ Most stories were still written in the established conventional forms, but the number of authors such as Anderson, James, Conrad and Joyce, who experimented within the genre steadily increased.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰⁰ *Scribner's* for example, which published Maartens' "Venetia's Child" and "Nobody's Child" by Maartens, was among the periodicals which published far more short stories than any periodical that existed before it first appeared in January 1891. It sold 300,000 copies at sixpence each, increasing its circulation up to 500,000 copies a month, see Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 188; see also Guinevere Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); J.R. Tye, *Periodicals of the Nineties* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1974).

⁴⁰¹ General information taken from Harold Orel, "Introduction: problems in defining a genre" in *The Victorian Short Story*, 1-13; of 6000 book titles published in England in 1900, only a negligible quantity were collections of short stories. For more specific details concerning the publication of short story volumes, see in particular his "Epilogue: the triumph of a genre" (ibid. 184-192).

⁴⁰² Hardy persisted in pursuing his own course, adhering to tradition while pursuing his own subjective approach. According to Orel, Hardy plays an important role as a short-story writer, in that he "clearly perceived how sharply his subject matter, and his heavy reliance on oral tradition, contravened currently fashionable doctrine about documentation of fictional setting, the need for veritable detail in the depiction of manners and social behavior, and analogies between the technique of a story-teller and that of a scientist" ("Thomas Hardy: an Older Tradition of Narrative", in *The Victorian Short Story*, 96-114, here 108).

While the Dutch reacted almost exclusively in a hostile manner towards Maartens' books, *Some Women I Have Known* was acclaimed by the renowned Dutch critic Lodewijk van Deyszel. Different cases of the feminine life experience and perception, Van Deyszel said, were treated with a sustained and condensed force of imagination, which managed to stay within the limits of pure necessity. This was done, as he put it, "with a movement ascending into the emotional life of the characters, so sincerely and truly living, that an absorption of the author's mind with the minds of his human creations [...] must have taken place to a degree of intensity of which only few examples can be found in literature."⁴⁰³

IV.2. *Some Women I Have Known* (1901)

The most striking aspect of *Some Women* is the power – seen through the very personal prism of each character – with which these twelve stories reveal the entire cultural, political and social kaleidoscope of the female condition. A condition accepted and corroborated by the establishment, which in fact amounted to the repression of women by men in all social classes. Of particular interest and a novelty at the time is Maartens' focus on marital repression in the upper classes, in its most subtle yet widespread manifestations. This is what he sets out to do not only in *Some Women* but, more manifestly so, in *The Woman's Victory*.⁴⁰⁴

In some way or other, in its various stages as well as from different angles, Maartens considered the question of marriage, both in his novels and his private notes. Particularly in his interviews, his detached and moderate manner of speech did not conceal his advanced opinions on the matter: "Marriage [...] hampers a woman. [...] Generally speaking she has a limited choice in the important question of selecting her life's mate and no freedom, after the choice is made, to live her own life. [...] And so there come the disappointments, the soul

⁴⁰³ L. van Deyszel, "Maarten Maartens", *De (Groene) Amsterdammer* (9 May 1925), 18, translated from the Dutch. Not long before this, Van Deyszel had resumed Maartens' plot structure in a critical article on his tragedy *Nivalis*, which equally defines that of the novels as well as of the short stories: "It is the rapid succession of opposed extremes, between storms of passion and complete indifference, between the most exhilarating landscape at sunrise and the most awful dark precipice at night, which – as it concerns the human condition – profoundly affects the reader" (211). The same is valid for his description of Maartensian dialogue as a means towards the "eruption of the things suppressed in the mind, or hidden by the spoken word" (212) (*De Gids* 3 [1924]).

⁴⁰⁴ In the criticism of the day, it was often stated that the novel should adhere to its task "to explain the age to itself" (G.S. Street, "Three Novels, *Blackwood's* CLXX [1901], 217, quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 75). Concerning Maartens in this respect, one thinks of *The Healers* and *The New Religion*, but also *Dorothea* and, particularly, of the short stories in which he endeavours to promulgate aspects of the female condition; cf. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds., *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), passim.

hungers, the depressions are the result of ideas destroyed, of needs unknown and unanswered.”⁴⁰⁵

The marriage question – of intensely topical nature at the time – serves to illustrate the distinction that must always be made between the artist Maartens and Maartens as the man of the 19th century. Moulded by his time as he irrevocably was, he was unable to conceive of love-without-marriage, in the same interview stating that “[trial marriage] would never do, at the least one would suffer” because the “soul has recesses that must be taken into account in any reckoning of that kind.” As a writer, however, he saw at the same time the potential it provided, revealing his readiness to imagine alternative forms of partnership in the future: “But think of the enormous possibilities in the idea for the novelist and the dramatist. [...] In the interest of art and literature I believe we should insist upon the trial marriage, whatever our human nature may say to it.”⁴⁰⁶

Maartens dedicates “to the women without a story these histories of women,” showing his (mainly female) readership a few select cases of women’s fate. Although the heroines in the cases presented usually are in more favourable circumstances than their own, each of them is suffering in her own way. They usually live in country houses and spend parts of the season in town or abroad. Their lives are filled with social duties, organising charity, ruling their households. Yet all this is but the hollow shell of the rigid mechanisms of convention, as the reader will not tarry to discover. Their vulnerable souls are captured and crushed until that desperate call for love and affection, or simply for real companionship, deadens into silence.

“The Duchess Eleanor”

At the opening of the stories, we usually find a brief and clear-cut presentation of a type in a particular setting, which is never without a grain of satire. The first story of *Some Women*, “The Duchess Eleanor”, begins as follows:

She was a German Duchess. In that case, you say, German Duchesses being so very few, she must have been either – – You are mistaken. She was a Duchess of Lauenstein, of the mediatised house of Stolzenau-Gutelande. She is dead, and nobody who cared for her, except her children, need be sorry it should be so. They lived at Stolzenau always, the Duke and she, at the heart of the famous pine-forest, with sand-wastes beyond, in flat, dark loneliness, in splendid, gilded pomp. On very rare occasions, when etiquette compelled, they would spend a few days in Berlin – in the gloomy old palace of the Ilsenstrasse – but as soon as he possibly could, the Duke would return to his pigs and his

⁴⁰⁵ “Maarten Maartens, “Interview”, *Bee* (21 April 1907).

⁴⁰⁶ The antecedents leading up to the marriage question have recently been examined by Randall Craigh, *Promising Language: Betrothal in Victorian Law and Fiction* (Albany: New York State University Press, 1999); cf. also Aselda Josefa Thompson, “New Women, New Mothers: The Conflict of Feminism and Motherhood in Late-Victorian Fiction”, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences. Nov. 63.5 (2002), 1844 (University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

poultry-yard. The Duke was, by preference, a gentleman-farmer: on this expensive and engrossing amusement he wasted an absurdly disproportionate share of his very considerate income, a still larger share of his far less considerable intelligence and almost the whole of his nearly illimitable leisure. He was a great, big, fair man, of sickly complexion, with a magnificent moustache and a constant tendency to boils.⁴⁰⁷

The opening implies the wide gap that exists between the Duke and his wife before we have been told anything about her. The perfectly straightforward depiction of this man as the type he represents leaves no niches of ambiguity whatsoever, no inkling of a cross road where the two worlds, his and hers, could possibly meet. In accordance with the title of the collection, the narrator's voice is personal yet objectively distant, as if he talks about people he had been acquainted with at some point in his life. As if he had been an intimate of the scene himself and with the ease of the connoisseur of the upper classes, he now turns to the Duchess:

She was one of those human beings who deliberately undertake to misunderstand their own disposition and therefore to leave undeveloped or to mis-develop their natural qualities – or rather, to allow that these qualities should mis-develop themselves. With that innate timidity which is born of hereditary pride she had set herself from childhood to ignore every natural impulse or instinct or ebullition of feeling, cherishing that dread of the ridiculous which was ever present before her eyes, checking herself, curbing, keeping back, intimidated by a mother who laughed at her, fretting inwardly under the self-imposed strain. (11)

Then we swiftly embark upon her history, in which the contours of her individuality become visible by the odd contrast to – and harmony with – the introduction of the story quoted above. While we are conscious all the time of her limitations, imposed by the inhibitions in her personality and the conventionalities of the society in which she seems unknowingly trapped, we are at the same time touched by the narrator's rendering of her tragic existence. This is achieved by utmost economy and consistency of style, bordering on soberness, in which the author does not once intervene, neither on his own account nor in the guise of the narrator.⁴⁰⁸

Goertz, the new tutor to her son, is introduced to the household. It does not take long for his presence and personality to break the dim spectre of her monotonous life. Until the end comes, Goertz is unaware of the impact of his presence, which threatens to blur the solid picture of Eleanor's existence and its tragic inalterability. Then we witness how, essentially by dint of implication, a type of woman develops into a character while she retains all the assets typical for a woman of her state and rank:

⁴⁰⁷ *Some Women*, 9-10; henceforth page numbers refer to the Tauchnitz Edition, vol. 3541 (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1901).

⁴⁰⁸ Which immediately calls to mind Osbert Burdett's significant conclusion: "Only in the short stories, and in particular in those concerned to portray the aristocratic world, is he entirely objective." (*Maarten Maartens' Novels*, 127).

When the tutor appeared, amid a flow of guests, she received him with unintentional indifference. Uncle Sigismund, a fine old beau of seventy, with a slim waste and a bright complexion, introduced a timid, insignificant, dark-eyed young man, Herr Goertz. The Duchess hoped Herr Goertz would be happy at Stolzenau and turned to someone else. At dinner Uncle Sigismund sat beside her and was very gallant and a little “*risqué*” telling many amusing stories about the wicked world he knew so well. Late at night, the Duchess knocked at her husband’s dressing-room door. His valet was with him: the Duchess motioned the man to retire. “This Herr Goertz,” she began abruptly, “who is to be the teacher of Wilhelm – I know nothing of him – nor do you.” “He looks just the kind of person that sort of person ought to look,” replied his Transparency, winding his watch. “Ernest, all I wish to say is this, I will let this man become Wilhelm’s tutor, on one condition – on one condition, do you understand me?” – “Well?” – “That, if ever I should wish him to leave the house, he shall go!” (19)

The implication is that she already feels threatened. The reader enjoys the privilege of having been admitted to her most intimate thoughts, forever left unspoken, as well as being her only companion in the utter loneliness of her existence. The story, it seems, has no mysteries whatsoever to reveal, but the reader is captured by compassion for this woman and the interest he takes in her fate. One is content to follow her path as it inexorably slopes towards the end implied at the beginning. Witness the following scene of their first private interview, typically concise and with great intensity of implication:

He hurriedly arranged his toilet. The manservant waited with a smile. “She won’t notice that,” thought the servant. “I should like to look over your list of work,” said the Duchess, “I should like to know what you do.” He flushed with pleasure. It was the first word of interest in his labour, which reached him in the desolation of this princely household. “*Durchlaucht sind zu gütig*,” he said. Those were the words she heard daily: she was sick of hearing them. With a little smile of disdain she bade him tell her about Wilhelm. “Prince Wilhelm is backward,” said the tutor boldly, and suddenly she looked straight at him, with fresh interest in her face. She made him fetch his table of lessons and went over its details. He answered as best as he could, eager about the task he had set himself, a little dazzled by her white neck, her white dress, her jewels, the perfume floating around her, the unaccustomed title of her princely rank. “If Frau Herzogin will permit me,” he said, pointing, “I have put a second hour here, on Thursdays, for orthography – ” “What is orthography?” asked Duke Ernest, suddenly looking out behind his paper, irritation in his voice. (21)

The situation takes a dramatic turn, intensifying the atmosphere, when the Duchess is unexpectedly led to surmising that there might be a connection between the tutor and her father’s estate. He thus holds a key to what must have been the splendid universe of her youth. His playing the piano does not only conjure up that period, long repressed beyond the contours of her memory, moreover it has the effect of tearing open a wound that had never healed properly:

She slowly pushed open the door and entered. Herr Goertz was at the piano. He stopped, in confusion, rising rapidly to his feet. “Where did you learn that tune? Where do you come from? What is it?” stammered the Duchess, seeking to control her agitation. “It is

Carinthian, Frau Herzogin. It was taught me by a cousin, who is game-keeper on the estates of your Highness's father. I was only trying some variations." "I know," already she had stiffened. "You surprised me. It is ten years at least since I last heard that tune. Do you know any more of the melodies of my home?" "Yes, Frau Herzogin." "Have the kindness to play me some." She gave the order as she might have given it to a servant. He coloured, sat down at the piano and began. She stood listening by the door. There was no other light in the room than that of the pianoforte candles. Presently she sank into a chair. Presently she covered her face with her hands.⁴⁰⁹

At first seeing the tutor, her intuition had told her already that she would eventually have to send him away. The interest of the story lies not only in her awareness of that fact, but equally in the elucidation of her instantaneous realisation of its consequences, i.e. the sentence she passes upon herself, dismissing him. This time, however, the Duke is set upon contradicting his wife, the more so as she can give him no reason for her wish to have the tutor removed. Aware as the tutor and the Duchess are of the feelings that exist between them, the inevitability of their separation weighs down upon them. However, Goertz is not willing to resign, not even when her uncle, Prince Sigismund, who got him the position there, intervenes, insisting that he should. The end bears out the tragic tenor of the situation to the full:

She went on playing softly, but she could not keep the tell-tale from her cheek. "Well, then, Ernest must give him his *cong e*," she said. "Ernest will not. Some pig-headedness about not doing as you tell him, I believe. Stupid men never listen to their wives." She struck a few loud chords in her music. "Of course Herr Goertz had better go," she said, "did I not say so before?" And she went on playing until Herr Goertz came into the music-room. "Frau Herzogin, a thousand pardons!" he stammered, as she rose. "It is the hour, I believe, of Prince Wilhelm's music-lesson." "Herr Goertz," she answered abruptly, "you must accept this place of my Uncle Sigismund's. We must let you go." His eyes sought the floor. "Oh, undoubtedly," he answered, "if I have failed to give satisfaction." "There is no question of that. You have given every satisfaction. But this is in your own interest." "I care little for my own interest. That is to say, my own interest is not the one thing to consider." "It is right that you should go. I ask you to accept this place – do you understand me? – I!" Then his eyes went up to hers. She stood immovable. "I will accept it," he said. He bowed down to the ground. She passed him and went out at the wide-open door. (32-33)

Each of the stories in *Some Women* has its own incomparable charm. This is not what makes their comparison difficult, generally speaking, with any other author in the genre. Burdett suggests: "His style is fluent and conversational, but with no beauty peculiarly of his own. Where it charms us is in its wit."⁴¹⁰ Indeed the style, straightforward and with an absolute resolution of its own, is compelling due to its sheer directness. In fact, it reflects a

⁴⁰⁹ *Some Women*, 23; the notion of the ideal world of a lost youth, and, with it, aspirations of a happy life smothered, is archetypal in Maartens, and certainly rooted in his own life experience; cf. *An Old Maid's Love, My Lady Nobody* and *Eve*. It was to become the permanently underlying motive of the frustrations of the heroine in *Dorothea*, the first novel written after two volumes of stories (1904).

⁴¹⁰ Burdett, 127.

realistic attitude that, if anything, is typically Dutch. Taking all into account – the author, the period and the theme – the style could be called modern, indispensable for a narrator who soberly expresses what he perceives.

“Mrs. Russell”

“Mrs. Russell”, the second story, also deals with a woman of the upper classes, but this time she is but a mere society figure who does not in the least realise to what extent she is remorselessly entrapped in the social web she presumes to be in total control of. After twenty-five pages of almost exclusive satire, there is, at the end, an abrupt change of tone, with greater effect, strikingly so, than the actual surprising end of the plot. At first, the story threatens to drift into melodrama, but then the unexpected turn – as Mrs. Russell’s change of attitude becomes apparent – proves to be highly effective in this story, as it will in a number of others to follow. In the novels of Maartens, the reader is often struck by the incongruity of a sudden change of tone. Here, our illusion is not in the least disturbed. On one of her charity errands, Mrs. Russell has an encounter with a suicidal woman, who unawares reveals herself as her husband’s mistress. The incident not only allows her to discover that her husband leads a secret life; it also, ironically, provides her with an opportunity to become, indeed, the ‘good’ woman she was satirically called at the beginning, and which she had all the time believed herself to be:

There was fury in her heart and rebellion and misery: she was bitterly angry with her husband; she was mournfully angry with herself. And the desire filled her heart to face him, to face him down, in hot accusation of his perfidy, his disloyalty to herself and her child. She! – perhaps she had not acted wisely, led away by her eager pity of the sinful and the suffering, but *her* error had at least been that of a generous nature, her expiation would be generous, too. She would abandon a part – she would abandon the whole of her mission work – alas, one labourer less among the whitening harvest! She would dedicate her evenings to her husband, winning him for these creatures – oh bitter shame! She would take up her music again; as a girl she had played a little Mendelssohn; she would read not only, as hitherto, “The Review of Reviews,” but also “The Fortnightly.” Perhaps in time, of his own accord, he would confess his sin. She shuddered as she thought of the shadow dark between them. And the words of the dying woman struck her heart with repeated blows: “You have caused him to suffer enough already. He must never know you know.” (56-57)

“Princesse”

Maartens’ standpoint can be defined as follows: the human species boils down to a limited number of types, of whom one, slightly exceptional perhaps, is put under a looking glass in each story. “Princesse” is even a better example than the preceding two stories. As before, delivered by just a few deft strokes of narrative, the reader has a complete grasp of the

protagonist's social background. The narrator suddenly interrupts his long report of the heroine's childhood antecedents: "Why all this about Claire? Because it is, in itself, the story. It explains the story's end. Claire is the story. An epic in the early, stately repose of her wealthy childhood – a lyric with the drawing master – a long elegy at Les Berguettes – and at the close a tragic-comedy – but that's too fast!" (62)

Without these antecedents, it would not have been quite so evident to accept how Claire, quite naturally, went for the man who possessed a title when having so select a suitor, thereby doing only what all bourgeois girls dream of doing: marry a prince and become a princess. Entangled in the story is another of Maartens' recurrent motives: the social decay of the titled as well as the moneyed classes: wealth in search of a title to get its money's worth, at all cost as it were. The rich actually buy themselves into the aristocracy, but its reverse is taken into account as well: in order to survive, the nobility needs to "prostitute" itself to the nouveau riche.⁴¹¹

The dialogues in which Claire confronts her suitor are full of subtle satire. Beyond the manifest naiveté of her appearance, they reveal her as a shrewd exponent of her class. Apparently, she is not aware of this herself. To illustrate this, witness the scene where Pagiardini, the nobleman, is introduced to the family:

"Prince Pagiardini!" The whole bourgeois family stared, open-minded, at this personage of exalted rank. It cannot be said that Sandro Pagiardini took much pains to please them. Wit and brightness were not in his line. Nor could he speak of art or of politics, or of trade. In fact, he spoke little, brushing up his heavy black moustache, and remarking that the wine was good. That same evening Jules, anxious to avoid any erroneous or unfavourable first impressions, took his young sister aside, and frankly told her, that he had brought his friend, whom he greatly respected, to see his sister, whom he dearly loved, on the understanding that possible inclinations might lead to a marriage between them – "my heart's desire," said Jules. And he meant it. "Little sister, you would be a Princesse," he said. Claire's cheeks glowed. "He is a genuine prince?" she said. "He is one of the oldest families of Tuscany. At Geneva I bought an Almanach de Gotha. See!" He took out the fat little volume and handed it to her. "He does not seem a clever man," she faltered. "I asked him about several things. He seemed to know nothing." "He is very modest." "And a – little – wild – Jules – like you?" "He is a man of the world, of course, not a monk, but he is devoutly religious." (80-81)

"Madame de Parfondrieu"

In the next story, "Madame de Parfondrieu", the plot unleashes directly from the motive that had been the aim in the previous one: a misalliance. Although the antecedents are given in as

⁴¹¹ A primary example of this theme is rendered by Hesketh Pearson, in his *The Pilgrim Daughters*, a collection of essays, such as the case of the Duke of Marlborough, and Consuela Vanderbilt. Another example is Edith Wharton's novel *The Buccaneers* (1938), ed. Viola Hopkins Winner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

straightforward a manner as in the previous story, their psychological implications are far more complex. They are given in a style, which, according to Van Maanen, “is characteristic of the light French spirit in which many of these stories are written”:⁴¹²

Madame de Parfondrieu had been married to her husband at a very early age. She had had no voice in the matter. Her father, in fact, had married her to a good-for-nothing boon-companion of his own. Fifty years ago the story was well known in the clubs – my father told it me – how old Breluchon, the money-lender that was, drinking with Parfondrieu, whom he had robbed and befriended all through his long dissipation and whose ancestral *château* he had acquired from him in the end, had one evening made the following proposal in the following terms: “Parfondrieu, you old fool, I can’t understand why you don’t marry my daughter Betty. She is heiress of all I possess: she will restore to your children the home of their fathers. Meanwhile, if you marry her tomorrow, I will give you with Betty five hundred thousand francs.” “I should be satisfied with less,” replied Parfondrieu. “What the devil do you mean?” exclaimed Breluchon. “Can’t you let me have the five hundred thousand francs without Betty?” (83-84)

Rather than to the style, Van Maanen refers to the voice and tone of narrator. In these stories, the narrator is not outside the *milieu* he is describing but, on the contrary, he is an intimate himself. Therefore he is always a little mocking, a little ironical. The style, again, has that resoluteness and straightforwardness of its own, compelling through its sheer directness. Compared to this, Maartens’ first novel *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*, has little more to offer than descriptive realism although, that novel, his first, established his reputation. Here we feel so close to drama, because the dramatic tension acutely arises from the dialogue., The sense is gone that we are listening to a narrator to inform us about all that is happening, as in the following dialogue between mother and son

“You – intend – to – marry – this girl?” ... “Mother, I shall never love anyone else. Of course it is not quite the marriage either you or I could have wished. I knew you would be vexed, so I asked my cousin to prepare you. But mother, you see it is not as bad as you fancied. How *could* you think that I, *your* son, had asked a girl to marry me, not meaning it?” “You have asked her to marry you?” “Yes mother, what *have* they written? – Had I but written at once; I am punished for my own cowardice. Ah, mother, how you must have suffered, to doubt of your own son!” She rose and stood looking at him. His blue eyes filled with her own. “*Tu es bête*,” she said. “Thank God thou art only that.” As she passed him, she read in his silent face, like a flash, the reminiscence that she had been a Demoiselle Breluchon. (88-89)

Considering all that has been exposed at the start, with a plot’s that is rapidly unravelling, it is quite natural and logical that the reader should suspend his disbelief: We understand that Madame de Parfondrieu is determined to find out about the rumours alleging that her daughter in law has a lover. When her suspicions are confirmed, her class pride, bound to save her son’s honour, is superseded by her motherly feelings. When she realises how much his happiness depends on Léonie, who is unfaithful to him, she does not have the heart to tell him

⁴¹² Van Maanen, 114.

of her horrible discovery. Instead, she most urgently desires to save her son the greatest sorrow and dishonour by trying to persuade Léonie to give up her adulterous affair. Approaching the end, her daughter-in-law's suicide seems perfectly plausible. Even if Madame de Parfondrieu's actions are hard to justify from a moral standpoint, the culpability of this woman, humiliated all through her life, is somewhat redeemed by the awareness of her own guilt. The fullest rendering of the type of woman seeking revenge for a dreadful humiliation, is Cornelia in *God's Fool*. Van Maanen resumes about "Madame de Parfondrieu":

It is as true and cutting a "tranche de vie" as any written by the great French master; the subject: a mother's love fighting and defeated by a son's infatuation, is as dramatically and cruelly handled as the "amours" of many a Maupassant character. There is no moralising: Madame de Parfondrieu is good, the son is good, Léonie is good; they are true, they act according to their lights, which guide them to their inevitable dooms. There is no unnecessary detail in the whole story; the somewhat flippant, cynical style lends a peculiarly vivid colour to the threefold tragedy. The actions and words of the minor characters are so chosen as to throw the chief ones into clear relief.⁴¹³

It has been said before that Maartens greatly admired Maupassant. Granted the similarities of subject matter and a possible influence of narrative technique, the essential difference is that in Maartens, Maupassant's overall determinist perspective is entirely absent. The characters are not doomed; tragedy does not result from the ineluctability of fate, but, on the contrary, from the sense that the character in question could almost just as well have made a turn for the better if there had not been a weakness, often the result of a deep infliction, It is that flaw in each character, a wound never healed that makes them truly human.

"Little Mary"

In *Some Women I have known*, "Little Mary" is a further example of Maartens at his best when the blend between satire and psychological realism is perfect. Still, even within its narrow confines, there is room for an amazing amount of satirical detail, as in the following quotation. Imperceptible in the flow of the narrative, the transition works both ways here: towards realism, by the introduction of the vicar, and again, increasingly, towards Thackerayan satire, wittily touching upon contemporary issues:

Most people will remember the great work undertaken in the later eighties by the noble-hearted and energetic Bishop of the Caribbees, when that prelate, alarmed by the rapid physical degeneration of his converts since Christianity had deprived them of their customary food, instituted – himself, it is hardly necessary to say, an enthusiastic cyclist – the great Caribbee Cycling movement in all parishes of his island diocese. [...] Immense funds were required for the purchase of thousands of "Safeties" (these were just coming

⁴¹³ Van Maanen, 115-116.

in): a great central committee, under the management of the well-known Mrs. Russell and her sister-in-law Mrs. Brisbane Bottom – organised the vast labour of National Appeal. Unfortunately, it was before the time when the celebrated Piccaninny Sauce had enriched the South Sea Bishopric with the wealth of Holloway and Bovril combined. At the time of the Harrogate Fête and Sale three thousand four hundred and seventy-three bicycles still remained unsubscribed for. That cipher, however, it must be admitted, brought down the age of eligible applicants to six. And to everybody who cared for the welfare of his kind and to everybody who didn't, circulars were forwarded with the motto: "Through the shadow of the globe we wheel into the younger day. Send us fifteen pounds from Europe for a cycle in Cathay!"⁴¹⁴

We can visualise the homely *décor* from this ludicrous description of its prior history onwards to the Bazaar itself, organised by a neighbouring Christian village committee. Louisa has a scheme to ensnare the vicar, who in his turn expects to meet her sister Mary, the girl he really fancies. The narrative gently engages in a series of coincidences, or plot constructions that seem rather odd (the letter being sent to Mary, her encounter with the vicar at the station) Yet the reader's credulity is not strained beyond a certain limit. For all the satire that besets the plot, the author remains objective. After having taken her revenge by writing to the vicar, thus annihilating her sister Louisa's attempt to meet her own lover *in spe*, Mary's ultimate loyalty to her sister is neither judged nor criticised; it is merely recorded. Her initial willingness to sacrifice her own happiness has eventually led to circumstances that are not without a tragic note. As she refuses the vicar and retreats into the security of domestic habit by taking care of her sister, she fails to avail herself of the only opportunity to break free from the extremely narrow bounds of her existence.

"John"

From the lower middle class *milieu* of "Little Mary", we pass on to the solid middle class environment of "John". To our surprise, we are informed that John is not a boy, but a girl 'of character'. That is to say, she is a Dutch girl who, in her mother's words, is "rougher and noisier, I think, than the four of the boys put together." (127). In the following, we are never told what her real name is. She is as courageous and proud as any of Maartens' heroines in his novels, regardless of her boyish insouciance. Her parents fail in their attempt to give her what they consider a proper education. We get to know her as a girl who simply has not "got it in her" to achieve anything: "Her mistress sent reports which at first described her as lamentably deficient in all the requirements a young girl of her position ought to have possessed." (136) In spite of a gradual improvement it is not until her father's sudden death that hidden qualities

⁴¹⁴ *Some Women*, 113-114. Maartens is eager to ridicule any of the "crazes" of his day whenever the opportunity presents itself (cf. particularly *The Healers* and *The New Religion*). Like Thackeray, the author refers to the heroine of a previous story in the same volume, thus evoking an atmosphere of familiarity.

of John's character fully emerge. She shows to possess a great sense of responsibility in assisting her brother Gerard to save the family enterprise. In fact it soon becomes evident that Gerard is not capable of running the business. It is John, not Gerard, who promptly decides to call upon Brook when their business councillor insists that their competitor, Nicholas Brook, is in fact trying to buy them out of business in forwarding the vast sum urgently needed:

She drove boldly to Nicholas Brook's office, a thing she detested. What work she had done in the firm she had always rigorously done behind the scenes. "I typewrite for Gerard;" that was her explanation of her presence in the sanctum. Nicholas Brook received her immediately in his private room. "What can I do for you, John?" he said cheerfully. "Nothing," she answered stiffly. "That was what I came to say." "It isn't much to come for. But perhaps you are hardly as busy at your place, as we are here?" "Don't sneer; that's the one thing I can't stand," replied John, her lip trembling. "Rightly or wrongly – we are informed, that a considerate advance for which we applied to a Bank in China has been accorded us, through them, by – you! – I want to know if that's true?" – "And supposing I refuse to answer your question?" "That will be sufficient answer. You refuse?" – "No." "You needn't, for your face has answered. Now, I want to know why?" (146)

It is a token of her solid Dutch common sense that she should vanquish her pride, after she discovers Brook's real motives, and be willing to marry him, her late father's friend and competitor. Given the circumstances, this is perfectly plausible as part of the 'business deal', the fusion between the two firms. Beyond that, there is the implication of the woman she is: respecting him, she feels there is potential for more. She had implied that she liked him earlier on. Now, given the change in circumstances, Brook proposes to her. The plot revolves around the main character, and the dynamics, credibility and plausibility of the story derive solely from that principle. There is no distraction from the main theme for the simple reason that there is no space that would allow for digressions in the short story.

Although Maartens' stories move in all social classes, he naturally is at his best when treading his own ground, the upper- and leisure class. His descriptions of lower class behaviour tend to be in line with some of the clichés with regard to the lower classes at the turn of the century.⁴¹⁵

“Madame de Liancourt”

In “Madame de Liancourt”, the narrator, intimate connoisseur of the leisure classes, once more moves with ease and with an elegant and lofty style amongst its representatives. As with a slowly moving camera, the reader is virtually led into the bedroom of the protagonists, a

⁴¹⁵ Note, for example, the reaction of the servant in “Madame de Parfondrieu”, after she discovers a lady, the Marchioness, in the presence of her mistress: “What came you here for, making her wretched? You, what are you, old and ugly, to grudge other people their happiness?” – and, to the other's horrified amazement,

married couple, where a tense dialogue that will inevitably lead to a denouement, puts us instantly *in medias res*. Whenever Maartens deals with marriage, it is hardly ever without also evoking the paralysing sensation of boredom:

“You, now! – You do everything wrong!” said Monsieur de Liancourt. Madame de Liancourt looked up from her needlework, “I have heard that so often,” she answered, “it begins to lose its charm.” Monsieur de Liancourt threw himself back in his big armchair by the bedroom fire: a semi-good-natured smile played across his handsome face. “It is a truth,” he said, “we always have with us! Hourly, under some new aspect, it presents itself. At first I am astonished: then I know it again. Ah, I say, welcome! it is you! – *la gaucherie de ma femme!*” He lay watching his wife, through the blue smoke of his cigarette; a pleasant-looking man in his undress evening jacket, florid, barely forty, still young and anxious to look younger, a little bald at the top (oh, the pity of it!) well preserved and laboriously groomed. “Ah, it is you,” he repeated. “*La gaucherie de ma femme!*” Madame de Liancourt did not look up again. “You spoil your effect entirely,” she said, by repetition.” She was seven years her husband’s junior. Perhaps she was not exactly a beautiful woman. Perhaps her supremely graceful figure was a thought too tall: perhaps a slight ripple was wanting in the smooth radiance of her golden hair. That is possible. She possessed in absolute perfection the unfathomable quality we call “distinction,” which birth and breeding solely, and rarely, confer. (149-150)

Well embedded in the dialogue, this story implicitly highlights the author’s invectives against his own class, as well as against the social conduct expected of the members of the higher classes. At the return of the century it was *bon ton* to make a mark in ‘Society’. In the story, this modern tendency is put in contrast with a more ‘decent’ past, against which one is supposed to behave in a defiant and almost slightly contemptuous manner; that is to say, if one does not wish to go through life without being noticed, hence included by that very ‘Society’.⁴¹⁶ Within such a restrictive pattern, women are put under a double pressure, as they must still confer, also, with the conceptions of femininity of the time. Monsieur de Liancourt criticises his wife for talking “like a last century novel” (i.e., the eighteenth century, 153), or when he tells her: “The fact remains that, nowadays, the woman who does not dance on the brink of the precipice is as little thought of as the woman who has fallen over it.” (154). In fact, Monsieur de Liancourt, a class-conscious prig, is more of a victim of society than his intelligent wife will ever be. In his blind eagerness to become somebody in the eyes of society, he is unable to perceive his wife’s distinction, and, hence, to comprehend the amount of sacrifice her stooping to conquer would entail.⁴¹⁷

she burst out into a flow of the vilest gutter-epithets, heaping up insult and indecent abuse with the swift ease of a child of the purlieu. The Marchioness stood silent drenched, under a downpour of filth. (*Some Women*, 103).

⁴¹⁶ A theme in many of the novels of the day, many of which are now forgotten, while some have become classics, such as the novels and stories of Edith Wharton, cf. e.g. Scott Emmert, “Drawing-Room Naturalism in Edith Wharton’s Early Short Stories”, *Journal of the Short Story in English* 39 (2002), 57-71.

⁴¹⁷ *Some Women*, 154-155: “In all these matters you are lamentably ignorant. Every word that you utter about society shows that you have been brought up entirely outside it.” – “Where I would like to remain.”

“You cannot. We are too poor, – *Voilà*. With people like you and me society connections are so much capital. Heavens! You might be a Power!” – “By my beauty? Or my knowledge of pedigrees?” “No – a thousand

The plot unwinds when Madame de Liancourt is informed by her husband that one of the members of the old aristocracy, Guy de Belvalette, is about to marry an insignificant but wealthy bourgeois daughter. This news not only strengthens her determination to teach her husband a lesson, it also implies the deeper motivation that – *noblesse oblige* – she should act to save de Belvalette's – a nobleman's – honour:

She turned red, still gazing out of the window, to which she had long ago returned. "I will not believe," she said, "that the Vicomte de Belvalette – "Who is worse than poor – " "Will marry the daughter of Schlopsmeyer – " "Who is more than rich. These, my dear, are your backwoods ideas. He will marry her – " "It would be an infamy!" she interrupted, trembling with excitement. "And she will be happy" – he paused in the doorway with his gun – "and Guy will continue to make the social successes of the woman he smiles upon! He will never make yours!" The door closed sharply. Madame de Liancourt stood by the window. Presently, the colour still coming and going upon her cheeks, she drew herself up, with rapid movement of one who takes a painful but unchangeable resolve, and she passed down into the noisy great hall with that graceful sweep of her lissom figure which many lovelier women might envy, and did. She threaded her way straight to the Vicomte. "Monsieur de Belvalette," she began, "Ah – you are going shooting!" – she stopped. The Vicomte turned his listless head. "Everyone is, Madame, – I believe," he said. "If there were anything else – I should be only too glad – " "No, no: I would not keep you from your sport. But only, I had thought, if you were weary – you had promised to show me that drive – and tomorrow – " (159)

Often in these stories, the tension reverberating between the characters in itself sufficiently accounts for their lasting impact. In dramatic dialogue, skilfully encapsulated in innocent small talk, the charged atmosphere continuously changes but is always intense. Equally so in the sparse narrative, interlacing the encounters between the protagonists. As the Vicomte is a nobleman of the old stock, whatever he might have had in mind to do, it all becomes immaterial now that he finds himself in the company of a woman whose slightest gesture exudes the distinction of class. There is nothing that would please him more than to be of service, and take her for the ride he had promised. Engrossed in their conversation, they fail to take notice of the spot where they should have returned, in order still to be able to turn their dog cart, as the road gets too narrow later on:

"Then what shall we do?" "Pick some violets first. Your favourite flowers!" They got down, and she stood before the mare, while he gathered a great bunch of the tiny blossoms. As he handed her them, flushed with so much stooping, he detached a large buttonhole and stuck it into his covert-coat. "And now we must unharness this animal," he said. "You will laugh at me, but, really, I am not at all sure of my powers as a stable-boy. I have saddled dozens of horses, but I don't remember ever having harnessed one." "Is that all?" she replied laughing, "I am sure of my powers as a stable boy, I!" And, for the moment, as she helped his bungling fingers, strapping and unstrapping on the lofty river bank, she felt, with a delightful sense of enjoyment, her superiority over this

times – no. By what makes a woman a Power – *savoir faire* – *savoir plaire*! By making yourself noticed, by having men, who are somebodies, pay you attentions, flatter you, speak of you. What use is to a man his admiration of a wife whom nobody else admires? In the end, he also ceases to find cause for admiration. *Tiens*, I would not have said that, but you provoke me!" (154-155).

wonderful man, whom so many women had found irresistible, who, to her, was simply an honest gentleman, *bon compagnon*. (165)

She is now sufficiently self-assured to proceed to the limit, challenging him while equally preparing the successful outcome of her scheme by subtly manoeuvring him.⁴¹⁸

At the dinner-party that very evening, Monsieur de Belvadette surprises the whole company, wearing violets in his buttonhole instead of cypripediums, the flowers worn by Schlopsmeyers's daughter, the woman he is supposed to marry.⁴¹⁹ Finally, Madame de Liancourt enters with her husband, having kept the others waiting on purpose, with a great bunch of violets in the middle of her low-cut bodice. The high-strung consternation that hangs in the room leaves her superbly unaffected. In the end, her husband's reaction is nothing but a lame avowal to her strength. Thus she conquers in three ways: by showing her husband the limits of his worldly wisdom, by keeping Monsieur de Belvadette from the brink of the precipice of a misalliance, and, perhaps most important of all, by proving her pluck and mettle in defending the left-overs of genuine aristocratic values.

The strong sense one gets of involvement, of being taken from scene to scene in swift succession, stems from the balance between dialogue and narrative. Intertwining the dialogue, the narrative is brief enough so as not to put the reader at a distance. One is not merely a spectator present at the scene; beyond that, there is a sense almost of participation, similar to the sense of involvement one has when watching carefully cut sequences of a film, giving the spectator that illusion of immediate presence. It has the effect of being shown rather than told.

“Our Cousin Sonia”

In the next story, “Our cousin Sonia”, this impression of involvement is equally strong. The reader is invited into the narrator's own house as it were. How could he not feel privileged, now that he shares the company of the ‘finer’ people? Being part of the scene while it lasts, it

⁴¹⁸ *Some Women*, 165-66: “They got the dogcart twisted round – rather a perilous moment! – and the mare again between the shafts. “We shall be late for lunch,” he said, as they started. ”Thank Heaven!”

“You do not like lunch?” “I do not like *table d’hôte* meals. You are a master of persiflage, Monsieur de Belvalette.” “Surely my words are most harmless.” “It is in your face.” “Madame, my face is the one sin I am not responsible for.” “That is the saying of a woman.” “I fear that no woman could ever say it. Your violets smell deliciously. How delightful to have a favourite flower! – I have none!” “Butterflies have.” “Madame, you reproach me with being a butterfly. But when I speak of becoming domesticated, you reproach me yet more.” “Monsieur de Belvalette, what I reproach you with – but no, I have no right to reproach you with anything ! Pray choose your own flower!” “Yet if, of your great goodness of heart, in any forlornness, you would condescend, once for all” – he bent forward – “to advise me!” “Oh, I should bid you of course take the *golden lily – lilium auratum*: remember! After all, in the world of today, there is nothing worth seeking, even for the sons of Crusaders, but Stock Exchange bankers’ gold!” “Thank you,” he said quietly, and his dark cheek burned purple, as if he had received a blow.”

⁴¹⁹ The Dutch connotation of the name ‘Schlopsmeyer’ makes this one of Maartens prime examples of choosing a name that is meaningless to his English readers, but that is loaded with a heavy and cynical tongue-in-cheek meaning.

charms him into feeling a little elevated himself. This sense of intimacy is an intrinsic part of Maartens' charm, particularly where the narrator presents himself as an *alter ego* of the fictional author y the name of Maarten Maartens. Talking about his own house and his own family, he could not more perfectly have introduced himself as a member of the class he is now describing. The narrator casually refers, for example, to Lise de Liancourt, whom we have also encountered in the previous story. This enhances the impression that we are in a small and secluded community where people know each other. To a foreign readership, part of the charm lies in these: the recurrent observations which, taken together, reveal unique aspects of the Dutch mentality.

The coming of Cousin Sonia brings quite a change in the monotony of the rural seclusion in which the narrator and his wife allow their days to pass quietly. Even when one has no knowledge of Maartens' private circumstances – as his readers did not – one actually imagines him to have been in real life very much as pictured here.⁴²⁰ We gradually get an impression of the narrator and his wife from the way in which they deal with their cousin. His attitude towards Sonia is as we would expect it to be: reserved politeness mixed with subconscious expectations of a change of some kind from his daily monotony, offering the girl a framework to vent her feelings as they come. On the other hand, to his wife it is much more a matter of doing her duty towards the girl. Sonia, of Russian origin, had married Harry, of the *côté honteux* of the family. The couple is soon to find out that Sonia's wealthy uncle, who was to provide the fortune Sonia and her husband were most likely to spend, did not exist. We are not told whether Harry was trapped by dishonourable stratagems on her part, or whether someone else was the driving-force. At any rate: in the course of the story, the girl proves to be sincere in her way. She had been sent to the Maartenses by her husband on the claim that he, for the moment, could no longer support her. The interest of the story lies in the psychological constellation that gradually materialises between the three main characters, rather than in the exposition of her sparkling personality. There is a growing emotional intimacy between the narrator and his cousin, just as there is but the merest touch of jealousy on the part of his wife, who is quick to perceive her husband's soft spot for the girl. Sonia had quickly established herself in house and hearts of this family through the charm of a character that was both *ingénue* and *raffiné*. If not, her insinuating that her hosts were responsible for her 'miserable' situation would have been more than impudent:

⁴²⁰ Three stories in the collection have Dutch settings ("John", "Our Cousin Sonia" and "Mees"). Van Maanen is of the opinion that "the first two do not quite come up to the high mark of the others" (117) without giving any reasons. Where it concerns "Our Cousin Sonia", he apparently failed to perceive the qualities described above, embedded in this particular form of fictional autobiographical writing.

“Ah, Cousin, your family has much cause to make good to me all the wrong that my husband has done!” “Dear Cousin, as long as you are happy here – ” “Happy? How can I be happy, when I am destitute! I am like a beggar: I have not the means of subsistence. For these clothes I have been obliged to get, in your elegant world – “ I smiled with approval. “Yes, they are over-dressed,” said Sonia. Well, unless I pay the milliners, I shall have to go to prison.” “How much money do you want?” I asked rashly. “Eight hundred florins, *mon cousin*. Ah, thank you: you are a gentleman!” “What could I do? “Your husband does not communicate with you, at all? I said. “You have not written to him?” “No, indeed: I have not written. Rather would I tear my eyes out. Would *your* wife – think you? – write, *mon cousin*, if you had run away?” “I suppose not,” I said uncomfortably, standing on one leg.” What! are you preparing, at the mere suggestion, to fly? Oh, you men! But no, you are not of the kind that betrays. Anna is happy!” She lifted her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes. “Never mind, I too am happy in having found so generous a relation. At least I am saved from the bagnio.” “Don’t tell my wife”, was all I could reply. (186-187)”

Sonia has a way of melting herself into the heart of everyone by her singing, particularly into the narrator’s. He tells us that at a party given at his house, a week after Sonia’s arrival, everybody was enthusiastic about her voice. One of the greatest connoisseurs, present at the party, expressed his great disappointment that circumstances should have prevented her from becoming a professional. When one of Sonia’s letters is returned undelivered, the truth is quickly discovered: The money given to her was sent to her husband who, as the narrator’s wife rightly conjectures, is masquerading in London under a false name. However, in the light of the decision she has taken to become a professional singer, she now has the courage to admit the truth: that it was a plot, that she was sent to them in order to distract money from them. The sheer honesty of this avowal of a woman desperately in love disarms both her hosts:

Her pretty cheeks were burning. Her sorrow and shame would have melted a stone. “Old Madame Brassy ought to be ashamed of herself,” said my wife, with ready insight. And suddenly Sonia laughed. “Yes, I fear,” she said, “we have all been very, very naughty. But mamma-in-law is as poor as we. Heaven only knows how she manages to hang on.” “She doesn’t even pay her butcher,” explained my wife. I looked up, surprised, at this bit of information. “Serve the wicked, expensive butcher right!” said Sonia. (192)

The way in which the narrator moves in between of the social classes enhances the impression of a social excursion through the various strata of one category of people in particular, whose justification of existence hardly ever exceeds the notion of leisure. Behind the screen of the outer paraphernalia of all the kinds of activities they embark upon, there is the emptiness of an existence with the constant obligation, it seems, of merely having to kill the time. Most of the protagonists live in a world of unlimited wealth, but there is something ominous in the fact that their actions are merely an excuse for not having anything better to do. The real sore point in their lives is that these people, with an unlimited amount of time at their disposal, are

incapable of using that time adequately. Maartens is incessantly critical of this – his own – social class. The recurrent witticisms sprinkled over all of the stories are his way of illustrating that particular state of *ennui*, forever looming in the background that turns not few of its members into cynics. The next story, “Diane de Bragade”, is a perfect case in point.

“Diane de Bragade”

These pages will not tell the story of Diane de Bragade. She has yet to live it. All I can give is a column of tit-bits: she would be delighted to scan my paragraphs: she shall not have that pleasure. She would like to think she had caused me pain. There are men and women in the world whose only pleasure is this causing of pain. The men are very rare, thank God! – the women are rarer. But the woman, when she occurs, has by far the deadlier bite. Madame de Bragade enjoyed giving pain, because it showed her strength. Her worship – the only thing she loved – was physical strength, first in herself, then in men or brutes. The strength of beauty, the strength of muscle, the strength of hardness and obstinacy and cruelty: all this she was eager to recognise: for the strength of intellect she had no appreciation; the power of goodness she thought to be a copy-book rule. She had never intentionally done anything because it was wrong – or right. (195-196)

It is the sober description of a spoiled, conceited and cynical woman, who exploits men’s weaknesses while she really has nothing to show for but her physical attraction. In these portraits of women we are usually given some details that render their actions understandable, if not forgivable, in some way or other. However, nothing is added that would pardon Diane for her *sans merci* attitude towards all and sundry. Implausible as a character, it is hard to picture her merely as a type, and that is ultimately disappointing. In *Some Women*, there are sudden shifts in the narrative mode that have the beneficiary effect of guiding our interest as if taken by surprise, away from the cynicism and down to a deeper, more serious level, as in this story. When it comes to the safety and protection of their children, Jean de Bragade, usually quite spineless, shows his mettle by openly confronting his wife. Their little son Jeannot possesses a weak constitution. For this reason his mother all but despises him. With a child’s perspicacity of feeling, the boy realises the lack of affection on the part of his mother and, hence, that his well-being solely depends on his father:

“Would papa hate me too,” asked the boy, half turning to his father, “if I grew up a nincompoop?” “Most certainly,” interposed his mother with vivacity, a faint flush on her cheek. “I should not like to grow up a nincompoop,” said Jeannot. “Yet there is every danger,” continued Diane, irritated, addressing her husband. “Run away, Jeannot, and play with the others. I am sure that you coddle him. The other day, in Paris, you were far too anxious about his coat.” “He is learning to ride,” replied Jean sharply – Monsieur de Viroflay had been carried off by Jeannot to see the ponies. “He is not a strong child. I do not coddle him half as much as you coddle your little grey monkey.” “Coddling is good for monkeys.” “So be it. Would you wish me, Diane, to leave the coddling of the children to you?” “No, undoubtedly it is better in your hands. I will do what I can to make a man

of Jeannot.” “How?” “Let me go my own way. By teaching him not to be afraid.” “How?” The anxiety in his voice had increased: an imperious note, also, had come into the reiteration, which moved her to resentment. “Do I know?” she answered, “By making him face danger when it comes.” “When it *comes*,” he repeated. “That is right. Diane, listen to me. I forbid you – do you understand me? – to run any of your mad risks with Jeannot. I forbid you.” “You forbid me?” She lay back in her chair, half-closing her eyes. (205-206)

The last sentence ominously anticipates the trouble ahead. Impressed as she is by her husband’s unexpected demonstration of courage, she will revenge herself at the first opportunity. This presents itself when Diane and Jeannot go for a walk, accompanied by a friend, the Comte de Viroflay. A sense of impending danger is evoked in spite of the radiance of the natural surroundings, innocently and merrily drawn: “So they went towards the rocks, a beautiful walk through sun-dotted pine-forests, ending in a sudden blaze of poppy-covered meadow over a steep descent of precipice. Far away sank the vine-trellised Champaign, with a riband of river entangled across it, under the wide blueness of heaven.” (208) Following this, there is the final scene at a precipice, furnishing the ultimate climax.

As we have been prepared for the catastrophe, the reader is ready for the resolution. After Jeannot has slipped some yards down the precipice, it soon becomes evident that de Viroflay, the real nincompoop in this story, is unable to save the boy’s life. Nothing remains for Diana but to make an attempt herself. The action now following – Jean appearing on the scene at exactly the crucial moment – has a somewhat off-putting *deus-ex-machina* effect. However, as the action is presented in a rapid succession of images, as in a film, the reader feels more like a viewer:

With a cry she sprang down among the bushes, swung herself from one to the other, fell, her face full of scratches, caught at a branch, swung down lower – the deserted animals above ran to and fro, howling and barking. The boy’s call came up fainter: “Papa!” A man’s figure appeared on the height, clear-cut against the brilliant sky. Jean de Bragade, emerging from the pinewoods, had crossed the meadow with a sudden rush: he now stopped one moment for breath, then slowly and firmly descended, looking neither to the right nor left, down to Jeannot. He took the boy on his arm, and began painfully to climb upward, gasping beneath the weight, pausing constantly, working with hands and knees, bidding the boy to cling close to him: a terrible journey which he will remember all the rest of his life. At the last moment, as he was nearing the summit, a piece of rock, loosened by all this commotion, broke away and came rolling towards them, making straight for Jeannot’s curly head. The father, in that moment, threw up his arm instantly, to ward off the blow: the stone struck against his wrist, which dropped helpless. Half unconscious, yet retaining his nerve, though hardly aware how he did it, Jean dragged Jeannot over the ledge, and sank down on the grass in a faint. A couple of men were hurrying across the meadow, attracted by the dogs. (211)

The catharsis of the story provides a welcome boomerang-effect: instead of revenge, there is defeat for Diane. The very sustenance of objective narration puts a spell on the reader that holds its supremacy throughout.

“Madame de Mersy”

The former story, “Diane de Bragade” and “Madame de Mersy”, form in a sense a contrasting pair: in the previous story it was the husband who loved his child, whereas the wife was indifferent to the needs of her son. Now, we are confronted with a persistently selfish and jealous man on the one hand and a courageous and intelligent woman on the other hand.

Paul, a friend of Madame de Mersy’s, comes to take his leave the day before sailing off to Tonkin. He begins his *adieux* by fondly evoking – and harking back to the intimacy of their mutually shared childhood.⁴²¹ Suffering from the imprudence of leaving her ill child alone in her bedroom in this moment of weakness, Madame de Mersy is torn between the love for her only child, Simone, and her deep affection for Paul de Sorac. Not only did she already know him when a child; she has loved him secretly ever since. Encouraged by the solemn sadness of what may be their ultimate moment together, Paul confesses the love he has never before dared to avow to her explicitly. Simultaneously, it is left to the reader whether to conclude or not from Paul’s action if the friendship between them ever went beyond a state of emotional intimacy:

“You and I, we knew each other as children. We were cousins: we played together, always – we loved each other! Long before anyone had heard of Monsieur de Mersy.” “Paul, I cannot stay talking here. Simone is unwell. I must go to her.” He looked up for the first time. “Unwell?” he said quickly, and no woman could have withstood the swift sympathy of his voice. “Listen to me – first. I too am a sufferer, of your own flesh and blood. I too have a claim on your sympathy – a double claim, for the suffering is through you.” She moved back a pace, and her fingers touched the door-knob. (216)

From the rest of the story we gather that our suspicions must have been unfounded: Still, the implication is that, even if no sexual encounter between Denise and Paul ever took place, both would have desired it, had circumstances been different.

The first thing to detect in all of these stories is the criticism, more or less straightforward, of the women of that class. This may seem rather surprising for a writer who usually comes to their defence in portraying his heroines as victims of conventions that were either inherited and sustained by men or invented by them. In the course of each story, however, these women receive an impulse that propels them out of their circumstances, making them either

⁴²¹ One of Maartens’ recurrent themes, rooted in his own autobiography. Maartens and his wife were fond of each other from the time when he was eight and she was four. In fact, at that tender age, they even promised to marry each other. That they were also cousins is immaterial to the strength of the tie between them. Apparently it was Maartens’ conviction that such a bond – the only one guaranteed for life – can only take root in childhood, the period of the strongest emotional impressionability. The motive first appears in *The Greater Glory*, then to return in *Dorothea* and *The Price of Lis Doris*. Surprisingly, Van Maanen never refers to autobiographical aspects in the works of Maartens in his doctoral dissertation, although he did research on the Maartens premises (correspondence between Ada van der Poorten-Schwartz and Van Maanen, “Maartens archive”).

turn backward, as in the case of the Duchess Eleanor, or forward, as in the case of Madame de Mersy. From this final meeting with the man who may once have been her lover, strengthened by the knowledge that he is incurably ill, she finds the courage to oppose her sister-in-law at the crucial moment: when the latter arrives in order to persuade her to send Paul away, while there is still time before her jealous husband returns. She therefore wants Denise to accompany her at once to the ball. Denise had initially refused to follow her husband there, because of the child's illness. Now that the mutual feelings between Denise and her lover have been expressed, she is prepared to take leave of Paul, but not to leave her child merely for the sake of convention:

“Well? He will not surprise me with Monsieur de Sorac.” – “Your sangfroid is admirable: I could never have believed it. He will say that he came too early – it is for fear of this that he now walks slow – he will find you waiting, with your diamonds on.” Madame de Mercy snatched with eager hands at the radiant splendour around her neck, and tore it away in a sprinkle of glistening shreds on the floor. Her sister-in-law screamed aloud. “Take back your diamonds!” cried Madame de Mercy, her white chest panting, oppressed. “You – you are one of your race – like *him* you think all women sell themselves for jewels, and houses and titles and – God, I wish I could cast them back to you both as I trample on these chains with which my parents –” (223)

By this rejection of the family jewels, Denise deeply hurts Madame de Praville's family pride.⁴²² Yet at the same time, it provides the latter with the opportunity she had long been waiting for: to vent her long oppressed feelings of hatred of her brother's wife. Her allegation that in his senseless jealousy he might take the child away from its mother is too strong a threat: Madame de Mersy succumbs, accompanying her sister-in-law to the reception where her husband is awaiting her. The story has rapidly turned into a psychological battle between the two women. The deepening of their conflict provides opportunities for fresh shades of their characters to emerge. Although consumed by spite, Madame de Praville has the equanimity of mind to contradict her brother, obsessed with his wife's guilt. Notwithstanding the possessive nature of Robert de Mercy's character, his attitude to his wife is a little hard on the reader. When the mother is forced to desert her child and, in the end, the child unexpectedly dies, it all smacks too much of melodrama. No matter how plausible in itself, such things become oppressive when we are not given enough imaginative space in the narrative to prepare for them.

⁴²² Cf. Jean Pratt Arnold, *Signifying Chains: the Discourse of Jewellery in Victorian Literature* (DA, Ann Arbor, 1997), 881A, also with regard to Thackeray.

“Meess”

“Meess”, the successor to “Madame de Mercy”, is refreshingly free of such theatricality, – on the contrary: all seems very natural. A reader who is aware of the author’s private circumstances would be tempted to account for it, due to the high degree of autobiography in the story. Still, there is an equal lack of theatricality in the opening story, “The Duchess Eleanor”, in which there is no such amounting of autobiographical detail. However, there is one similarity: just as the tutor in that story was sacrificed for the sake of social conventions, so is the governess in “Meess”.

Even if Maartens in reality never had to dismiss a governess purely for social convention’s sake at his country home in The Netherlands, very likely the plot ensuing emphatically presented itself to him due to his isolation, both geographical as well as emotional. Van den Hill, the protagonist’s name, is an evident projection of aspects of the life circumstances of the author himself.⁴²³ The first phrase introduces Van den Hill and his wife and the newly arrived English governess. With typical Maartensian tongue-in-cheek, they are perfectly depicted in the writer’s authentic setting, his own estate:

The van den Hills were wealthy: they lived summer and winter at their beautiful *château* in the country, away from everybody and everything, he nursing his artistic temperament on leisurely contemplation of the beautiful, she engrossed in her delicate health. There were two little girls of five and seven, yellow-haired dots, whom their father considered as possibilities of beautiful development, physical and psychical, while their mother looked upon them as a moral and religious responsibility. (235)⁴²⁴

In the assessment of himself as a “good-natured, easy-going man, not yet forty, who took life easily (as he found it) and wished everyone else to do so” (236), the narrator was less than objective concerning Van Hill: it is hard to conceive of Maartens as an easy-going man; if anything, he was restless in the innermost recesses of his being. On the other hand when Van Hill’s wife comes into play, the narrator manages to remain much more objective. Paradoxically, that objectivity arises from the author’s *subjective* image of himself:

Mevrouw van den Hill was one of those rare women whose pure touch can rest on pitch, undefiled. She lived sinless, in a world of sin, and deemed herself a sinner. Carefully brought up in a sheltered country-home, married at twenty to a distant cousin she had always been fond of, cultured, comfortably established, caressed, she joined in gay conversation and even read, without pleasure, an occasional naughty novel, yet, all the time, she never understood what evil was. Deeply religious herself, it was her earnest desire that all should share her happiness, but she never obtruded her sentiments or

⁴²³ Maartens’ home was called “De Zonheuvel” (“The Sun Hill”). Designed by Maartens himself, it was built between 1900 and 1903, the year the family moved there. For his last book, a volume of poems, he would use the pseudonym “Joan van den Heuvel” (“Joan of the Hill”) Joan van den Heuvel, *Gedichten* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen & Zoon, 1915).

⁴²⁴ The only relevant and interesting dissimilarity between fiction and fact here is that the author had only one daughter, dark-haired.

opinions on those who were neither anxious nor ready to hear them. In any case, the powers at her disposal were small: she had always been more or less an invalid, and, at the time of Cicely's arrival, her energy alone still kept her semi-erect. (236-237)

The ensuing narrative further intensifies the blend of factional setting and fictional plot. The almost permanent invalidity of Anna, the author's wife, meant in terms of day-to-day existence that he virtually must have led the life of a widower. The atmosphere of morose desolation in and around the house is overwhelming in its simple and straightforward style:

It was surely the dullest house that ever a full-blooded man found himself compelled to reside in. Old, dingy, draughty, deplorable in its internal arrangements, delightfully quaint with its turrets and wainscots, beautifully furnished, full of tapestry and carving, a bit of sixteenth century history, pros and cons. In the summer it was bright with old-Dutch floral devices that nobody ever saw but the wary owners, for the health of the mansion's mistress prohibited visits of any kind. As the autumn deepened, the flowers went slowly dead in rainy silence: the white mist gathered around the rotting trees. Nobody ever rang at the gate, unless it was a beggar. Then various faces would appear at various windows, curiously gazing across the drizzly court. Mynheer van den Hill stood, his hands in his pockets, wishing he could wish for a chat with the beggars, whom the coachman had orders never to admit but to send, more or less satisfied, away. (237-238)

When the invalid lady of the house is sent off to a specialist of high reputation for a health cure in Berlin, the plot is propelled into a direction that more accurately complies the fictional truth with the actual frame of mind of the author. Maartens' loneliness was caused by the peculiar circumstances of his wife's illness. Due to her semi-invalid state and her almost permanent migraines, virtually the only communication between the two was through *billets-doux*. Being in adjacent rooms, he in his library, she in her boudoir, there was a tantalizing lack of contact: sound was torture to her. This was the author's private life alluded to in the story.

Cicely, or "Meess", as she is called by her employers, is left alone to cope with the children. As a governess, her new situation evidently provides a setting for regular encounters with Van den Hill: a deepening intimacy between herself and the landlord quite naturally ensues. The second part of the following quotation is not about Mr. Van den Hill; it is Joost Schwartz all out:

Mynheer told "Meess" about this and about other matters: they fell into occasional talks about Mevrouw or about Cicely's little circle in her own country, kindly courteous gossip with inevitably increasing interest in each other's affairs and in each other. And gradually there deepened upon her innocent little heart a great liking for the quite gentle-souled man with the pale-blue eyes and sorrowful, haughty face, who said such caustic things and did such kind ones. All the more was this the case after one December evening, when she had crept down, quite against her custom, before her own late supper, crept down along the silent passages to ask him something about the children's holidays. She had knocked at the library door which stood ajar, and, believing him to have answered, she entered. He was standing in evening dress by the great window, from which he had thrown back the curtains; a wild wind was beating the rain against the panes. "My God!"

he gasped, staring out into the darkness. And then she understood his first utterance to have been a groan. She crept away, trembling, to weep over her untasted meal, in her room. (242-43)

The monotony and sadness of their daily existence is refreshingly interrupted by a visit of the Baron and Baroness van Dorsveld, the only guests that had come since Cicely's arrival. With the threat of a lonely Christmas in store, and in dread of all the preparations that the festivities for the entire household require, Mynheer van Hill repeats his invitation to the Van Dorsvelds. Another reason is that he feels greatly relieved by –and infatuated with the Baroness's exquisite singing.⁴²⁵

Soon after their arrival, Baron van Dorsveld feigns an obligation to go to The Hague for business which is to take some days; the implication being that he has a mistress there. Fully aware of her husband's proclivities and amorous propensities, the Baroness explicitly urges him to stay. Knowing her endeavours to be futile, she also has an ulterior motive: the inclinations she cherishes for her host are more than mere friendship, which is why she wants to protect herself against acting upon them.⁴²⁶ The plot crystallises into a psychological pattern which, given the brevity of narrative and conciseness of style could hardly be more effective in terms of implication.⁴²⁷ Cicely finds herself in a quandary, intensely admiring and respecting the very lady whom she suspects of 'making eyes' at the man she herself secretly loves. The quandary becomes a quagmire when she receives a letter from Mevrouw van Hill in which that lady informs her that she intends to surprise her husband by returning home for Christmas and that she, Cicely, is to keep this secret entirely to herself. Perhaps "Meess" should have ignored the wish of her mistress in order to avoid the impending catastrophe. Utterly inexperienced in matters of such nature, she is absolutely incapable even of speaking

⁴²⁵ Singing in Maartens' prose, i.e., a single soprano performing for a man, has the impact of an *élixir de vie* upon the listener: the very epiphany of the secret of life's beauty, cf. Madame de Mongelas in *An Old Maid's Love* (176-177). The singing of a soprano provides the key to unlocking the listener's heart, making it liable to seduction, cf. e.g. Giulietta's singing for Gerard in *Dorothea*, 290-295.

⁴²⁶ To enhance an atmosphere of a closely knit community, Maartens occasionally refers to characters that appear in other parts of his social landscape. One's insight into that structure deepens according to the principle "if you want to know a person, get to know his friends", as well as into the structure of the character in question: Baroness van Dorsveld eagerly invites her friend Mary van Weylert (248), who happens to be one of the characters in Maartens' unpublished novel, "The Van Weylerts". Outwardly, such an invitation is a mere formality to comply with social convention, but inwardly the Baroness is too frightened of her own susceptibility to Mr. van den Hill to stay alone with him in the house. As it is Christmas, Mary is of course unable to accept the invitation.

⁴²⁷ Goetsch selects quotations by a critic advocating a tenor in realism that could be applied to Maartens' art of implication: "The realist is thinking all the time how the scene is viewed through the eyes of human beings, who are absorbed in the progress of their emotions [...] his aim is not to present something formal, stately, decorous, majestic, but to reflect the breathlessness, the indecision, the swift mental changes, the ebb and flow of the mood": Benson, "Realism in Fiction", *Cornhill Magazine*, XXXII (1912), 612, quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 87. From a slightly different angle, Henry James's interpretation grasps a similar meaning, defining what he calls the author's quality of mind as "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to

to anyone about it, let alone of taking any action. Instead, she sees no other way but to try to convince the Baroness van Dorsveld, by the vaguest of allusions, to leave the premises forthwith. In the eyes of that lady, who had been the first to fathom the secret of Cicely's heart, and who had even given her warning to be careful, this must of course seem the extreme impertinence of a mere domestic who is scheming to keep the man she craves uniquely for herself.

With that infallible instinct for *dramatic momentum* that allows for a tremendous visualisation of the scene, the sudden return of the lady of the house is thrust upon the reader, while Mynheer is on the verge of an emotional peak due to the presence of Dora, Baroness van Dorsveld:

“Let us have candles!” said Dora at the piano, in the great saloon. “No, no, why should we have candles?” He bent over her. “You know all the words by heart, and so do I.” “Yes, but –” “We have learnt them all by heart, Dora – by heart.” In the long silences and the darkness there was little singing. “Let me go up and dress for dinner,” she said, “I wonder whether Fritz will come to-night.” “We can do without him. You are not angry with me for saying that? It has been a happy time for me. You – you have made it bearable – you have done a great deal more – you have – I could not have endured my misery without you. Instead of that, you have – you have –” He bent down and kissed her. A faint light was spreading towards them though the opening of the distant door. He ran forward. “Elizabeth!”, he cried, fell back – then rushing forward, drew his wife away into the hall. “My God, what does this mean?” he gasped. “I have come back,” she answered in a dull voice. “Lorence, who was with you in there?” He flung himself before the door. “The Meess,” he said. (254-255)

Lorence's sudden realisation that his wife “would not mind the governess”, as “Meess” bitterly declares (256), is the pivotal point in the plot: the portent of the rigid nineteenth century class distinctions and inhibitions hits the reader like a flash. Those class distinctions forced anyone subjected to them into a straightjacket of conventions destroying much human warmth and sympathy for no obvious reason other than to keep up, at all cost, the appearance of decency. Like an unwritten law persisting through the ages, it must needs be that the person on the lowest rung of the social ladder shall pay the price, although all of Maartens' characters tend to be victims, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. Van Hill sees an opportunity to save the situation when the Baron returns almost simultaneously, having reluctantly given in to his wife's almost desperate appeal to do so. Van Hill realises at the same time that this solution so conveniently presenting itself – using the governess as a scapegoat – incriminates him of an act of callous cowardice:

“You see how even Providence interposes on our behalf. No great wrong has been done, I swear it! Providence will not permit the ruin of this house for so little! Think of

Mevrouw, in her weak health, in her goodness! Think of the poor little girls. I do not ask you to consider all I have suffered. I ask nothing but that you do not contradict me! Nothing but that." Cicely sank her face on one hand. "I won't contradict you," she said. "Please go away." He held out his hand, but she could not see it. He hesitated a moment. "God reward you," he said thickly, and crept from the room. (257).

In this rendering of a female character, "Meess" does not become an idealisation, a mere projection of the author's persistently looming infatuation with the purity of womanhood. Due to the restrictions of the genre, the short story offers no opportunity for such projections; the narrator has no opportunity to disrupt the plot by moralizing. The short story is highly autobiographical, and thus one might venture the hypothesis that the lack of comment on the diegetic level is precisely because of the narrator's close links with the level of his characters.

"Annette de Viroflay"

The last story, "Annette de Viroflay", is not on the same artistic level as its predecessor. It is the story of two orphan cousins, who grow up separately, each of them aware, throughout, that they are dependent on their grandfather's fortune. When that grandfather summons them to live with him, they as a matter of course do not hesitate, "he from a provincial university where he was studying law, and she from her Paris convent-school" (259). Echoing in the background is again the autobiographical note, more distant now. Psychologically speaking, the expectancy of that heritage has maimed them for life. That at least is the prevailing impression when one considers – with increasing surprise and bewilderment – their attitude of abject docility towards their grandfather.

In most cases, Maartens' stories begin with a matter-of-fact drawing, sketching the outlines of a situation that sets the tone for the rest to follow. Swift, sober and to the point, the introductory phrases are usually not void of satire and exaggeration. The *surprise effect*, however, is mostly attained by a sudden dramatic change, which also entails a change of tenor. As in the stories of some of his most renowned contemporaries such as Maupassant, Hardy or Chechov, fate determines the momentary state of desolation, of despair of the protagonist, i.e., the track that very character was condemned beforehand to follow by implication of class, breeding and character. Expecting as usual the *surprise effect*, now that we have come to the close, we feel somewhat disillusioned by its absence in this final story. The satire in its opening was consistent with the harshness of the situation it anticipated, but we dislike that it should remain satirical to the end, giving the description of the couple – ineluctably on its way towards financial ruin – an air of caricature. In the light of our forgoing reading experience, we have come to sense this as an impropriety. In its own way the story is told lively enough, and not without humour, but when the crucial encounter takes place, the

anticipated dramatic impact is lacking. In Maartens this mostly emerges from an eruptive and highly emotional dialogue between the two protagonists, which is final in its consequences. Instead, we have the impression of being entrapped in a moralistic tale. In a *melange* act of self-sacrifice and self-preservation (it is also *her* money which is at stake!) a devoted wife saves her husband from gambling away their entire heritage. In her determination to save what is left, Annette de Viroflay is reminiscent of Cornelia in *God's Fool*. But Cornelia was a strong-willed character, whose experience of life had driven all sentimentality out of her, and who had become thoroughly deprived of any illusions whatsoever beyond the desire to establish herself in society. Having got acquainted to the author presenting us with real characters throughout these stories, it is off-putting that he should now return to the mere type, representing a kind of person with no characteristics of his own, the result of the caricature mode.

IV.3. Comparative Analysis: *Some Women I Have Known* and Thomas Hardy's *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891)

IV.3.1. Introduction

From his vantage point as a critic in 1930, fifteen years after Maartens' death, Arthur Quiller-Couch wrote about him as a writer of short stories:

Critics have not yet recognised Maarten Maartens as one of the best for this kind of writing in a generation, which brought it to something like perfection. To take our language alone, his "The Duchess Eleanor" or "Madame de Parfondrieu" will easily vie with any of Hardy's *Group of Noble Dames* (let alone that the author is more at ease in their company) as some of his peasant stories will lift up their heads against Hardy's best.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ Preface, Letters, xxv. It took Hardy thirteen years (1878-1891) to assemble *A Group of Noble Dames*. Half of the stories were based on miscellaneous information about pedigrees recorded in the *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, by John Hutchins, a favourite book of Hardy's throughout his life. According to David Cecil, Hardy's curiosity about upper-class women may have had its roots in his profession as an architect: he was familiar with the great houses of the local countryside and their history (*Hardy the Novelist* [1943] [London: Constable, 1965], 122). The stories in *A Group of Noble Dames* were inspired by Hardy's reading of John Hutchins's *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (third edition, 1861 – 1873): Jil Larson, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 168, particularly 172-176. Six stories were first published in *The Graphic* in 1890: "Barbara of the House of Grebe", "The Marchioness of Stonehenge", "Lady Mottisfont", "The Lady Icenway", "Squire Petrick's Lady", and "Anna, Lady Baxby". *Longman's Magazine* published "The Lady Penelope" (1890) and "The Honourable Laura" (1891), in Hans G. Hönig, *Studien zur Englischen Short Story am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts: Stevenson, Hardy, Kipling und Wells* (Göppingen: Alfred Kümmerle, 1971), 139, with details concerning the publication of Hardy's stories in general (139-142). With a few minor exceptions of uncollected stories, Hardy gathered all of his stories in a total of four collections. The other three were: *Wessex Tales* (1888), *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) and *A Changed Man and Other Tales* (1913), see Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*, 97-99. Norman Page identifies Hardy's stories as "humorous" (*Wessex Tales*), "romantic or supernatural" (*Noble Dames*) "realistic and often ironic or tragic" (*Life's Little Ironies*) and "historical" (*A*

What made Quiller-Couch think of Hardy's stories when he read *Some Women I Have Known*? Hardy's *A Group of Noble Dames* deals with women belonging to the same social class, the aristocracy. In Maartens' *Some Women I Have Known*, this is equally the case, at least with the major part of the stories. In terms of genre though, the two collections stand quite apart. Hardy's stories are suspended between romance (sometimes verging on the fantastic) and realism, Maartens' firmly rooted in realism.⁴²⁹ In spite of the difference between Maartens and Hardy in terms of literary status and reputation, a critical comparison can be taken into consideration because, as Quiller-Couch aptly expresses above, there is no difference in quality: the aesthetic effect of Maartens' stories is not inferior to that of Hardy's. A detailed examination and comparison of both collections of stories, undertaken in this chapter, aims to prove Quiller-Couch right.⁴³⁰

Hardy was already an established novelist with *Far From The Madding Crowd* (1874), his greatest success to that date, and long before Maartens published *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. This in spite of the mixed attitude, taken by the critics toward his treatment of certain themes. The debate over these issues considerably increased during his last phase as a novelist.⁴³¹ The

Changed Man and Other Tales): "Hardy's short stories: a reconsideration", *Studies in Short Fiction*, IX (1974), 75-84. Kristin Brady, on the other hand, labels the *Wessex Tales* as "pastoral histories", *A Group of Noble Dames* as "ambivalent exempla" and *Life's Little Ironies* as "tragedies of circumstance" (*The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present* [London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982], 48). Brady's book is the fullest critical analysis of Hardy's short stories yet written. On the complexities involving Hardy's attitude to social class, see Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1989), 129-154. Widdowson summarizes: "Hardy, in fact, lies athwart the whole system: the lower-class rural man who has entered the educated and privileged domain of a metropolitan cultural class, and cannot admit his origins; the poet who is forced to be a novelist [...] the entire fabric of his life is a mesh of fictions" (138); cf. also Douglas Dunn, "Thomas Hardy's Narrative Art: the Poems and Short Stories", in *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London: Macmillan, 2000), 137-154. Cf. also Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London: Methuen, 1977), as well as Carl J. Weber, "A Masquerade of Noble Dames". *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 58 (1943), 558-563; Joe Fisher, *The Hidden Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

⁴²⁹ T. O. Beachcroft noted: *A Group of Noble Dames* is probably Hardy's heaviest collection of stories, and also his most morbid. It includes the horrible story of "Barbara of the House of Grebe [...] an ultra-Gothic romance that seems all the more dreadful for being treated with Hardy's broadcloth realism" (*The Modest Art: A Survey of the Short Story in English* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 117-118).

⁴³⁰ On the context of the short story see Karl-Heinz Göller and Gerhard Hoffmann, eds., *Die englische Kurzgeschichte* (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1972); Paul Goetsch, *Literarische und soziale Bedingungen erzählerischer Kurzformen: Die Short Story*. Tübingen: Studienmaterial Englisch, Fernstudium für Englischlehrer Sekundarstufe II (Tübingen 1978); Günter Ahrends, "Ästhetizismus und Realismus in der englischen Kurzgeschichte der 'Nineties'", in Manfred Pfister and B. Schulte-Middelich, eds. *Die Nineties: Das englische Fin de siècle zwischen Dekadenz und Sozialkritik* (München: Fink, 1983, 248-274); Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Barbara Korte, *Die englische Kurzgeschichte* (Tübingen; Basel: Francke, 2003).

⁴³¹ "Maartens met Hardy for the first time in 1893 as "Gosse's friend the Dutch novelist" at Hardy's London residence, 70 Hamilton Terrace (Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], 337). In 1905 both received an honorary degree from Aberdeen University: "To Mrs Gosse", *Letters*, 231. On Thomas Hardy cf. Philip Aronstein, "Thomas Hardy", *Germanisch-Romanische Zeitschrift* VI (1914), 170-184; Patrick Braybrooke, *Thomas Hardy and his Philosophy* (1922) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969); Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1954); Concerning Hardy's literary appreciation, see the Introduction to *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.G.Cox (London and New York 1995 [1979]), xi-xlvii; for a concise selection of the critical reviews dealing

Letters give ample proof of Maartens' admiration for Hardy. In 1902, not long after the publication of *Some Women*, he wrote to Mrs. Gosse: "I am re-reading all Hardy; we have of course much in common from our very different standpoints and extremes of environment, but, surely his greatness must be palpable even to those who dislike his writing most."⁴³²

Hardy was mainly regarded as a novelist. His short stories were little taken note of.⁴³³ In the two collections of short stories examined here, both authors share a psychological interest in their female characters. In these separate case studies as they may be called, there is, ultimately, an unfathomable and unique blend of sense and sensibility in the characters of each of these women. Hardy's stories are enshrined in mystery, the veil is never entirely lifted, which gives them a touch of the gothic. Maartens' stories have none of that, but nonetheless there is a persistent and prevailing mystery in the characters of his women protagonists. The subtle and complex constellation in which the heroines find themselves emerges from the various circumstances of their past history, as well as from their present quandary, resulting from that past. The narrative techniques used by both authors are quite different. By projecting his characters into a distant past, Hardy gives them a flavour of romance. Even if probing into his protagonists' past is also part of Maartens' method, he does

extensively with the issue, see particularly xxiv-xxxvii: "Hardy's last three novels (more especially *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* [1891] and *Jude the Obscure* [1895]) received an amount of discussion much greater than any of his earlier works. This was largely due to the widespread controversy over their morality and their general attitude to life", xxvii; see for example Anthony Kearney, "Edmund Gosse, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, and the Repercussions of 1886", *Notes and Queries* (2000), 332-334; on Hardy's popularity in the 1890s, see also Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), 216-225; Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971).

⁴³² *Letters*, 203. In other, earlier letters to the same addressee, it says: "I walked into Sotheran's [...] and rashly purchased a beautiful complete Meredith and a ditto Hardy. As well take the two biggest, like an American. And *how* big Hardy is! Everyone of them, very big or just a little less" (203). Referring to a discussion with James Barrie, he reports: "I ventured the statement that Hardy was one of the two or three very greatest English writers now living, and found this met with acceptance, slightly to my surprise[...]" (127). But the greatest *laudatio*, probably of all, comes in a letter to Hardy by Maartens himself: "I am not going to be so impertinent as to praise your books to you, except in so far as I presume to register my own recognition of the greatest living English master of my craft" (205). Goetsch's concludes with regard to the critical reception of Hardy at the period that many readers were in favour of his fusion of poetry and realism, added to that the charm of his personality and deep sympathy for the suffering human being. That Hardy no longer presented a harmonic concept of the universe had no negative impact as yet on this appreciation, cf. *Romankonzeption*, 55; The similarity with the appreciation of Maartens is obvious: see H. Breuls, "Author in Double Exile: The Literary Appreciation of Maarten Maartens", unpubl. M.A. thesis, Regensburg University, 1985, 32-49, 105-116.

⁴³³ Introduction to *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*: "Not much need be said about Hardy's short stories: they appear to have been not widely or fully reviewed" (xxxvi). Concerning *A Group of Noble Dames* it quotes the *Academy* "that it was very characteristic in tragedy and in fantastic humour (22 Augustus 1891, XL, p. 153)" and the short notice in the *National Review* saying that "the author of the novels was hardly to be recognized here except by 'ingenuity of invention' and the 'art of terse and pointed narrative' (August 1891, XVII, p. 845)", xxxvii. For a concise and informative introduction to the stories, also relating how their early history is "intimately bound up with that of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" (143), see Norman Page, *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Cf. also Michael Millgate, "Hardy's fiction: some comments on the present state of criticism", *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 14 (1971), 230-236; Norman Page, "Hardy's Short Stories: A Reconsideration", *Studies in Short Fiction* 11 (Winter 1974), 75-84; Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

not situate them in an historic context, and his account is by no means tinged with a similar aura of romance. Whenever the occasion presents itself, Hardy's narrator reminds the reader that much time has elapsed since the events recorded actually took place. The narrative frame that re-tells the long forgotten fates of his heroines is set up for the sole purpose of establishing and then heightening the romantic effect. At the same time, however, by presenting himself as an historian with a genuinely genealogical interest, the narrator halts our mere drifting into a reverie world of pure romance.⁴³⁴ Thus, the romantic perspective of "things gone by" is blended with the modern psychological perspicacity of the realist:

The pedigrees of our country families, arranged in diagrams on the pages of county histories, mostly appear at first sight to be as barren of any touch of nature as a table of logarithms. But given a clue – the faintest tradition of what went on behind the scenes, and this dryness as of dust may be transformed into a palpitating drama. More, the careful comparison of dates alone – that of birth with marriage, of marriage with death, of one marriage, birth, or death – will often effect the same transformation, and anybody practised in raising images from such genealogies finds himself unconsciously filling into the framework the motives, passions, and personal qualities which would appear to be the single explanation possible of some extraordinary conjunction in times, events, and personages that occasionally marks these reticent family records. Out of such pedigrees and supplementary material most of the following stories have arisen and taken shape.⁴³⁵

This is Hardy's typical – if you like elaborate way – of expressing where his chief interest lies. Similar to Maartens, the psychological motives that propel the protagonists' actions are made intelligible through the narrative but Hardy's method is definitely more complex. He indulges in the conjuring up of a sentimental atmosphere by having each of his tales told by a different narrator, in the manner of a framework story. Of this, however, we are not aware until we reach the end of the first story, where it comes somewhat as a surprise to find ourselves present at a meeting of the Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club. The first narrator reveals himself to be one of the members of this honourable institution: "It was at the meeting of one of the Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club that the foregoing story, partly told, partly

⁴³⁴ In contrast to Maartens, Hardy insisted on the factual base underlying his fictions. According to Harold Orel, his "pride in his craft did not derive from invention, but from the sense that he had given life to reworkings of historical figures, and dignity to their motivations" (*The Victorian Short Story*, 102). George Wing explains that of the ten stories of *A Group of Noble Dames*, all but the last ("The Honourable Laura") are historical. He deals extensively with their literary sources and historical foundations: *A Group of Noble Dames: 'Statuesque dynasties of delightful Wessex'*, *Thomas Hardy Annual* No. 5, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1987) 75-101, 79.

⁴³⁵ 'Preface' to *A Group of Noble Dames* (London: Macmillan, 1891); quotations are from 'The Mellstock Edition of *The Works of Thomas Hardy in Thirty-Seven Volumes*, vol. XXII (London: Macmillan, 1920). In the same preface, Hardy expresses his gratitude to "several bright-eyed Noble Dames [...] who have given me interesting comments and conjectures on such of the narratives as they have recognized to be connected with their own families, residences or traditions; in which they have shown a truly philosophic absence of prejudice in their regard of those incidents whose relation has tended more distinctly to dramatize than to eulogize their ancestors." Compare this with Maartens' own account (or the reactions of part of his Dutch readership) of *The Greater Glory*: "Now everyone is reading me, but *only* to recognize 'portraits', personal

read from a manuscript, was made to do duty for the regulation papers on deformed butterflies, fossil ox-horns, prehistoric dung-mixens, and such like, that usually occupied the more serious attention of the members.”⁴³⁶

We are introduced to a group of gentlemen, well acquainted, even friends, who have gathering around the fireplace of one of the members of aforesaid club. Five of the ten members of the company tell their story before dinner, five of them afterwards. Although there are ten different storytellers, there are no differences in style and tone of voice. Assuming that Hardy was aware of this, it would seem to be a serious and unnecessary flaw in this collection of stories, were it not that, in reality, there is only one narrator. The men have not known the heroines of their stories personally; they only present their recollections of occurrences that once made a stir in their respective families or neighbourhoods. The end of each story contains some suggestion or idea, which serves as a path leading straight up to the next story.

The narrator guides us through the story in a somewhat obsequious style. We do not get that typical Maartensian sense of close intimacy that we experience in *Some Women*, where we seem to accompany the narrator rather than being guided by him. In Hardy, there is a kind of intimacy ‘once removed’ as it were: that of the men united then and there, around the hearth fire. Putting it in somewhat exaggerated terms and transferred to our own time it would feel, it is like being part of an audience invited to a television talk show: we are supposed to watch and listen to some respectable gentlemen, recollecting tales of the past. It is a frame story in which the frame itself causes a feeling of lapse of time between the actual occurrence of the tales and the telling of them.⁴³⁷

In Maartens, there is never such a frame; the narrator is instantly ‘recognised’ as belonging to the company of the very heroines themselves. From the beginning this annihilates the possibility of any sense of remoteness in time. Although the things the narrator tells may have happened years ago, there is an overall sense of present time throughout. There is either a substantial slice of the narrator recognisable in the main protagonist himself or he presents

scandals, and tittle-tattle. Everyone wants to be able to accuse me of having ‘put them in’ (“To Harry Spielmann”, 18.6.1894, *Letters*, 92).

⁴³⁶ Thomas Hardy, *A Group of Noble Dames* (1896) (London: Macmillan, 1920), 51; page numbers added to the quotations in brackets refer to this edition. Hardy implicitly parodies Chaucer’s “Legend of Good Women”, and Tennyson’s “Dream of Fair Women”, see Paul Turner, “A Group of Noble Dames” in *The Life of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 116-122, here 120; cf. also Ernest Brennecke, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Haskell House, 1973), 161. Several contemporary reviews refer to its similarity to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, such as the *Saturday Review* LXXI (20 June 1891), 757 and the *Academy* XL (22 August 1891), 153; see also Kristin Brady, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 84 and 208, note 20. Hardy wrote the largest number of short stories within 1888-1891, the period in which he started to use the term “Wessex” for his fictional world (see Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*, 112).

⁴³⁷ For the book edition, Hardy added appropriate links between the stories, see Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*, 100.

himself as an intimate acquaintance of the protagonist in question. An example of the first case is to be found in “Our Cousin Sonia” (*Some Women*) which opens with: “Ours is a numerous family”, in which the narrator presents himself as one of “the Maartenses” (170). An example of the other case is “Madame de Bragade,” where the opening sentence reads: “The first time I met Madame de Bragade, she said the worst thing I have ever heard fall from a woman’s lips. It was at a big dinner-party, and I had the honour of sitting next to her.”⁴³⁸ Compared to this, the narrator in Hardy’s second story, “Barbara of the House of Grebe” never misses an opportunity to revive our sense of remoteness from the events recollected here. On the occasion of that lady’s second marriage, the storyteller, presented by the narrator at the beginning of the story as the ‘Old Surgeon’, adds:

“In my childhood I knew an old lady whose mother saw the wedding, and she said that when Lord and Lady Uplandtowers drove away from her father’s house in the evening it was in a coach-and-four, and that my lady was dressed in green and silver, and wore the gayest hat and feather that ever were seen; though whether it was that the green did not suit her complexion, or otherwise, the Countess looked pale, and the reverse of blooming.” (82)

In the preface to the *Noble Dames*, Hardy professes his aim to be that “this dryness as of dust may be transformed into a palpitating drama” (v). As each story is gradually unravelled before our eyes, its dry and faded pages are mysteriously filled with sparkle and colour, like a composer’s score during a live performance. Yet even while something in that performance may touch us to the quick, what we get is, however, merely a semblance of life, the memory of a life lived so long ago that it may indeed have been no more than a figment of the imagination. In the slowly paced exposition, the dramatic climax we are expecting comes almost too late. Before we reach the end of the story, irony has crept in at the edges, pushing us permanently into a distance from the scene.⁴³⁹ With that irony penetrating all the pores of the narrative, we are emotionally kept at bay. The drama, if drama there is, has an artificiality

⁴³⁸ *Some Women*, 194.

⁴³⁹ Joseph Warren Beach pointed at this as early as 1922: “However interesting his theme, however true to life, he insists on embroiling his characters in action so strange and tangled as to produce on the reader’s mind an impression of artificial contrivance” (*The Technique of Thomas Hardy* [1922] [New York: Russell & Russell, 1962]). In the same work, Beach analysed Hardy’s use of irony as a major device in all of his writing. In “The Literature of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 1798 to the First World War”, he considers *Noble Dames* Hardy’s most successful group of stories (*A History of English Literature*, iv, ed. Hardin Craig [New York: Collier Books, 1962], 234). Hardy’s irony in *Noble Dames* begins in fact with the title, in which the word ‘noble’ is used as a pun, meaning ‘titled’ as well as ‘having high moral qualities’, see also Brady, *Short Stories*, 90, and Dennis Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), as well as Jil Larson, “Sexual Ethics in Fiction by Thomas Hardy and the New Woman”, in Jenkins, Alice and Juliet John, eds., *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (New York; Houndmills, England: Macmillan; St. Martin’s, 2000, 159-172).

that is not meant to touch us.⁴⁴⁰ Although Thomas Hardy's stories depart, as it were, from the image set before us in the preface, the narrator consistently manages to sustain the distance in time to the scene. When the dramatic climax finally comes, it keeps just short of what we had been expecting – that is to say, ever since it had been announced to be “transformed into a palpitating drama.” When poured out in carefully measured quantities, irony ineluctably diminishes the dramatic effect of the narrative. No doubt this had been the author's aim from the start; still, the reader's dramatic expectations persist, even while they gradually diminish as the story advances.

IV.3.2 *A Group of Noble Dames: Part One*

The irony of showing how people's deeds turn against themselves is not without comic effect. In Hardy's opening story, “The first Countess of Wessex”, the heroine never manages to come near her lover in spite of all her efforts, a kind of comedy of fate verging on the burlesque.⁴⁴¹ There is also comedy in the insistence with which Reynard is discouraged, again and again, to see his young wife: “You must not try to see Betty yet” (39). As the account of his predicament takes on a more and more ironical tone, the realistic impact diminishes. In all of these stories, irony is used to prepare for the surprise turn in the plot, heightening, paradoxically, its effect. Only when, as here, decreed by fate itself, does such an unexpected turn become palpable to our imagination. In Maartens' *Some Women* on the contrary, the

⁴⁴⁰ Later, Hardy called *A Group of Noble Dames* “rather a frivolous piece of work, which I took in hand in a sort of desperation during a fit of low spirits” (“To Lord Lytton”, 15.9.91, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, i, 239). Concerning his books in general, he wrote to Maartens: “It is a high gratification to me that so eminent a judge as yourself should be impressed by any book of mine – all of them having, as it were, come to pass by chance” (ibid., iii, 23.12.1902, 43).

⁴⁴¹ When Betty meets her husband for the first time after so many years of separation, his reaction is as follows: “Betty, I've never kissed you since you stood beside me as my little wife, barely thirteen years old! May I kiss you now?” Though Betty by no means desired his kisses, she had enough of the spirit of Cunigonde in Schiller's ballad to test his daring. ‘If you have courage enough to venture, yes sir!’ said she. ‘But you may die for it, mind!’ (44-45). All-encompassing and informative as it is, elements of burlesque comedy concerning the love-theme are not mentioned by Michael Irwin in his “From Fascination to Listlessness: Hardy's Depiction of Love”, in Charles P.C. Pettit, ed., *Reading Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 117-137. In his “Art and Aesthetics”, Norman Page examines the ways in which Hardy puts his cultural knowledge to use (Dale Kramer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 38-53, here 43-44). As in the passage quoted above, one detects a certain need in Hardy to show off his cultural accomplishments. The social pinnacle where Joost Schwartz resided made it quite unnecessary to point out the obvious. On the whole, little research has been done on Hardy's short stories. For a detailed and still valuable exploration of the various approaches to irony, see Phyllis Rice, *Hardy's Irony with particular reference to the Short Stories* (Unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Illinois, 1965), cf. also Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy: Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1982), and *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1978). Tracking down elements of transition in the Victorian novel, Goetsch observes that it was not forbidden to describe (more, at least, than in the 70ies), greyness and a monotonous universe, provided it was done, as Gissing in *Thyrza*, with subtlety, equity, and in a highly serious manner. He was certainly not allowed, as Hardy in *Noble Dames* had done, to adopt the ‘modern attitude’, showing that: “to be veracious it is necessary to portray only persons of poor or bad natures” (“Contemporary Literature”, *National Review*, XVII [1891], 845, quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 52).

irony has a tragic note. It dwells on the inalterability of fate as such, on the human condition of submission to fate, not on a playful adversity to our wishes.

“The First Countess of Wessex” is actually a story of adventure. It springs from a mother’s fatal decision to give her daughter (by the name of Betty) in marriage at so early an age as thirteen. What follows is a simple story of an adolescent girl who, as circumstances change, acts according to her lights. When she grows into maturity, her interests gradually run counter to her parents’ expectations. The principal motive, from which the dramatic impulses of the plot ensue, is of a psychological nature. In “The first Countess of Wessex,” the girl’s premature marriage turns for the good in the end. The ironic device increases the element of theatricality even while it corroborates the moral of the story. This is expressed by the narrator, when he refers to Reynard, the husband:

He was of all men then living one of the best able to cope with such an untimely situation as this. A contriving sagacious, gentle-mannered man, a philosopher who saw that the only constant attitude of life is change, he held that, as long as she lives, there is nothing finite in the most impassioned attitude a woman may take up. (45)

Unpredictable changes in life may turn any event into a contingency, hence into an ironical adventure. This ineluctable fact irons out part of the drama: finally there is only change, and nothing is left for us insignificant mortals to hold on to. All these stories are presented as an ironical and playful impingement upon the ephemeral quality of emotions: when there is a change of circumstances, feelings change as well.

In “Lady Caroline, the Marchioness of Stonehenge”, that lady secretly disposes of the corpse of her lower class husband whom she had secretly married. He had had a stroke while visiting her. In chilling narrative it is related how she fears for her “reputation, about which she was now exceedingly anxious,” and she “began to be ashamed of her mad passion for her late husband and almost wished she had never seen him.” (104) Knowing of the existence of Milly, a lower class woman who had been in love with her deceased husband previous to her secret marriage, Lady Caroline hatches out a lugubrious plan she proposes to Milly: “You lost him in life; but you may have him in death *as if* you had had him in life.” (106) Milly’s response shows Lady Caroline the depth of the girl’s love for her deceased husband: “A strange light, as of pain, shot from the Lady Caroline’s eye, as if for the first time she begrudged to the young girl the position she had been at such pains to transfer to her; it showed that a slumbering affection for a husband still had life in Lady Caroline, obscured and stifled as it was by social considerations.” (109) This might be taken for social criticism were it not, in fact, irony in disguise, providing a clue to the central interest in both authors: the exploration of the female psyche. It is not the love for her late husband that tortures Lady

Caroline, but her envy of Milly's ability to feel so deeply for him. The irony which persistently permeates life's banal manifestations is carried still further: in order to exculpate herself, Lady Caroline frantically attempts to reverse her previous machinations when she discovers that she is pregnant; attempts that are nothing short of ludicrous. At the time these stories were written, illicit pregnancy still led to a social ostracism. The theme is absent in Maartens; it may have been an issue too embarrassing for him to tackle. It must have crossed his mind though, considering that all the aspects concerning sexual relations between men and women – adultery in particular – occur in his prose, even if by implication.

Both authors are united in their particular concern with women of the upper class who are subjected to the rigours of social convention. They show the irreversibility of fate in the lives of these women, due to a particular disposition of character, embedded in a set of haphazard circumstances.⁴⁴² When Arthur Quiller-Couch reproached Hardy for his deterministic attitude to life, it might have escaped him that Maartens' attitude to life was at least as deterministic as Hardy's, the only difference being that Hardy's determinism tended to be morose and heavy-handed whereas Maartens' determinism veered towards the caustic and cynical.⁴⁴³

The next story, "Lady Mottisfont", is the wry story of a rejected bastard. Dorothy, the young protagonist is tossed hither and thither between the care of her natural parents.. When Sir Ashley Mottisfont proposes to Philippa, he hastens to request her to look after a baby, presently in the hands of a villager's wife in the parish. Soon the new Lady Mottisfont cherishes motherly feelings for the child. After some time has elapsed, though, Sir Ashley tells her of a noble lady whom he had known previous to their marriage and who had wanted to adopt a child. He was now of the opinion that it would have been wise if that lady had adopted Dorothy, as the girl would have had far better chances in life than they were ever able to provide. When this lady, a Countess, comes to live in the vicinity, the two parties soon get acquainted. Before long, Lady Mottisfont notices the physical resemblance between the child and the Countess. She surmises that the Lady was Dorothy's natural mother and that her own husband was the father. After a period of painful indecision she decides to be no longer in the

⁴⁴² "The compassion for victims of the English class system (both the privileged and the "low-born") is a salient feature in all of Hardy's novels and a crucial element in his presentation of the many characters in *Noble Dames*, frustrated or injured by oppressive social conventions." (Jill Larson, "Thomas Hardy", in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 135, 168); see also Peter Calvert, *The Concept of Class: An Historical Introduction* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

⁴⁴³ Preface, *Letters*, p. xv. However, there is the difference in time as well as outlook that places Maartens much closer than Hardy to the Victorian realists. In Hardy's novel *Two on a Tower* (1882), Swithin St. Cleeve, the astronomer protagonist, already sees the universe as chaotic, not made for mankind. Melancholy distrust, rooted in an awareness of metaphysical abandonment of this kind, is absent in any of the Maartensian protagonists.

way of an adoption of the girl by the Countess, particularly as Dorothy herself obviously wishes to go and live in that far more beautiful and opulent environment .

In spite of Hardy's conviction that fate plays with people in a way, not dissimilar to the way a cat would play with mice, the usual harshness of fate is softened in this case by a subtle display of irony. After some time the Countess considers that she has to abandon her child again, in view of her coming marriage, Oddly enough, this confirms Philippa's surmise that the Countess was in reality Dorothy's mother. If there is satire in this – a mother's concession to conventionality– there is cynicism in the cruel revenge of Lady Mottisfont:

He [Sir Ashley Mottisfont, her *quondam* lover and father of her child Dorothy] had no sooner mentioned Dorothy's name than Lady Mottisfont showed symptoms of disquietude. "I have not acquired any dislike of Dorothy," she said, "but I feel that there is one nearer me now. Dorothy chose the alternative of going to the Countess, you must remember, when I put it to her as between the Countess and myself." "But my dear Philippa, how can you argue thus about a child, and that child our Dorothy?" "Not *ours*", said his wife, pointing to the cot. "Ours is here." – "What, then, Philippa," he said, surprised, "you won't have her back, after nearly dying of grief at the loss of her?" – "I cannot argue, dear Ashley. I should prefer not to have the responsibility of Dorothy again." (134-135)

The very conventions that restrict the freedom of the two women provide them with an opportunity to eschew their responsibility. In this light the title of the collection is indeed ironical, even a little cynical: The stories are not just about anybody, but also about a group of *noble dames*.⁴⁴⁴ Social conventions are depicted with extreme rigidity, almost to the point of implausibility: a Countess refers to her own child as 'the foundling', this to the very *father* of the child. There is absolute disavowal of any social status for the illegitimate child. When the father asks his daughter, almost in a casual manner, "Where would you like to live besides?" the cynicism is even pushed further. As if Dorothy had any choice where to go, having been told before that neither her natural nor her former adoptive mother wants to have her. Still, as if this were not enough, the narrator hastens to add that "she was never altogether lost sight of by Sir Ashley." (136)

All of this does not bear any resemblance to *Some Women I Have Known* where change of circumstances does not cause change of character; in fact there seems to be no change at all.

⁴⁴⁴ One reviewer criticized Hardy for not being subservient to moral codes in *Noble Dames*: "American Puritans are to be warned against *Noble Dames* and the passions exhibited by Hardy's 'beautiful pagans', who, in their peasant simplicity, pursue men at will, catch them, and have large families" (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 83 [September 1891], 641-2). Hardy detested editorial censorship, as in the case of his *Noble Dames*, see Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*, 102. Finally, his "disgust with the strictures of Grundyism reached such a blazing intensity that he could no longer continue to write fiction." (*ibid*, 102). On Hardy's problems with publishers' censorship, ever since his beginnings as a novelist in the mid-1860s, see for example. J. A. Sutherland, "Hardy: Breaking into Fiction", in *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (London: The Athlone Press, 1976), 206-225; cf. also Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of His Art", in Albert J. Guerard, ed. *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), 34-45.

Things are being narrated as they were first perceived, with the understanding that they are bound to remain that way. Existence is dominated by paralysis, rather than by chance. In either point of view, however, there is a tragic aspect that is not without a deeper irony of life's blind mechanisms. Both authors write about women who have in common that their destinies are beyond their control. Their fate was thrust upon them, so they may ultimately be pardoned.

Still, Maartens' scope is not as far removed from the "fatalism of Hardy", as Quiller-Couch would have it in his defence of Maartens.⁴⁴⁵ Quiller-Couch's determination to save Maartens from what he regards as a stigma prevented him from noticing the fatalism in Maartens' short stories. 'Q's frustration with the influence of French naturalism on English literature might have marred his critical acumen.

Maartens' stories seem to be a collection put together at random; written down, it appears, as they just sprang up in the narrator's mind. The only feature they have in common is that the centre of interest is taken by a female protagonist. In *Noble Dames*, there is a segment in the narrative at the end of each story that provides a link with what is to follow: a further member of the club, compelled by what he has just heard, is induced to contribute another story. Thus, the story told by the old surgeon sets the rural dean going: "The story had suggested that he should try to recount to them one which he had used to hear in his youth, and which afforded an instance of the latter and better kind of feeling, his heroine being also a lady who had married beneath her, though he feared his narrative would be of a much slighter kind than the surgeon's. The club begged him to proceed, and the parson began." (96)

From the beginning, Hardy's stories are more elaborate. Their frame is created and sustained by these kind gentlemen, succeeding one another in telling a story. This creates a peculiar atmosphere of proximity, as when watching a play, sitting close while not being part of it. The cameos 'played' by the kind old gentlemen outshine the artificial stiffness of the protagonists of the stories, so that, in a way, the frame outweighs the setting.

As a principle, the behaviour of Hardy's characters is determined by outer circumstances rather than by inner emotional necessity. With a few exceptions, they are crushed by the very weight fate thrusts upon them, leaving them no other choice than to languish in resignation, mechanical submission instead of passionate resurgence. Although we have been prepared all the way for their submission to fate, we expect them – just for once – to rebel against it. Unwilling as we are to accept their total abjection, we can never entirely get rid of the suspicion that it is the author – rather than fate – who forces them into submission at any cost.

⁴⁴⁵ Preface, *Letters*, p. xxi.

“Barbara of the House of Grebe”, the second story, has an air of the Gothic. It is Poe-like in its effect from the moment when Edmond’s statue is secretly put in Barbara’s shrine, up to the point where it becomes life-like in its eerie radiance in the middle of the night.⁴⁴⁶ Although reminiscent of the great American master, Hardy’s psychological motives make him reluctant to let any of his stories slip beyond realistic bounds. The appearance of the statue of the former lover enhances the impression that we are dealing with a story told by an old man at the hearth fire, a story that happened a very long time ago indeed.

Descriptive narrative is more preponderant in Hardy than in Maartens. Even when the dramatic action is paramount and should be dealt with accordingly, the narrator does not tarry to provide more detail, instrumental to the psychological implications one is invited to ruminate. This holds true for the stories throughout: their dramatic potential is considerably reduced by the predominant presence of the narrator. There is none of the immediacy of dramatic impulse, as in *Some Women*. Hardy’s stories do not give us the opportunity to experience the drama ourselves; we do not live the scene. Our recognition of what we read is but indirect. We are being told about it and there is an end to it. Still, there are rare instances where the analytic narrative turns into something close to the indirect speech, used by Maartens. Here is an example, taken from “Dame the First”. Mrs. Dornell finds out that her daughter Betty, the heroine of the story, has a secret lover:

Betty at length appeared in the distance in answer to the call, and came up pale, but looking innocent of having seen a living soul. Mrs. Dornell groaned in spirit at such duplicity in the child of her bosom. This was the simple creature for whose development into womanhood they had all been so tenderly waiting – a forward minx, old enough not only to have a lover, but also to conceal his existence as adroitly as any woman of the world!⁴⁴⁷

Whenever it appears in Hardy’s stories, class criticism is considerably less obtrusive compared to the harshness with which it is expressed in *Some Women*. Yet as in Maartens, the social criticism emerges from the degree of psychological subtlety in evoking the woman’s suffering. In “Barbara of the House of Grebe”, the power that man holds over woman, as decreed by social conventions, is demonstrated by the brutality with which the male protagonist, Uplandtowers, treats his wife. There is not the slightest inkling that Uplandtowers

⁴⁴⁶ T.S. Eliot says that the story portrays a “world of pure evil”, and he wonders what morbid emotion prompted Hardy to write it: *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1934), rpt. The Folcroft Press, 1970, 62. Maartens usually expressed his opinion on Edgar Allan Poe with unreserved praise, as in an interview he gave to a magazine called *Bee* (New York, 16 April 1907). Here is an example, however, with one important reservation: “I cannot say Poe impresses me, and yet he is of course one of the three names in American literature. The horror is often nearly perfect, but that ‘nearly’ spoils it all. I wonder, is fictitious horror possible? In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, one of the very best tales, the last paragraph spoils, by exaggeration, the whole thing’ (“To Mrs. Gosse”, 5.1.1896, *Letters*, 122).

⁴⁴⁷ *Noble Dames*, 21.

is unaware of the cruelty of his behaviour. His is the sort of callous behaviour of one who would not hesitate to kick a pregnant mare in the belly, in full view of a third party. In this case that third party is the reader. Once more, we are neither inclined nor motivated to *feel* with the characters, but content to study their behaviour rather than sympathise with them, as if they belonged to another age and, hence, to another world. This may seem a shortcoming, were it not that there is comic irony in this, giving the story its flavour, polishing it up as it were, removing the dust. It oddly complies with the frame of all of these stories: the club of hobbyists, telling each other tales. Since everything is seen through the prisms of the old men, this kind of narrative description has the intrinsic quality of subduing the dramatic effect of almost everything said.

Such is the case, too, in the third story, “The Marchioness of Stonehenge”. A victim to social conventions, the Marchioness disavows the two most important events of her life, marriage and motherhood. The indirectness of perspective does not render the narrative – with its inherent social criticism – less plausible. In fact we are dealing with a kind of adventure story, in which a quaint occurrence gives a quite unpredictable and surprising turn to its dénouement.⁴⁴⁸ Actually this occurs in all of these stories. The lapse of time is inexorably accompanied by change, the outcome of which being beyond any mortal’s control. As time passes, the exterior events have an impact on the character’s way of perceiving life’s ineluctable course. The events lead to a shift in the outlook on life; in due course the character changes opinion about matters which had seemed unalterable before. Within this mechanism, human beings imagine themselves to be free agents, whereas in reality they are but puppets, unaware of the strings of fate they are attached to. “Lady Mottisfont” is a case in point. The narrator takes great care to give us a neat elucidation of the relevant contingencies of the story: we easily wrap ourselves in the illusion of reality. In this case it soon becomes evident that the root of the evil lies in the main motive of these women: initially they had only wanted the child for their selfish designs. As in the previous stories, the dénouement, implausible as it may seem at first, does not appear so at the end.

In *Some Women*, fate – or whatever one wishes to call the force that predestines the female protagonists to act as they do – is not some indifferent exterior force; it comes from within. Maartens’ concept of the workings of fate is diametrically opposed to Hardy’s in *Noble Dames*, where the narrator entertains the reader by the revelation of a character; he is willing to accept the ineluctable outcome from the very outset. In contrast to Hardy’s descriptive illustration of his figures in *Noble Dames*, it is a matter of implication rather than description

in *Some Women*. Implication is the art of evoking sentiments, fears and frustrations, not expressing them verbally, but making them hover there, in the niches between the ‘sparsely clad’ and sober sentences.

Another thing that may have induced Quiller-Couch to compare Maartens with Hardy, is the manifestation, in both writers, of a microcosm they represent throughout in their prose works. These stories, as well as the novels, grant the reader access to an intimate world very much concerned with itself. An important aspect of this intimacy is the recurrence of protagonists in different novels and stories, as for example in *Noble Dames*:

The season drew near when it was the custom for families of distinction to go off to Bath, and Sir Ashley Mottisfont persuaded his wife to accompany him thither with Dorothy. Everybody of any note was there this year. From their own part of England came many that they knew; among the rest, Lord and Lady Purbeck, the Earl and Countess of Wessex, Sir John Grebe, the Drenkhards, Lady Stourvale, the old Duke of Hamptonshire, the Bishop of Melchester, the Dean of Exonbury, and other lesser lights of the Court, pulpit and field. (129)

Sir John Grebe we have encountered before, the Drenkhards are soon to follow. In *Noble Dames*, community is restricted to the upper classes of that particular region in the South of England known by its fictitious name of Wessex, comprising the counties of Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somerset and Devon.⁴⁴⁹ In *Some Women*, however, the protagonists are not so narrowly placed: they live all over Europe. The setting is cosmopolitan. We are introduced to an aristocratic community of people who know each other and who meet regularly, in spite of the geographical distances between them. Since Maartens’ aristocratic women all live according to a particular social code with a fixed set of rules, the geographical location is irrelevant.

Notwithstanding the social delimitations of the setting, this perspective turns Maartens’ collection of short stories into a book in which national boundaries, cultural and geographical, are irrelevant. Hardy’s intellectual and social hemisphere in *Noble Dames*, however, does not surpass the boundaries of the provincial gentry of Wessex, even if one holds that this gentry life, idyllic as it may appear from the outside, is in reality quite harsh. Having Hardy’s Wessex in mind, there is a parallel between that ironically portrayed yet idealised world, and Maartens’ attitude towards ‘his’ Holland: equally mocking yet more benevolent. In the conclusion of the first story of *Noble Dames*, the narrator refers to the setting of these stories as “dear delightful Wessex, whose statuesque dynasties are even now only just beginning to

⁴⁴⁸ In this sense of an adventure story, we are closer to Maartens than it appears at first sight, as part of *Some Women*, at least, could be considered as such: Think for example of “Meess” and “Our Cousin Sonia”.

feel the shaking of the new and strange spirit without, [...] where the honest squires, tradesmen, parsons, clerks, and people still praise the Lord with one voice for His best of all possible worlds” (51-52).⁴⁵⁰

Considering Maartens’ obvious admiration for Hardy’s prose, it may be assumed that Maartens’ Holland can be seen as a sort of Wessex – in the sense of an overarching vision rather than as a concrete place. The difference lies in the author’s perspective: nowhere does Hardy explicitly profess to describe manners, morals and individuals outside of Wessex, whereas Maartens says that when his tales take place in Holland, it is but by the merest accident. This indirectly corroborates Quiller-Couch’s remark that Maartens felt “more at ease” in the company of noble dames. In the conclusion to the first part of *Noble Dames*, the club members are reminded that it is time for dinner, and the reader is somewhat abruptly pulled back into the frame.

IV.3.3 A Group of Noble Dames: After Dinner

The second part of *Noble Dames* is aptly called “After dinner”, as most of the members think it worth their while indeed to return to the club to amuse each other with stories around the hearth fire. The link with the first part is assured by the churchwarden, one of a number of narrators to follow. He announces that the story he is about to tell deals with a father’s constancy of feelings towards his offspring as opposed to the unpredictable feelings of some mothers, as had been depicted in the previous story. The motive is based on the assumption that in contrast to the previous story, the father’s affection is less prone to be corrupted by considerations of status and material wealth than the mother’s.

This story, “The Lady Icenway”, revolves around a marriage bearing upon the plot as a heritage of the past while heavily burdening the actual situation.. Insofar as a premature and disastrous marriage has an ominous impact on all further developments, the story is reminiscent of *Jane Eyre*. Compared to the previous stories in this gallery of noble dames there is a waning of dramatic impulse, even if the tragic sequence of events resulting from that marriage is sufficiently persuasive to suspend the reader’s disbelief. Lord Icenway has a name with emblematic significance. He has an ‘icen’ way of constructing his own misfortunes indeed, leaving him entirely responsible for his ill-fated marriage. In Hardy as well as in

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Lea Hermann, *Thomas Hardy’s Wessex* (1913) (London: Macmillan, 1925); John Barrell, “Geographies of Hardy’s Wessex”, in K.M.D. Snell, ed. *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990*, 99-118, also cf. Merryn Williams, *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (London: Macmillan, 1972), passim.

⁴⁵⁰ Compare this to Maartens’ conclusion to the preface to his novel *The Greater Glory*: “It is only by the merest accident that my scene is laid in Holland, a country whose inhabitants, I suppose, are no better, nor

Maartens, the grief of the men seems insubstantial compared to that of the female protagonists. The men are like tools that lie around, only to be picked up by the narrator when necessary to give shape to the much larger sorrow of the women. These husbands live with their spouses without having the slightest inkling of the passions, fears and needs that beset these women.⁴⁵¹ Perhaps this is the most striking similarity between these two – obviously very different – collections of stories: the discrepancy between the male and female imagination in the emotional perception of reality. The destinies of these women inexorably move towards misfortune, and passive acceptance of fate is the central issue, in *Some Women* as well as in *Noble Dames*. We are aware of an unfathomable yet persistent undercurrent in which the mysterious laws of the human psyche indomitably determine the characters' actions. And yet for once it seems that Maartens is the more fatalistic of the two. As Kristin Brady has rightly pointed out, one sees the protagonists in *Noble Dames* "in terms of their humanity rather than their class." If this is equally true for *Some Women*, her following assessment is not, i.e., that the reader considers part of the suffering of these women as the result of injustice and prejudice rather than of fate. In *Some Women*, things are as they are: there is no escaping from fate. Brady's final conclusion, though, is again valid for both: The reader is stimulated to reflect upon "the central moral issues which have led to such suffering and stifling of human affections: questions of birth, inheritance, class, family and sex."⁴⁵² In this story, a suspicion arises that Lady Icenway's secret motive for visiting her former lover is sexual desire. The moral lesson that can be distilled from both *Noble Dames* and *Some Women* throughout is particularly valid for this story. ultimately everyone is responsible for his own grief, Lady Icenway for the inconveniences that her marriage entails, her first husband for neither seeing his son nor his still beloved ex-wife and Lady Icenway's second husband for not getting what he desperately craves, an heir. It is the fatalistic attitude, the inescapability from fate that Quiller-Couch criticises amongst other things in his preface to the *Letters*:

Along with the falling price, or 'estimated value', of narrative in fiction has declined the price of 'character', its old supposed opponent. By 'character' one used to understand an individual will operating through reason upon circumstance, and a happy ending or a tragedy would be brought about by the triumph or the misleading and crushing of that active rational will. It is always hard to fix starting points for fashion: but I hazard that in

worse, than their neighbours. My common sense tells me they cannot be, though my widely-travelled heart insists, with sweet unreason, that the land of my birth is the best and happiest spot on the globe."

⁴⁵¹ Brady points out that Anderling (of 'The Lady Icenway') is the only male character in the volume to receive any attention (up to the point of disapproval) at all (*Short Stories*, 92). Cf. Barbara Tilley "New Men? Exploring Constructions of Masculinity in Late Nineteenth-Century New Woman Novels", *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences, Sept. 64.3 (2003), 918-919. University of Florida, 2002.

⁴⁵² Brady, *Noble Dames*, 94.

our country this new fashion may be dated back beyond the War (which largely accounts for its present impetus) to the fatalism of Hardy and the non-moral but doctrinal practice of that sincere artist Mr. George Moore.⁴⁵³

Quiller-Couch attempted to exclude Maartens from all the latter-day determinists and realists, which he considered Hardy to be part and parcel of. In trying to rehabilitate Maartens by distinguishing between him and the realists, he missed his mark. Particularly in *Some Women*, the fatalism is rooted in the characters themselves, rather than in their circumstances. It causes their fate to be so tragic. In the case of the Duchess Eleanor for example, the tragedy lies in the very sensibility that compels her to act in the way she does, thereby extinguishing the faint light that had only just begun to break upon the perpetual greyness of her existence. Through implication the author directs our gaze directly into the inner recesses of the sensibility of the heroine. In *Noble Dames* there is no such poignant and acute experience of the tragic, because here the author takes us far back into a remote past, mellowing as it were, in the guise of a mystery, the fatality attached to each of these dames. Again we are near the realm of the Gothic: the curse that besets the heroines has a hidden reason that remains forever undisclosed.

The irony of the omniscient author in “Dame the Sixth: Squire Petrick’s Lady” is most subtle. More than in any of the others, there are elements that can be labelled as satire, such as the exaggeration of Timothy’s infatuation with his bastard son’s origins of ‘noble blood’. The sixth dame, Annetta, confesses to Timothy, her husband, that the boy she has born him is not his son. The changing of a will serves as a plot impetus, a classic device in Victorian prose writing.⁴⁵⁴ It is Timothy who changes his grandfather’s will. As is often the case in both these collections of stories, events turn out to be unpredictable, disrupting the life of the protagonists. With subtle irony Hardy’s narrator reveals that Petrick is, in reality, an impostor and a snob. Maartens does not always proceed very subtly when he imparts details on scoundrels. He is rather blunt in his description of the moneylender in “Madame de Parfondrieu” for example.⁴⁵⁵

The impact on the reader of Hardy’s class-criticism results from its being embedded in veiled irony, hardly perceptible and yet strong. His class-criticism sometimes turns into satire. Class-

⁴⁵³ *Letters*, Preface, xxi.

⁴⁵⁴ It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Maartens appears to be obsessed with wills, inheritances, marriages for money and other Victorian money matters, characteristic of mid-Victorian novel-writing. Autobiographical elements that might in part account for that: his training as a lawyer, his marriage to a wealthy heiress, and his belonging to the Dutch patrician class through his mother, whereas his father was a Polish Jew without any creditable social roots.

⁴⁵⁵ *Some Women*, 83-84. Equally embedded in the narrative is the social criticism of the law profession, of which, being a lawyer himself by training, hardly any author can have a more outspokenly negative opinion than Maartens.

criticism in Hardy's prose is rooted in a narrative in which the mechanisms of a rigid social system are reflected in the remorseless behaviour of one human being towards another. This is how Timothy reacts when he finally discovers that his son is his natural son after all:

Timothy went home, and the boy ran out to meet him; whereupon a strange dismal feeling of discontent took possession of his soul. After all, then, there was nothing but plebeian blood in the veins of the heir to his name and estates; he was not to be succeeded by a noble-natured line. To be sure, Rupert was his son physically; but that glory and halo he believed him to have inherited from the ages, outshining that of his brother's children, had departed from Rupert's brow for ever; he could no longer read history in the boy's face, and centuries of domination in his eyes. His manner towards his son grew colder and colder from that day forward; and it was with bitterness in his heart that he discerned the characteristic features of the Petricks unfolding themselves by degrees. Instead of the elegant knife-edged nose, so typical of the Dukes of Southwesterland, there began to appear in his face the broad nostril and hollow bridge of his grandfather Timothy. (166-167)

It is an exception, as is the case here, when Hardy describes his protagonists rather from within than from without. The narrator's viewpoint is so close to that of the character that sometimes it becomes difficult to discern who the focaliser is, the character's or the narrator's. Still, as a rule, we are listening to the voice of the narrator.⁴⁵⁶ Because of the narrative distance maintained towards the character, we never entirely slip under the protagonist's skin. That distance prevents the irony from slipping into pure satire. In *Some Women*, there is no subtlety in the modulation of the narrative voice, no seemingly imperceptible ingression, one mode transmogrifying into the other. When compared to Hardy's mellow yet obsequious tenor, Maartens' short stories consist of point-blank realist descriptions. Even when he deals with noblewomen in a noble setting, there is none of the decorum of style, which Hardy uses to describe his noble Dames. Maartens comes straight to the point. Consider the follow-up of the introductory remarks about "Madame the Parfondrieu":

Her married life began happily enough. She liked her father's friend, who had always treated her kindly, for Parfondrieu could not but be courteous to a woman. Of life she knew nothing: she was quite contented to obey her father, and become the devoted wife of a splendid gentleman, who gave her so much in return for the small gift of herself. She was twenty-five before she married. She was thirty before she understood how her husband dishonoured her. She was nearly forty before she realised why he had married her, and that all the money was hers. His faithlessness killed, once for all, all her happiness, all her gentleness, all her trust and respect. It prepared the ground for the gradual discovery of the power, which was still left in her: she hardened in the realisation

⁴⁵⁶ According to Maire A. Quinn, Hardy believed that the short story form was 'primarily oral, and that it resulted in the employment of narrators in his tales as 'a deliberate conjunction of art and artifice, the oral recitation of the written word ("Thomas Hardy and the Short Story", in *Budmouth Essays on Thomas Hardy: Papers Presented at the 1975 Summer School*, ed. F.B. Pinion [Dorchester: Thomas Hardy Society, 1976], 74-85, 76).

of her wealth. She was a plain woman, whom husbands did not love, but she was a rich one whom they had to consider. (84-85)

Perhaps the author is averse to any such form of stylistic decorum because he does not consider it to be an aesthetically appropriate means to his subject. Maartens revealed the lives of these women as they were: barren in their daily monotony, cluttered with the paraphernalia of wealth, desperately clinging to the vestiges of their lives.

As we have seen in some of the novels, familiarity with his subject can mean a threat to objectivity, where instances abound in which the author has a hard time keeping his personal involvement at bay. In *Some Women* though, there is no such danger. Objectivity is of another nature in *Noble Dames*. Here the narrator makes sure that there is no room left to speculate on the character's motives as to why they do – or do not – commit a particular act. In all of these stories we are aware of these motives. In the case of Timothy Petrick, for example, it is obvious that his grandfather would instantly disinherit him if he found out the truth about his – wrongly – alleged origins. All this we have either been told explicitly, or it is implied in the narrative. When the author indulges in more description in order to deepen the relief, it is done with an infallible sense of balance in dealing evenly with all the material at his disposal. Consequently, we seem to be watching the centre of interest from a distant viewpoint. Embedded as it is in a continuous flow of descriptive detail, there is a gradual shift towards that centre, without ever putting the deliberately sustained distance in jeopardy.⁴⁵⁷

Maartens does not display such meticulous care for descriptive detail as Hardy. He keeps his introductory sketch as brief as he possibly can, and once it is finished, he instantly proceeds with dramatic dialogue. In “Madame de Parfondrieu”, one of the earlier stories, we quickly assume why old Breluchon, the money-lender, wants his daughter to marry the Marquis of Parfondrieu. Not satisfied with having robbed that aristocrat of his possessions, he schemes to complete his pernicious act – as always perfectly legal, technically speaking – by obtaining the man's title of nobility for his daughter as well. In the following, the narrator hastens to get to the thick of the plot: the emotional and psychological idiosyncrasies of the heroine. We are overwhelmed by the impression of witnessing a drama – quite the opposite, as in Hardy, of having been told a story that happened a long time ago and never without an air of dust about

⁴⁵⁷ In reaction to a particularly vitriolic assessment by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Hardy emphasized the distancing device of the story framework in *Noble Dames*: “to guard against the infliction of ‘a hideous and hateful fantasy’ as you call it, the action is thrown back into a second plane or middle distance, being described by a character to characters, and not point-blank by author to reader” (*Pall Mall Gazette* [10 July 1891], quoted in Norman Page, ed., *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*, 394).

it. In almost every scene, the dramatic impulse focuses our attention on even the slightest whiff of dialogue between two protagonists.⁴⁵⁸

As there is seldom an instant of indirect speech in *Noble Dames*, the effect is the greater when it does occur unexpectedly. There is such a moment when Timothy suddenly realises his mistake, the changing of his grandfather's will. It hits him like a sudden revelation: "Had he only left the first will of his grandfather alone!" (164) If there are but few such moments of indirect speech in *Noble Dames*, there is even less dialogue. For that reason, it has more impact than the dialogue in *Some Women*. In both books, pivotal points in the plot consist of eruptions of dialogue. In "Squire Petrick's Lady", a story of about 3600, words there are only two such instances. In the first, the doctor corroborates Timothy's belief that his wife's confession was based on an illusion (161), secondly, when Timothy vents his frustration regarding his son (163).

Harsh class criticism resides in the very irony of Timothy's reaction to the truth: having gone out of his way to prove unmistakably that his son is indeed his natural son, that fact, when confirmed, deeply disappoints him. The last part of the following comical passage illustrates the breaking down of dramatic effect by means of the narrator's satirical interjection:

He was sixteen years her senior; old enough to be compassionate. "My poor child, you must get to bed directly! Don't be afraid of me – I'll carry you upstairs, and send for a doctor instantly." "Ah, you don't know what I am!" she cried. "I had a lover once! Twasn't I who deserted him. He has deserted me; because I'm ill he wouldn't kiss me, though I wanted him to!" "Wouldn't he? Then he was a very poor slack-twisted sort of fellow. Betty, I've never kissed you since you stood beside me as my little wife, barely thirteen years old! May I kiss you now?" Though Betty by no means desired his kisses, she had enough of the spirit of Cunigonde in Schiller's ballad to test his daring. "If you have courage to venture, yes sir!" said she. "But you may die for it, mind!" He came up to her and imprinted a deliberate kiss full upon her mouth, saying, "May many others follow!" (44-45)

In Hardy's seventh story, "Dame the Seventh. Anna, Lady Baxby", we are given specific detail concerning the historical period: the middle of the seventeenth century, i.e., the Civil War. As a matter of course, Lady Baxby sides with her husband in the Civil War that divided the country in two parts and parties. Unbeknown to Lord Baxby, she tries to persuade her brother, a commander of the rebelling parliamentary troops, to join the royalist camp, an attempt that is doomed to fail. During a discussion on the subject of the Civil War, her husband professes that he doubts her brother's valour, to Ann Baxby's extreme dismay. Consequently, this lady, whose family pride is irretrievably hurt, decides to join her brother's side. As she secretively leaves the house, dressed in her husband's garments, she is

⁴⁵⁸ As in the scene between Madame de Parfondrieu and her son, immediately after he has informed her of his intention to marry a woman unknown to herself (*Some Women*, 88-89).

approached by a woman who tells her, in the colloquial tongue of the region, that she had been waiting for ‘him’ for two hours.⁴⁵⁹ In the flash of realising her husband’s infidelity, Lady Baxby’s determination to counteract her husband politically by changing sides, is totally swept away by her jealousy. It eclipses in the face of this woman who, as Lady Baxby sees it, challenges her position and apparently has been breaking in upon her territory. With brilliant irony, the narrator’s concludes the scene:

There was not the least doubt that Lady Baxby had been mistaken for her husband by this intriguing damsel. Here was a pretty underhand business! Here were sly manoeuvrings! Here was faithlessness! Here was a precious assignation surprised in the midst! Her wicked husband, whom till this very moment she had ever deemed the soul of good faith – how could he! Lady Baxby precipitately retreated to the door in the turret, closed it, locked it, and ascended one round of the staircase, where there was a loophole. “I am not coming! I, Lord Baxby, despise’ee and all your wanton tribe!” she hissed through the opening; and then crept upstairs, as firmly rooted in Royalist principles as any man in the castle. (179)

We are both surprised and amused by this sudden change of heart: the husband proves to be more important than the brother, their marriage more important than family pride.

“Dame the Eighth, The Lady Penelope”, opens like a fairy tale. Mellifluously, the narrator gives us the story of a beautiful lady who had been courted by three suitors at the same time: “The said gallants were a certain Sir John Gale, a Sir William Hervy, and the well-known Sir George Drenghard, one of the Drenghard family before mentioned.” (186) By way of introduction, we had initially been led to assume that the story would deal solely with the fate and history of the Drenghards (or Drenkhards).⁴⁶⁰ The narrator hastens to add that “with this, however, we are not now concerned” (185), implying that there might be more tales in store, to be dealt with some other time. The story about Lady Penelope that began like a fairy-tale romance, is yet the only one among the *Noble Dames* that truly has tragic aspects. There is a slice of unmitigated Freud in the circumstance that a woman, feeling guilty about her second husband’s death, succumbs to her grief and feelings of guilt, and dies, whereas, objectively, there was no culpability involved in the matter whatsoever.

⁴⁵⁹ Maartens only occasionally uses colloquial expressions, usually in a burlesque manner to indicate differences of class and behaviour, particularly in his collection of peasant stories *My Poor Relations*. Preceded in this by George Elliot and Dickens, Hardy was acutely aware of the possibilities of the colloquial style, and relied on it, for example, in characterising his rustics, see: Nicolaus Mills, *American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 120. For further treatment of this aspect of Hardy’s style, see Albert Guerard, *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949) and *Thomas Hardy* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963). J.B. Smith writes that Hardy generally represents dialect impressionistically, “using a sprinkling of non-standard forms which are hardly likely to hinder comprehension.” In *Noble Dames*, for example, men speak more broadly than women, as Squire Dornall and his wife in ‘Dame the First’, and the upper classes speak less broadly than their inferiors, as Lady Baxby with the ‘wench’ in ‘Dame the Seventh’ (“Dialect in Hardy’s Short Stories”, *Thomas Hardy Annual* No. 3, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1985), 79-92, here 87.

Guilt, culpability, and sin, they are the typical Maartensian themes that keep cropping up after *The Sin of Joost Avelingh*. Sin looms largely and is rooted in the Christian tradition. In Maartens' works sin is a *conditio sine qua non* of human existence. In Hardy, there is none of that; there is only fate, haphazardly stuck to each character like a label onto a suitcase. The deliberations with which a character – like a puppet on a string – attempts to give a direction to the course of fate give this story its persistent ironic flavour. For that same reason, we can hardly look otherwise at Lady Penelope than with an ironic twinkle in our eyes: eventually, tragic notions are numbed by the reader's awareness of the futility of all her conjectures.

Fairy tale romance, tragedy, then ironic overtones, and finally morose cynicism: Lady Penelope's own dictum "Have patience, have patience, you foolish men! Only bide your time quietly, and, in faith, I will marry you all in turn" (187) has ominous consequences in becoming true. A stillborn child and the death of her first two husbands gradually destabilize her mentally and in the end she perishes miserably. All this does not seem so very different from the realistic plots in Maartens' prose: it all depends upon the angle from which the fate of each character is delineated. There is a weakness in the character of these women: human fallibility, that accounts for the impending doom, regardless of all other circumstances that conglomerate, accelerating the movement pending in its direction. Maartens describes the fate of particular women in such conditions, whereas Hardy draws a picture of the fate of mankind as such, within which the fates of these women are embedded. Returning to our story, in the course of only a few months the husband of her choice died of his extreme proclivity to convivial living (as if, indeed, to bear out his name: Drenkhard), and the Lady Penelope was left to become mistress of his house. Her third husband, Sir William, affected by the gossip that his wife was partly responsible for her second husband's death, decides to move out without actually deserting her. When she comprehends the reason for his departure, the emotional impact is devastating, resulting in her quick mental and physical dilapidation:

It is not known when, or how, the rumours which were so thick in the atmosphere around her, actually reached the Lady Penelope's ears, but that they did reach her there is no doubt. It was impossible that they should not; the district teemed with them; they rustled in the air like night-birds of evil omen. Then a reason for her husband's departure occurred to her appalled mind, and a loss of health became quickly apparent. She dwindled thin in the face, and the veins in her temples could all be distinctly traced. An inner fire seemed to be withering her away. Her rings fell off her fingers, and her arms hung like the flails of the thresher's, though they had till lately been so round and so elastic. (194-195)

⁴⁶⁰ The narrator's uncertainty concerning the correct spelling of the name of the family to whose house he is referring, intensifies the notion of remoteness in time and the mystery attached to it.

In Maartens' stories, gossip is rife, enveloping the main characters and impinging on their state of mind. He could just as well have written the passage quoted above. He may have drawn his inspiration both from the plot and the style of such passages. Up to the end, a fairy-tale kind of sad charm permeates this narrative recollection of Lady Penelope's faith. Due to this, the eighth story comes closest to the stories in *Some Women I Have Known*.

The ninth story opens with a description of a nobleman, the Duke of Hamptonshire. Even if the narrative is more elaborate, it strikes one as typically Maartensian. Hardy's description, however, sharply works out the contrast between the reputation of the man's forebears and his own actual appearance:

He came of the ancient and loyal family of Saxelbye, which, before its ennoblement, had numbered many knightly and ecclesiastic celebrities in its male line. It would have occupied a painstaking country historian a whole afternoon, to take rubbings of the numerous effigies and heraldic devices graven to their memories on the brasses, tablets, and altar-tombs in the aisle of the parish church. The Duke himself, however, was a man little attracted by ancient chronicles in stone and metal, even when they concerned his own beginnings. He allowed his mind to linger by preference on the many graceless and unedifying pleasures which his position placed at his command. He could on occasion close the mouths of his dependants by a good bomb-like oath, and he argued doggedly with the parson on the virtues of cock-fighting and baiting the bull. This nobleman's personal appearance was somewhat impressive. His complexion was that of the copper-beech tree. His frame was stalwart, though slightly stooping. His mouth was large, and he carried an unpolished sapling as his walking-stick, except when he carried a spud for cutting up any thistle he encountered on his walks. (201-202)

All this does not go beyond the description of a type of landed nobleman, not dissimilar to the way Maartens would describe such a person. The difference lies in the obviousness of the satirical note. Hardy is more circumspect and allusive in his satire.⁴⁶¹ Maartens' narrative is less objective than Hardy's, due to the fact that his anger – despise of the upper classes – haunts his stories. Often he uses specific words to give a positive or negative connotation to the type of protagonist he is dealing with. Such a term is 'stalwart', which always has a positive connotation. As a rule, his heroes are 'stalwart', and he seems to be unable to deny his characters an appropriate physical appearance corresponding to their high moral standards. After having described the duke himself, he depicts his residence, creating the environment and, hence, the atmosphere of the setting, thus paving the way for the actions to unfold and the individual characters to emerge. But instead of instilling these characters with life, his 'noble' protagonists are left somewhat stultified.⁴⁶² This brings to mind Quiller-Couch'

⁴⁶¹ Compare this to Maartens' description of the duke in the first story of *Some Women*, 9-10.

⁴⁶² Concerning the method of characterisation, Hardy believed that plausibility was a *conditio sine qua non*. According to him, exceptional events could be of use to an author in the rendering of his vision only as long as he managed to camouflage their unlikeliness: F. E. Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 268. The author, Hardy's second wife, refers to a diary entry of 14 January 1888. According to her, Hardy made use of such exceptional events in order to elucidate the powers of destiny and the psychic

remark about Maartens feeling “more at home in their company.” *A Group of Noble Dames* is one of the few examples in Hardy’s work of his writing about people in the higher ranks of society. In this particular case it is clear why he chose to write about them: The inhabitants of the great houses of the Wessex countryside appealed to his imagination, susceptible as he was to the antiquarian and picturesque side of such a setting. In *Noble Dames* that setting was vivid and beautiful, but the inhabitants of the setting were cast in a conventional mode and were therefore anaemic rather than brimful of life. An early critic who sought to evaluate Hardy’s achievement as a novelist, pointed at what he called his sympathetic appreciation: “the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but without that sympathy.”⁴⁶³ This is the Maartensian quality we have been eager to point out all the way. In all of Hardy, this talent is perhaps most flavoursome in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. In *Noble Dames*, if at all, it can be detected in the rendering of the various storytellers only. There is no such sympathy in the description of the female protagonists, which is, perhaps, where these stories differ most from *Some Women I have Known*.

The next story has a Maartensian theme *par excellence*: a life wasted because the secret appeals of the heart to pursue its course had not been followed. The difference lies in the method: Hardy’s story is entirely descriptive until it culminates in the dramatic dialogue between the Duchess and Alwyn, the curate. When both were young, Emmeline’s father had forced Alwyn to forsake Emmeline, after their affection for one another had been disclosed. Incidentally, the dramatic climax of Maartens’ “The Duchess Eleanor” comes to mind. In that story the absence of a final reckoning in the form of dramatic dialogue was highly exceptional for Maartens. To be forced to leave with so many things left unspoken must have been even more aching to the heart, yet such were the unwritten laws of class distinction.

In the dialogue between the Duchess and the curate, it emerges that she is still willing to elope with him after so many years, although she is, by now, the wife of the Duke of Hamptonshire. Alwyn quailed at the very idea. The fatality of the moment is all the harsher, since Emmeline knows about Alwyn’s plans to emigrate to America, as he can no longer bear to live in England. He might as well have taken her with him, were it not for his pusillanimous nature.

evolution of his characters. Cf. Helmut E. Gerber and W. Eugene Davis, *Thomas Hardy: An annotated bibliography of writings about him* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1973).

⁴⁶³ In Ernest Brennecke, ed., *Life and Art by Thomas Hardy: Essays, Notes and Letters Collected for the First Time* (New York, 1925), quoted in Goetsch, 94. On the other hand, Goetsch also points at the tragic and deterministic aspect in Hardy, insufficiently remarked by the critics (102), and that Hardy considered the process of modernization to engender the dissolution of the traditionally rural order, causing man’s deracination (121). In Maartens, we always feel that the precipice is near, but often this is not so much implied or described as anticipated, as it were, in the behaviour of the protagonists, as in *The Greater Glory* and *Dorothea*.

The scene is as dramatically powerful as any of Maartens's, but Hardy's impulse to romanticise his plots induces him to a highly unrealistic train of events that strains our credulity.⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in spite of our somewhat incredulous attitude at the close, we also feel, as we do in Maartens, the tragedy of a missed opportunity between lovers – due, once more, to social conventions. Yet Emmeline and the Duchess Eleanor, Hardy's characters and Maartens' characters, are worlds apart. Like most of the noble Dames, Emmeline is somewhat stilted, whereas, with Eleanor, the reader feels every aching pulsation of the heart, sharing her despair in the realization that Goertz' presence can no longer be maintained. As a consequence of that very despair, she finds the courage to send him away, choosing to remain imprisoned within her unhappy marriage. Hardy induces our imagination in conjuring up, for a little while, a ghost from the past, long dead and gone, but we cannot hold on to some element of mystery, as we do, for example, in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Although the author professes that his stories are authentic, they have a legendary ring about them. The suspension of disbelief is in jeopardy; one doubts if these noble dames could ever have actually existed.⁴⁶⁵

The last story, "The Honourable Laura", is a final example of a surprisingly unrealistic plot, where Hardy borders on the implausible.⁴⁶⁶ Again, great attention has been given to the natural setting. In these stories, as in all of Hardy's, nature is an essential constituent of the human drama of life. Moreover, it is an intrinsic part of his method of communicating his understanding of the nature of life. His protagonists, small and frail creatures, are embedded and enveloped, nurtured and sometimes destroyed by a nature, tremendous and all-powerful. Whether it is a wood, a heath or the old grey walls of Oxford, quite often, nature's manifestations almost become living entities, oppressing frail specimens of humanity, pushing

⁴⁶⁴ Kristin Brady judges that "'The Duchess of Hampshire' contains the mixture of absurdity and pathos that characterises the *Noble Dames* stories written in the early 1890s, but lacks the moral coherence and sociological acuity of the latter narratives" (*Short Stories*, 83).

⁴⁶⁵ In his chapter called, "The Sophisticated Tale and the True Short Story", Wendell V. Harris comes to a similar conclusion. As the attempt at a sophistication of the plot backfires into its artificiality, he ranges the *Noble Dames* with the first category: "Hardy distanced his stories about the lives of gentlewomen who have long been dust by having them told successively by the members of an antiquarian club. Unfortunately the interest of the stories is distanced also, for the events in each remain in an insulated past; never are they made vivid. The affairs of the characters seem so far removed that the outcome is of little moment; the result is a singular lack of tension in the narration" (*British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979], 89).

⁴⁶⁶ According to F.B. Pinion, the scene in Wilkie Collins' novel *Basil* (1852), in which Basil is tempted to hurl Mannion over the precipice inspired Hardy in his conception of "The Honourable Laura", *Thomas Hardy, Art and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 6; The story first appeared as "Benighted Travellers" (in *Harper's Christmas*, 1881), its heroine being changed from 'Lucetta' to 'Laura' when it was included as "The Honourable Laura" in *A Group of Noble Dames* (F. B. Pinion, *Hardy the Writer: Surveys and Assessments* [London, Macmillan, 1990], 317).

them to the background.⁴⁶⁷ In the face of destiny, omnipresent and all-encompassing force, the actions of these dots in the background are perpetually doomed to be insignificant.

In “The Honourable Laura”, the heroine of that name and Smittozzi, her professed lover, take up brief residence at the Prospect Hotel. They have hardly settled in when a carriage emerges out of the snowy greyness of the landscape: It is her father, Lord Quantock, accompanied by his nephew, James Northbrook, who is to assist him in retrieving his daughter Laura. When in the course of the inevitable encounter, the nephew is too persistent in interrogating his niece, her father summons him to relinquish his endeavours. To his (and to Smittozzi’s) evident surprise, James then avows that Laura is his wife by law. He confesses that he married her secretly in spite of her father’s opposition to such wedlock. Therefore he now feels entitled to his – father-in-law’s – assistance in recuperating his wife, rather than having to help the old man in bringing his daughter to reason. We understand that, given the circumstances, Lord Quantock is appalled at hearing this and, embarrassed beyond endurance, instantly leaves the premises. Given the fact that the narrator is an old gentleman with an inclination towards the sensational, the reader should not be surprised that there is more in store. It is difficult to imagine though that Lord Quantock is forever to repudiate his daughter afterwards. Yet, even while considering the mores of the day, there are no grounds to assume that anything dishonourable or indecent has happened between Laura and her professed lover, Smittozzi, at least not enough to justify a duel. We can but assume that Smittozzi is quite innocent, even if he is somewhat bohemian, as may be concluded from the description given by Laura’s father: “A man cleanly shaven for the most part, having the appearance of an opera-singer, and calling himself Signor Smittozzi.”(225) Smittozzi is a born and bred Londoner, an opera singer, who donned himself with an Italian sounding name for artistic reasons. So why should Northbrook not believe – or pretend not to believe him when he pledged that he was ignorant of Laura being married? Being innocent, there is no reason why Smittozzi should accept the challenge to a duel, considering the serious risk of losing his life. Having read the eight stories of *The Noble Dames*, like eight nebulous clouds at the back of a rural landscape, there is still that bond with the group of kind old gentlemen, gathered round the fire to tell each other these

⁴⁶⁷ For example, Eustacia Vye (*Far from the Madding Crowd*) feels imprisoned on the heath whereas in *Lis Doris*, the heath, in its overwhelming energy, symbolizes freedom from the oppressions of civilisation. On Hardy’s concept of nature, see Rüdiger Görner, “Zur Metaphysik der Erzählten Natur”, in *Streifzüge durch die Englische Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1998), 135-140, as well as Phillip Mallett who examines how Hardy practised his concepts into the narrative. Hardy insisted that his works offered ‘impressions’ and not ‘convictions’, but these impressions “are engraved on steel rather than on wax” (“Noticing Things: Hardy and the Nature of ‘Nature’”, in *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, 155-170, 158; cf. J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

stories. Together, these men symbolize Hardy's fatalistic philosophy of life, permeating all that we have been told by them.⁴⁶⁸

All this is very different from the succession of ladies in *Some Women I Have Known*, where there is no such attempt at establishing an all-encompassing sense. Instead we have a procession of destinies collected by a narrator who, in a fictional sense claims to have known them all – in some way or other. The fact that we are dealing with fiction seems immaterial in view of the veracity with which the narrator objectively evokes their fate.

In a sense, the nineteenth century had been an age of growing self-consciousness. Yet, as that age moved across the threshold into the new century, it lost a sense of unity in the process; society started to atomise. Preoccupied as each individual increasingly became with his own fate, so was the author with the lot of each of his heroines in *Some Women*. Insofar as Maartens shifts his concentration to the emotional sensibilities of his characters, he adheres to the psychological tendency in the literature of the day. In contrast, however, to many of his contemporaries, he does not pursue his goal analytically, as the new fashion was. His inspiration does not allow the aesthetic vitality to be impaired by painstakingly dissecting the opinions and doubts of his heroines.

The female characters in *Some Women* cannot be fully described through word and action: last but not least, the narrator achieves the completion of his image by implication. That is to say, his words touch upon regions beyond the explicit message, to suggest all the subtleties and overtones of the mood in which he observed it, and to which he instinctively responded. This is the case when the artist is entirely writing within his range. It requires a level of sophistication, which Maartens possessed by dint of social status, upbringing, and artistic temperament.

Hardy's reference to Schiller's *Cunigonde* in his first story of the *Noble Dames* strikes the reader as oddly incongruous. It is not without the pedantry, slightly touching, of the self-educated countryman. As if naively pleased with his cumbersomely acquired learning, he cannot refrain his narrator's temptation from showing it off. However, no amount of painstaking study Hardy is known to have undertaken could ever have got him within sight of achieving that intuitive good taste, that instinctive grasp of the subtleties of class differences, which is the native heritage of one bred from childhood in an atmosphere of a high culture. Therefore, and regardless of his infallible instinct for a mood of a setting by means of poetic description: when he trespasses into territory beyond his intrinsic limit, he cannot get beneath

⁴⁶⁸ As for example elucidated by F.R. Southington, *Hardy's Vision of Man* (London: Chatto, 1969), passim.

the surface. His *Noble Dames* are a collection of stilted figures, romanticised conceptions of noble ladies, fidgets of his imagination, rather than living characters of flesh and blood.

IV.4. The Author within his Range: *The Woman's Victory*: Maartens' second volume of short stories

Introduction

Between the publication of *The Healers* and *The New Religion*, another volume of short stories by Maarten Maartens appeared: *The Woman's Victory*. As the title suggests, the central characters are again women.⁴⁶⁹ With this volume Maartens by no means broached a new topic – on the contrary. A mere look at lists of girls' and women's magazines and periodicals, will suffice to give a notion of the extent to which this issue had grasped the attention of the general reading public.⁴⁷⁰ *The Woman's Victory* precisely balances on this borderline between a girl's adolescence and a woman's adulthood. As such they touch upon the "new girl" as well as the "new woman". These twenty-two stories, although shorter and written in a more light-hearted vein than *Some Women I Have Known*, contain, nonetheless, penetrating flashes into the darker recesses of the female psyche. In situations that are mostly exclusively made up of dialogue, the often-staggering contrast between the worlds of men and women is implied magnificently. Maartens needs but half a dozen lines to evoke the entire history shared by two people. It is evident that the characters could not have acted otherwise than they did, given their situation. Many of the stories are like quick – yet infallible – grasps of some outstanding facet of the heroine. Ultimately though, the character remains shrouded in mystery. The veil is never entirely lifted.

"The Woman's Victory"

The Woman's Victory opens with a story of less than ten pages, bearing the same title. Having been married for only two months, two young people are in the midst of their first serious conversation. Obviously, this tête à tête is going to change their relationship quite

⁴⁶⁹ Maarten Maartens, *The Woman's Victory* (Short Stories) (London: Constable, 1906). The author dedicated the volume to his daughter Ada, then eighteen years old, "with fond thoughts of life's consummate sweetness, and brave thoughts of its consummate pain." Pages added to the quotations refer to this edition.

⁴⁷⁰ An example of such a compilation is to be found in Sally Mitchel's study on the girls' culture of the period. In the introduction, it says: "Girl's culture suggested new ways of being, new modes of behavior, and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women (except in the case of the advanced few). It authorized a change in outlook and supported inner transformations that had promise for transmuting woman's nature (*The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915* [New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995], 3; as well as the extensive bibliography, 219-246.

considerably. From the very start, the reader dreads the pending debacle. At the end of the splendid dialogue, which actually constitutes the entire story, the enticing question remains whether or not she married him solely for his money after all. As many others in this collection, this story provides the liberating experience of encountering a Maartens capable of looking at womanhood from all sides, untrammelled by his own idealistic projections.

“A Love Song”

In the next little story, “A Love Song”, the quick draft of the lives – and ‘lifelessness’ – of the characters overwhelms the reader in its suggestive power, putting an odd strain upon his imagination, so that one feels almost as lame and limbless as the characters themselves. The less space the author chooses to have at his disposal, the greater the dramatic impact of his stories. In one stroke, he boldly and sarcastically portrays the life of the couple in their feverish pursuit of happiness, made possible by their newly acquired richness. The difference of temperament and character – of living in mentally different worlds – is swiftly displayed. Instead of the man, as it is usually the case, it is now the woman who has a very sober outlook on life, matter-of-fact, without a scrap of imagination.

The exchange between master and main servant, concerning the future of a young servant couple in love, is a masterful depiction of the extreme difference in their outlook on life, as much as a page of dialogue can possibly render. The story unexpectedly takes a personal turn when the lady finally addresses her husband by his Christian name, Guy, and the reader infers that their happiness was not what it might have been. Now they will at least try to help two of their servants in their pursuit: in giving the assurance that they can remain in service after their marriage. The projection of the idealisation of love, with the possibility of its realisation in the lives of this young couple, freshly in love before their eyes, gives us another glimpse of the author’s persistent view of the inalterable pusillanimity of a life of leisure. The energy wasted in the incongruous keeping up of appearances, a self-asserting vanity bound to be in vain, it is all the more striking because the writer so successfully portrays the mediocrity of the so-called high-life.

Maartens succeeds in conveying so much with so little means, evoking the modulation of a voice, implying the meaning of facial expressions:

“Do you think I am too old?” “No,” she answered, uncomfortably, wondering whether he was looking at her grey hair. “Thank God no man is ever too old to talk nonsense.” “God?” “God. Do you disagree?” “No. Oh, no. No, no.” He glanced askance at her. His lips twitched. “But you’re right. Youth is the time for nonsense – the time when we don’t *know* that it is nonsense. All the difference lies there. Oh, there’s nothing diviner on earth than a folly we deem to be sense.” “Hush!” she said. “Hush!” “They wouldn’t understand

me,” he said. “Who would?” “I,” she said. And again their eyes met, in embrace. “And the months slip by,” he murmured presently; “and the young grow old. It’s a stale truth – to the old. But the young don’t know.” He glanced up at the straight back in front of him. “Poor wretches: A mercy for them! How could they bear to wait if they knew that nothing else does?” And the carriage drove in silence down the slope. “Guy,” she said suddenly in a whisper, “we must let them marry – these two.” (28-29)

This conversation has led to a rapprochement between the main protagonists. It brought to their attention that they still harbour deep feelings for each other. In helping their servants they did themselves a favour too. The realism of the dialogue is mellowed by sweet melancholy. The regained intimacy between them is symbolised by a magnificent description of nature reminiscent of Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). When Maartens gives a detailed description, it is often rather concise, as if the author were somewhat reluctant to do so. Often, a little more would have been desirable: in the face of the author’s predilection for dialogue, we would have wished to deepen our impression of a landscape, outlined to us by his narrator as briefly as could possibly be. Rarely, there is such a perfect blend between dialogue and description, culminating into a moment’s epiphany. This is the case in the following quotation. Nature herself is gathering her forces, unleashing her evocative powers:

And they drove, in the glorious summer midday, through the sleepy little town of Fitching. Sleepy though it seemed, it was alive with summer gladness. In the street a couple of dogs were playing; the heavy fragrance of the florist’s stocks and roses hung upon the moistness of the watered roadway; all about the grey church tower the pigeons were fluttering and pairing; a rider passed, his steed neighed fiercely to the carriage mares; a great flood of heat fell across the white front of the houses; a girl looked out of an upper window: a young shopman opposite blew a kiss to her, and she returned it. Outside just where the last straggling houses ended, in turning a corner, they came upon half a dozen haymakers, dancing, hot, unkempt, ungirthed, amid the scents of hay, to the sounds of a cracked concertina. And the country spread white before them, heavy with the deepening weight of its own golden and green fertility, drowsy and aching beneath the strength of its mighty Lord and Lover, in plenteousness of sunshine and sweetness, of birth and increase of life. He stood up in the victoria, and, bending forward – “Thomas,” he said, “you may put up the banns for you and Molly. Look out, you young fool! What on earth – !” “It’s all right, sir,” gasped Thomas, bringing back the horses to the middle of the road. “Please, sir, I didn’t mean any harm about Molly. We’re honestly sweet on each other; and cook, she says – ” “Very well, we can talk about that afterwards. Meanwhile marry as soon as you like.” He sank back into his seat. For a moment husband and wife looked at each other in silence: her eyes were full of tears. Presently he drew gently nearer, and, behind the unconscious lover’s back, in the sight of heaven and earth, the trees and the birds and the flowers, he softly kissed her cheek. And they drove on, into the woodland, out of the silver glare into sudden golden shade. They drove on, amid the changing scenes of massed and varied foliage, bright underwoods and spreading branches, chequered with every tint of green and glitter of golden light. The deep recesses of the forest were alive with hidden singers ringing out alternate praises of the swelling

summer's day. And the hoofs of the cheerful horses played across the velvet turf. (31-32)⁴⁷¹

Maartens as well as Hardy channel their creative impulse instinctively into pictures, Maartens foremost in his short stories, Hardy in his novels, film-scripts *avant la lettre*.⁴⁷²

“Sir Geoffrey’s Theory”

Although it contains less than twenty-five pages, the third story, “Sir Geoffrey’s Theory” has the oddity of being divided into four titled chapters, thus creating the impression of an ultra-short novel rather than of a short story, as if in that way the author wanted to evoke rather than deal with the thematic density implied. In fact it is neither the one nor the other. In its artificiality it is the odd one out in Maartens’ short stories. The story is about a widower whose son is crippled in an incongruous and absurd dancing accident at the age of eight. In Maartens’ work physical suffering is an important theme, not in the least because of its autobiographical overtones. It is Joost Schwartz breaking in upon the story. We are in the company of Joost Schwartz with his personal history, his bad health, the semi-invalid state of his wife, his anti-vivisectionist views, his contempt for doctors and medical science, his opinion on the sanctity of life and so on, rather than in the company of Maarten Maartens the author, too overt an intrusion, impairing the authorial distance. Where it should be Sir Geoffrey having to come to terms with his son’s disability, it is Joost Schwartz’ feelings and opinions we get, in a significant flash of autobiography:

So often he had mocked in his own solitude at the medical science of our day, which concentrates all its ingenuity on prolonging the agonies of cancer or of consumption – at the modern philanthropy which picks up all the little wretches that can only live to suffer,

⁴⁷¹ Not only Hardy comes to mind. The conditioning impact nature can have is also portrayed in a similarly striking way in Maupassants “Le Baptême” (*Oeuvres Complètes: Miss Harriet* [Paris: Flammarion, 1918], 201-202).

⁴⁷² Upon this pictorial quality of the short story, Henry James based his conviction that the short story could achieve its own kind of excellence. It could solve some fundamental artistic problems in a way that the longer forms could not, see: John Edmund Savarese, ch. 6, “Henry James: The Tale as Picture”, in *Some Theories of Short Fiction in America in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978), 247-308, particularly 249-254. Amongst the critics dealing with the impact of the visual arts on Hardy’s method, J.B. Bullen analyses how Hardy’s visual sensibility was sharpened by Ruskin and Frédérique Brunetière, with whom Hardy shares the view, in his own words, that “art involves a disproportioning – (i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion) – of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence ‘realism’ is not art” (F.E. Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1891* [London: Macmillan, 1928], 299, quoted in Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], 13-14). As far as the cinematographic aspect is concerned, Oscar-winning Irish writer and director, Neil Jordan, has a way of writing about Graham Greene’s novels that, without in the least assuming any comparison between Maartens and Graham Greene, reminds one of Maartens’ novels in contrast to his short stories: “When you read his stuff, it seems very cinematic because you can touch and even smell the atmosphere he creates. Often, he has great beginnings and has a magnificent way of setting up templates for drama. But then the development of them is terribly interior as they will tend to centre more around moral dilemmas. That is probably why he hasn’t been filmed too well.” (*The Observer* [28 March 1999], 7).

and builds them up into conscious endurers of this misshapen lot. They understood these things better in a truer, healthier civilisation – the Greek and the Romans, with their *euthanasia*, their exposure of the misbegotten. They understood it, and we? Or whole nineteenth century leechcraft prolongs the pain it is unable to remove; our whole modern morality nurtures the conception that sorrow is in itself a beautiful thing; our whole vaunted civilisation becomes one vast machine for the intensification of human endurance. And what is the outcome? A world's despair. (53)

“The Marseillaise!”

Maartens might have been directly inspired by Hardy's “Dame the Seventh. Anna, Lady Baxby”, from *Noble Dames* to write this story. Here as well, the narrator insists that the story took place a long time ago, “a page from an old book, unwritten, sweet-scented, yellow with years. The whole thing is forgotten: all its writers, and readers, long silent, are now passed away” and “a page from a family history, dead and buried in a poet's heart.”(58) Also, the setting is deliberately historic: the Napoleonic occupation of the Netherlands, at the close of the eighteenth century. “Dame the Seventh. Anna, Lady Baxby”, is equally set in a historic background. In both stories we are shown a woman's pride and passion in one sweep and in an equally fierce style. The contrast between male and female sensibility, as exemplified by the protagonists Elizabeth and Edward, is unsurpassed by any of the other stories in *The Woman's Victory*:

“Edward,” she panted, and all her passion seemed to rise to her lips. “You laugh, and you sing, and your country bleeds! My father looks grave – you talk of a comedy. I weep – you bid me sing a love-song!” Not before long, her determination and devotion will make Edward aware of his duties, inducing him to act for his country. When he is taken prisoner and condemned to death, Elizabeth assails the enemy “Citizen-Commandant”, who has power over life and death, with imperturbable courage, like Puccini's Tosca did in similar circumstances. In contrast to that lady, however, she pleads her case in a manner that is unerringly steady in its quiet belief in justice – against all odds. Eventually she triumphs. Even if this woman's capacity of self-sacrifice is exaggerated, and even if she is meant to exemplify all courageous women, it is still this particular woman, Elizabeth, whom we see and feel in her battle against the oppression personified by the commander.

“Herrisdale”

After having been refused by the lady he proposed to, Lord Herrisdale increasingly makes a fool of himself by persisting in his endeavours to conquer her. All of these stories have the

effect of a flashlight suddenly thrown into a semi-dark room, showing us people in the middle of some crucial conversation, on the verge of crisis, caught by the situation of the moment:

In the sweet smell of the rain her words fell softly, like icedrops, upon his heart. "I am very, very sorry. You do me too much honour. Any woman would be proud to accept what you offer, if she could." "There is one thing more I should like to say," he answered hurriedly. "Will you let me? I am very rich –" All the ice froze firm in her face as she turned towards him. "You don't understand," he continued hoarsely. "You don't know what I'm going to say. Don't look like that at me please. I wasn't going to say that I wanted you to take me for my money. Please don't think me as big a fool as the others do." "I don't," she said humbly. "I mean, of course, I don't think you are a fool at all." She looked up into his hot young boyish face. They were children, both of them, that had not fifty years to divide between them. "What I wanted to say was this. Let a fellow say it and have done. I've got heaps of money, and a big position, and all that sort of thing. Why, I've got half-a-dozen livings. What is a chap like me to do with half-a-dozen livings? I have always had all that money, ever since I remember, and I've always been Lord Herrisdale. Well, I've made a beastly fool of myself. I beg your pardon, but it's true." "Don't beg my pardon so often, but say exactly what you want to say." (80-81)

Initially it seems we are given, once more, the type of the rich upper class spoiled brat, bathing in wealth purely by birth and heritage. As the dialogue unfolds, Lord Herrisdale proves to be a deeply insecure person, yet honourable at heart. He is firmly imprisoned in the privileged environment he was born into. There is deep despair in his seeking the help of this particular woman to set him free of his clusters. The tragedy resides in his half-conscious awareness that his privileged position enhances, paradoxically, the mediocrity of his existence.

As a general tenor of *The Woman's Victory*, one might say that there is a constant allusion to the greater humanity of women, their insight, sensibility, moral courage and unselfishness. In 'Herrisdale', however, the tables are turned. The woman's victory has bitter taste here, there is nothing noble about it. 'Herrisdale' is a harsh, realistic story of a wealthy man who commits suicide after believing, rightly so, that the woman he married accepted him merely because of his money. His suicide has an extra cynical note, leaving her a fortune much larger than she would have needed in order to pay for the mortgage on her father's house.

"The Bargain"

Maartens is most at ease when he is within his range: Most of the stories again deal with women and men of the upper classes. These stories are again interspersed with auctorial comments, and many a time the fictive situations are indirectly, or even plainly autobiographical. Yet it does not seem to matter, in view of the natural ease with which the author creates his characters embedded in their particular milieu. Protagonists as well as the setting strike us as 'true to life' as the phrase went – the *conditio sine qua non* to be met by

any writer with the urge to be taken serious by the literary establishment of the day. Such a story is “The Bargain”. There are reminiscences of *Her Memory* in the atmosphere and manner in which the protagonist seeks to alleviate his sorrowful longing for his wife. Although physically present, she is virtually lost to him and to the world, due to her mental illness. The tale contains some of Maartens’ most splendid type descriptions. In fact it consists of a single scene, evoking before the inner eye the tragic life of the artist who is aware that he is talented but not a genius.⁴⁷³

“Diamonds”

If “Diamonds” presents, once again, the Maartensian theme of ‘law versus equity’, it provides above all an outstanding example of the importance of plot in generating and sustaining the illusion of reality. In this case it unerringly leads up to a woman’s ultimate victory. Without giving the plot away, suffice it to say that the couple is reunited by an extraordinary coincidence. When Harry Stretten discovers that the love for his wife is at stake, he acts entirely according to the requirements of the plot, as it were. It is enticing to see how he pursues his aims with courage and decision, behaving in a manner that seems to have a logical momentum of its own.

“A Drop of Blood”

Most of stories in *The Woman’s Victory* contain recurrent elements of autobiography, either as fictional re-adaptations of the author’s personal life circumstances, or as a representation of his own views, in the guise of impersonal narrative. As such, “A Drop of Blood” is a variation upon the theme of the artist stuck between his vocation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the commercial exploitation of his work. When, ultimately, his daughter’s life is at stake, he really has no choice but to stoop to commercial conditions and considerations, earning money in that he complies with the popular taste. In almost all of these tales, however, a little extra is added. In this case, it is implied that it is possible for an artist to step from poetry to prose without relinquishing his poetic vision. In the words of a critic of the period, art “seeks uniqueness, not uniformity, and so does not so much spread morality abroad as cherish and grow to their full strength the moralities it finds among its listeners. In this sense the moralists and the artists for art’s sake come to an understanding.”⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ For a quotation in full of “The Bargain”, see Appendix 2.

⁴⁷⁴ A. Ransome, “Art for Life’s Sake”, *English Review* XIII (1912/3), 69, quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 85.

This is exactly what happens in Maartens' short stories. They are moral tales, but they are not told by a moralist, at least not by one with a wagging and admonishing finger. The fact that they were conceived from a subjective standpoint does not come into the matter. When for example one considers Maartens' achievement in the light of Arthur Ransome's definition of subjective realism, Maartens would not have felt like an outsider: for the subjective realists it was inconceivable to describe reality objectively. The impression of the artist, ephemeral and brief, was from the outset a very personal one. In order to express himself, he simply had to experience his impressions intensely, to consider them carefully and to fuel them with great sincerity into the practice of his craft. The same idea is expressed by Henry James in his famous image of the house of fiction: it is a house in which all writers are gathered. In this image, each of the writers positions himself in such a way as to get a glimpse of the world outside that is most in accordance with their own temperament. James never tires to stress the subjective nature of the experience of reality:

The House of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will.⁴⁷⁵

Often, the motive that generates the plot consists of a fine fusion between the traditionally external approach of the realist and internal psychological scrutiny. If biological differences contribute to the discrepancy between the male – and the female sensibility, that discrepancy is reinforced when the protagonists embedded in a particular – mostly socially privileged – structure.

“The Heiress”

“The Heiress” is a brilliant example, all its power emanating from the dialogue, of which it consists almost exclusively. We are shown how money can become an impediment to happiness, particularly between a father and his daughter. At first, the girl, being an heiress, cannot marry the man she is in love with because he squandered the money he inherited:

⁴⁷⁵ *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 46. See also Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* which is, in fact, an application of the theory of Henry James, cf. particularly 145-148, 156-202; also cf. Wendell P. Jackson, “Theory of the Creative Process in the ‘Prefaces’ of Henry James”, in Burney J. Hollis, ed., *Amid Visions and Revisions: Poetry and Criticism on Literature and the Arts* (Baltimore, MD: Morgan State University Press, 1985), 59-64; Delia da Sousa Correa, “‘The Art of Fiction’: Henry James as Critic”, in Dennis Walder, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities* (London: Open University Press, 2001), 137-156; Daniel R. Schwarz, “James's Theory of Fiction and Its Legacy”, in Daniel Mark Fogel, ed., *A Companion to Henry James Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), 39-53; Coleman, Elizabeth, “Henry James Criticism: A Case Study in Critical Inquiry”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 40.3 (1985), 327-344; J. M. Cameron, “History, Realism, and the Work of Henry James”, *English Studies in Canada* 10.3 (1984), 299-316.

apparently he was quite worthless when rich. It is not before the girl loses her fortune as well and both are poor, that marriage becomes not merely possible but even desirable, because oddly so he now is in a position to lead a responsible life and be a worthy husband.

“The Dream Knight”

Poe-like once more in its atmosphere of mystery and suspense, the following tale, “The Dream-Knight”, is an example, seldom in Maartens, of a story written in the first person. His Christian name happens to be Maarten. One involuntarily wonders about the identity of the stranger that the narrator’s wife had seen some seven years before they got married, first in her dreams and then in reality. Now, the couple suddenly encounters him again, with a weird German phrase on his lips “Je näher mir, je näher Deinem Grab”:⁴⁷⁶

I started involuntarily. The words came to me like an echo, out of some song of Schiller’s. Even in the softened darkness she saw, or felt, the start. “I fancy they are German,” she continued. “Now you know why I have always refused to learn that language, though you were so anxious to teach me. You are not angry with me, are you? – now. I sing Italian. I do not want to understand those words. I believe they must mean something very terrible. When he said them, his face and voice always grew terrible, terrible. And the last word, I imagine, must have something to do with ‘grave.’” “No!” I cried, “no!” – for a great fear was coming upon me. The night was too silent. Her voice was too laden with awe. (157)

It may be a messenger of death, or even Death himself, crossing their path. At any rate there is suspense: the reader, puzzled, has the sensation of a secret being revealed. All of Maartens’ stories in which the wife – or mother of the child – is either dead or in imminent danger of dying are, more or less, a projection of the author’s personal circumstances: his wife’s permanent invalidity, his fear of losing her irretrievably in death. In all that follows there is not a word that does not intensify our premonition of the ineluctable end. The reason why most of these tales leave so profound an impression is that, looming over it all and always impending, there is the persistent fear of being abandoned, left alone in a world henceforth cold once our beloved have departed.

“A Resurrection”

“A Resurrection” is a perfect blend of conversational style interspersed with indirect speech, embedded in an exceptional wealth of descriptive narrative. Maartens’ depictions of the life of the rich in their endless odyssey to escape from the futility of their existence, are never altogether void of autobiography. In this case the bachelor existence of the main character,

⁴⁷⁶ “The nearer to me, the nearer your grave.”

Walter Gozlett, is another fictional variation of aspects of the author's life "before the sudden change of this wealthy marriage, arranged by his mother – a marriage that had turned out happily enough, but for its all-pervading pleasure-seeking ennui."(166)

Fragments of the author's personal history – his studies, travels, marriage, encounters – found their way into these tales. He could do so the more easily not only due to his pseudonym; also he lived outside the country of his readers, England. In "Resurrection", the male protagonist, the artist Walter, knocks at the door of the boarding house where he lived many years before, after which the narrative evokes the artist as a young man. To a biographer with Maarten Maartens' life at the back of his mind, this story would be of particular interest. Without that knowledge, however, one is equally touched by the gentle charm of Walter's nostalgic disposition, on the one hand seeking emotional sustenance from a rosy-hued old world while trying to come to terms with the new world on the other hand. There is also a mass of detail, exceptional in Maartens, in the grand manner one wishes he had employed more often:

It was with a gasp of relief that he found himself alone in the drawing room. "As empty as ever," he thought with a smile, "not even a new book or a fresh antimacassar. People shouldn't hang up these dead faces on their walls; they stick in your brain till Doomsday." The whole framework, closing around him, no longer fitted; its angles poked him in the heart. He realised, with unlooked-for anger, the hateful perpetuity of inanimate things round the life that melts away. He strode up and down the slippery parquet, wondering which of the old people would come in first. A lithograph of Heidelberg in the old man's student days hung where it had always hung. 1850. *His* youth was 1880. In 1880 the Rhine ran silver, and the sun among the pine-forests poured liquid gold. And every day the merry-go-round whirled for a penny a ride. A horrible thing is a merry-go-round. Well, he was a member of two clubs in St. James's Street, and his wife's movements were chronicled in the *World*. (172)

The story is full of delectable instances, giving proof of the author's mastery in showing the revelatory significance of human qualities, hidden in the slightest impulse of a movement, in an involuntary gesture, in the most subtle shade of character: "He had always known her thus: strong, self-possessed, selfish; her clear blue eyes and warm brown flesh filled with that calm self-confidence which holds weak hearts in bonds of iron. What had caused him to declare, quite recently, to somebody that the repose of an olive cheek could be insolent beyond any insolence on earth?" (175-176) The ensuing conversation between Walter and Julia is like a screen beyond which another dialogue – the real one – takes place. There is no need to go to any lengths to explore that exchange: it is rendered more so by what is being left untold, than by what is being said. The passions of the past are resurrected when Walter revisits Wiesbaden, the town of his student years. The love of his youth is unconsummated, still hurting deep inside, like craving for something forever beyond his grasp. That awareness is set against the background of a life wasted, absurdly, in lukewarm emotional vacuity, the

price paid for material wealth. Once more we are struck by the lively and clear-cut images, engendered by the perfect balance between poignancy of style and economy of realist description.

The volume offers a collection of all the Maartensian ingredients we have grown so familiar with. The themes treated in these stories are as serious as ever, yet they are treated in a fierce yet light-hearted vein throughout, a development that began in *Some Women I have Known*. In a number of those stories the author also fictionalised his own circumstances. Paradoxically, as it seems, this led to greater objectivity, enabling him to withdraw entirely from the scene, leaving the territory to a narrator who occasionally bears the name of Maartens. Even more than in *Some Women*, the author is in a position to probe the essence of his characters beneath the surface of his personal commitment. Once escaped from the bonds of his 'self', we perceive their imaginative significance: our vista is extended to embrace the larger vision.

“Lady Mary’s Mistake”

“Lady Mary’s Mistake” is an example of this extended vista from a different angle. It is the story of a man who no longer wishes to stay with his wife. At first, Lady Mary’s assumption that this is indeed the case seems exaggerated, as carefully shown and interwoven with the finest shades of irony in the dialogue between Mary and her mother. The story is a gem, a prism reflecting, once more with the greatest economy of means, worlds of difference in feeling, perception and emotion existing between man and woman. Mary sharply realizes that the mistake is hers, that she has had an oblique perception of her husband’s devotion for a long time. But she is utterly unaware that it is too late to mend the damage. The tragic note emerges from the fact that Mary’s initial fears prove true in the end, but on very different grounds. We are given a glimpse of the precipice looming between them when t husband, Sir George Tresling, winds up all the cynicism of his attitude in the one short phrase: “Everything, henceforth, shall be exactly as you like, dear.”

“The Little Christian”

On and off an anti-Semitic attitude is perceptible in Maartens’ prose. Jews are seldom treated without a sneer: the odd banker, industrialist, moneylender or pawnbroker. To Maartens they were telltale signposts of the all-devouring materialism of his day. Maartens’ prejudice rooted in his family background: One must bear in mind that his father was a Jew who converted to Christianity. Admittedly Maartens would never be able to eradicate the blemish – as he felt it – that rested with his forefathers. The stigma lastingly impaired his perception of Jews. His

too impetuous outcry against Jews exceeded the measure of personal motive: he believed that the Jews were the executors of a materialism *par excellence*, because their actions were grossly in contradiction with the idealistic principles of Christianity. In Maartens' stories, the type of the Jew appears as the very incorporation of human selfishness, in a society where money has become the only standard against which, by dint of its blind force, all other values must tumble.⁴⁷⁷

All this is implied as a background to the satirical story "The Little Christian", the only instance in any of Maartens' stories where anti-Semitism is actually the theme. It is a cynical exposure of the social situation of the Jews –extremely simplified, as often in Maartens' satire, but very effective. A wealthy Jewish family has just arrived at one of the hotels for the rich, "the Palace Company's latest and most magnificent Bellaria Palace Hotel":

They were unmistakably (not the retainers) of the remnant of the children of Israel, of that section of the numerous remnant which, reverted to the worship of the Golden Calf, now fattens on the fleshpots of a conquered Egypt, and following the example of the Lawgiver, breaks the whole of the twelve commandments in the presence of the golden god. That deity amply rewards them with abundance of the filth which is lucre. In other words the family were of the money-Jews, the international banking Jews, the ultra successful-parasite Jews, who fatten on the sores of kings. Everybody knows their name. Look over the admiring (contemptuous) hotel-porter's shoulder, and read in the visitor's book. "Baron Isidor de Goldberg with family and suite, from Paris." From Paris, of course. The good Americans go there after death, it is said. And the bad Jews before. (190)

Burdened with biblical reference, the argument at first seems to tie the author down to mere preaching, imperilling as it seems the desired accusative impact beforehand. Soon, however, it enables the author to deal with the issue from quite a different angle. Not only does it serve as an invective against the Jews in general: the dilemma of being Jewish in a surrounding hostile environment becomes the actual theme. Once the setting has been splendidly dealt with, the discrimination of a little wealthy boy takes centre stage. His name is Louis which, added to his name of de Goldberg, emphasises the satirical purport of the story.⁴⁷⁸

When the boy confronts his mother with his troubles, his suffering comes to her as a shocking revelation. In the following, his protective but isolated Jewish social milieu is juxtaposed to his painful experiences as a social outcast. In spite of the maudlin sentimentality of the story, there is a tragic note in the boy's awareness of what it means to be a Jew. In order to give more drive to the motive, its complexity is increased in that our attention is directed from the

⁴⁷⁷ The fact that Maartens' father was a Jew before converting to Christianity may have played a part in the negative portrayal of Jews as opposed to the positive Aryan concept to be described later.

⁴⁷⁸ Bearing in mind that Louis is a very French and very Christian name, culminating in King Louis the Holy (1214-1270). Furthermore it was not uncustomary, among the wealthy Jews, to bestow Christian names on

larger *social* context towards the more intimate exchange between mother and son. It soon becomes clear that the boy is, in fact, a Christian, and that the Goldbergs are not his real parents at all, i.e., the title of the story was not meant as irony but as a factual statement.

“Her Last Word”

“Her Last Word” is a dramatically powerful story about a woman who decides to leave her husband after their last remaining child has left the parental home in order to get married. Aware of having suppressed, for many years, her personal needs in serving her husband and children, the woman realises that she must finally live up to her own desires. Many of Maartens’ female readers must have readily identified with the situation in which a woman attempts to do what so many women secretly would have wished to do, but would never have actually considered undertaking.⁴⁷⁹ In almost each line, the overwhelming discrepancy between husband and wife is evoked. The story must have had quite an impact upon the reader a century ago, a time when strict rules of behaviour within marriage – cornerstone of the prevalent social codex – were still rigidly followed:

He caressed with light fingers the nape of her neck. “All we can wish for our daughters is that they should be as happy as you.” “They must take their chance,” she said sadly. “So the last of them is gone. God grant she may love him!” “Of course she will love him. All good wives love their husbands, don’t they? Fancy a daughter of yours not loving her husband!” Again he caressed the small curls about her neck. “Say you love me – quick!” He did not wait for her answer, but moved towards the door. “I’m going to my club for an hour,” he said. It was then that she arrested him. (203-204)

Marriage was everything to a woman, and she was willing to sacrifice everything to the man who took her forever. But men not necessarily thought and acted according to their lights: unfortunately, by dint of birth and upbringing, many of them could not but behave like the spoilt brats they were. Far from showing such men their limits, women colluded in strengthening the social pattern by their submissive attitude.

their male offspring, a disingenuous device to detract attention from their being a Jew. Another connotation being the *Louis d’or*; the family name of ‘von Goldberg’ satirizes a *type* of family as well as a *type* of banker.

⁴⁷⁹ Reading “Her last Word”, one thinks of Tolstoi’s “Kreuzer Sonata” (1891), a cynical rendering of the marriage situation. A contemporary example of a novel which criticises the condition of the married woman of the middle classes is *A Writer of Books* by George Paston (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898) Here one of the female protagonists warns another: “How will you like to have to lead the dullest, the narrowest, the most circumspect of lives knowing that, while your husband is free to amuse himself as he pleases, there will be no mercy for your slightest weakness, that, should you take one step aside, you will be cast out of the paradise of middle-class respectability into the outer darkness of Bohemia...?” (189), quoted in Margaret Diane Stets, “New Grub Street and the Woman Writer of the 1890s”, in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 21-45, here 41; cf. Díaz Lage, José Maria. “Naturalism and Modes of Literary Production in George Gissing’s *New Grub Street*”, *Atlantis: Revista de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos* 24.2 (2002), 73-83.

Now that the woman finally has the pluck to show her husband his limits, it is too late to make him understand. The ensuing dialogue, dramatically tense, has the cathartic effect eagerly desired by herself, i.e., that she may find the courage to leave her husband. The reader's empathy is on her side, confident, as much as the Duchess herself, that she will stick to her determination never to go back to her husband:

He stood looking at her. She turned again, very slowly, and went out at the door, and closed it behind her. He, as the lock sank into the slot, took to pacing the room to and fro, up and down. He did so for some minutes, in the dullness of the sinking candles, the vague atmosphere of fog behind the curtains, the dying fire. Then he stood still, in the middle of the drawing-room, and drew out his cigar-case and lit a cigar. "She'll come back, when she's thought it all out," he said. (211-212)

The tremendous finality of her act is rendered by imagery of doom: the lock sinking into the slot, the sinking candles, the fog and the dying fire. But nothing can shake him out of his habitual frame, numbed as he has become by so many years of habit. We would not expect him to act in any way different than he does: to take his hat and walking-stick and head straight for his club.

"The Challenge!"

In "The Challenge!" Maartens also fictionalises his own position of a man of letters. We have come across this before: occasionally he introduces an upper class setting as a means of self-presentation in disguise. He begins by providing a glimpse of the outer façade of this setting:

There is no time to wait; the thing must be published today. On July 27, 1905, at the Foreign Office Reception, the customary official conglomeration of costumes, diamonds and candles, uniforms and liveries, gilt buttons, stars and crosses: valetry and flare! The stupid grandeur of governmental greatness, which no one cares to see twice, excepting the fools who require to live in it forever. The world. The whole little world of intriguing evil that rules the vast humble world of honest labour and love. (213)

In the following, the first person narrator, by the name of Maartens, subsequently allows his readers, the 'lesser' mortals, to peep into the inner recesses of that secluded world, privileged in so many ways. He feverishly anticipates an encounter with a Duchess whose identity remains un-revealed throughout the story. As usual, nothing is painted in detail, the intention of the artist being to present as much of the scene only as is needed to evoke its characteristic atmosphere. That a woman should so quickly lay bare her most secret thoughts to a man utterly unknown to her seems unlikely. However, that man is a well-known author, whose books she professes to have read, a man who was no stranger to upper class circles. "The Challenge" is either a fictionalisation of such an encounter with a Duchess or a projection of his imagination. Whether the Duchess's spontaneous act of trust is plausible or not, the

magnificence of the visual evocation of their meeting renders the question immaterial. Here is the opening of that scene:

She sank back towards a seat against the wall – a Louis XIV tabouret – half a dozen hands stretched to move it. She flung her train round as she sat down. “Vous me ferez cette honneur, Duchesse,” said the man who had been speaking to her, a man with bloated brow and broad blue riband. She looked carelessly away. “I cannot. I am otherwise engaged.” Her lips trembled. Once more, with a sudden eagerness, her glance travelled along the countenances around her. None could have said if she noted any. She recognised a newcomer: her face lighted up to his bow, with a winningly responsive smile. In another moment she was beside me. I do not know, to this day, how it happened. Others must have seen before I did. She was beside me. She was speaking to me, close: “I have long wanted to meet you. It will be cooler in the conservatories. Conduct me.” In a tumult of triumphant amazement I offered her my arm. (214-215)

The confession that follows is a variation upon the theme of woman’s soul in turmoil: “You, who – more than any man whose works I have ever looked into – can read the workings of a woman’s heart?” is what the Duchess implores. She tells him that she wants to open her heart to him, that he should put her words into a form that would make her husband understand.⁴⁸⁰ “Do you know why I have told you this thing?” “Yes,” I said bitterly, “I am only a novelist to you, not a man.” The answer she gave me was full of such supremest tact as raised her at once to the innermost shrine in my wide veneration of woman.” (221)

Womanhood is one of Maartens’ outstanding themes, but veneration of woman – in the widest sense – is the motive of these stories. We have come to know it to be the deep impetus to all of his works, in his early poetry as well as in his novels. It is, however, not until he reaches the phase of short story writing that it sharpens into the objective point of view of the distant and observing narrator, away from idealistic projections. Still, Maartens’ narrator is by no means indifferent to their overwhelmingly and insistently appealing fascination. It continues to have an effect on his stories: as a rule, the beauty of the heroine is immaculate.⁴⁸¹ Still, as he had begun to show in *Some Women I Have Known*, Maartens continues his pursuit for more objectivity in *The Woman’s Victory*. Not that the veneration has become any less: in the course of years of wide travelling, experience had sharpened his views and made them more encompassing. His temperament required that he should transform them in a manner entirely

⁴⁸⁰ In newspaper interviews, Maartens is repeatedly quoted to have received letters “from women all over the world” (e.g., in *Bee* [Sept. 1907], New York). He corroborates this explicitly in the “Interview” which he prepared for publication. None of such letters could be retraced in the Maartens archive.

⁴⁸¹ In this respect Maartens is a follower of the fashion of the day, as, for that matter, is Thomas Hardy. To a large extent, the role model function of these heroines has been taken over, in our own time, by film stars. This is one reason why directors are attracted to Hardy’s work. Equally some of Maartens’ novels, as well as a number of short stories would lend themselves perfectly for screen productions. As far as the heroes are concerned, in contrast to Hardy’s, Maartens’ heroes have a specific physique, meeting the standards of the Germanic ideal: stalwart, broad-shouldered, blond and blue-eyed.

his own, either by fictionally participating in the narrative, or by interspersing it with autobiographical material.⁴⁸²

As in *Some Women*, many of these stories fulfil a threefold purpose: first, they grant the reader the privilege of identifying with these women as heroines – almost in the classical Greek sense of the word – in their private struggle and isolation. Second, by being introduced to their circle, it was at the same time comforting to that readership to perceive the suffering of the protagonists, which was the price these heroines had to pay for the social privilege of belonging to the leisure class. In this respect one might say that this kind of literature, both entertaining and serious, satisfied a need, which is nowadays largely fulfilled by television productions and films. Third, the author – doubly exiled, socially and artistically – had found a way of expressing himself without exposing his real personality to the public. When, as in the present story, the narrator says about his servant: “I have had him ever since we both were boys, and I love him” (224), this does not necessarily imply anything more than that he warmly appreciated his servant. In “The Challenge !”, the introduction to a scene of “high life”, was just enough to provide a setting for what rapidly proceeded: the business that went on back stage. This is also the case in the next story.

“An Arrangement”

There is no doubt that any modern reader, when reading this story as most of the others, will be struck by the modern straight-forwardness of its tenor. Not only the prevalence of the dialogue accounts for this. There is a directness in that dialogue that gives it an immediate importance to every sentence spoken as if – at this or that particular moment – nothing else could possibly have been said, giving each phrase a weight of its own that calls for the reader’s total attention. From the very start, the implication that the male protagonist is bankrupt hangs like a heavy cloud over these sentences, a cloud gloomily approaching while the sun is still beaming. The image of that cloud gradually darkening the landscape stands as a symbol for Antoinette’s gradual loss of her innocent perception of the surrounding world, which, to her, had been untainted hitherto. Once more, female innocence is crushed as it clashes with the evil world. Maartens seems obsessed by the theme: everything said between

⁴⁸² The opposite would be Flaubert’s motto of *impassibilité*, where the author, himself an indifferent spectator, pretends not to show the slightest imprint of his personality. Adhering to Flaubert’s standpoint, Goetsch, refers to Galsworthy: if the author reveals himself in each sentence, the reader may refuse recognition. It may threaten the suspension of disbelief when he realizes the author’s different standpoint. In the way episodes are arranged or by narrative comment, the reader may feel that his own creative imagination is being restricted by a narrator-author who provides the clues and explains. Therefore the author should disappear entirely behind the scenes he creates, see: John Galsworthy, “Meditation of Finality”, *English Review* XI (1912), 539, quoted in Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 86.

the two protagonists enhances the reader's awareness of impending doom. Striking, too, is the frequent appearance of phrases that could go straightaway into a collection of witty aphorisms. Often, it concerns remarks about men and women of the upper classes. In spite of their somewhat generalizing effect, they broaden our scope of the intricacies of the social interaction between the members of those classes, and deepen our understanding and sympathy for each of them individually.

At first, the idea that René might leave his wife simply because he is no longer able to support her financially, seems a little hard-pressed on the reader, until one realizes the graveness of the situation to the full. It is René's desperation that drives him to such a step, utterly incapable as he is to rely on Antoinette's determination to solve their problems together. That she should submit to his pragmatism comes as somewhat of a surprise, even if fate proves him wrong in the end.

“Our Lady of Lies”

“Our Lady of Lies” deals with the existential problems beleaguering a wealthy couple when they definitely run out of money.⁴⁸³ Divorce, suicide – all becomes plausible when one pursues their dilemma from their point of view. Consequently when it comes to the surprise turn towards the end, Maartens will not leave us in the lurch. As it deals with an asylum for the victims of luxury, “Our Lady of Lies” offers us with a treat of Maartens' most acid satire.⁴⁸⁴ A wealthy woman discovers that her husband is an impostor. Cheating with other people's money has made him into a rich and highly esteemed man: the entire social hypocrisy has been compressed into these few pages. To a greater or lesser extent, each of these stories is the continuation of Maartens' private battle against what he considered, as we have seen, “the rotting thing” in society.

“The Passport”

Woman's readiness and capability to sacrifice herself is again the motive in “The Passport”. When the fate of the man they love is at stake, their readiness and capability to sacrifice is unlimited. Compared to that, men's attitude of self-preservation is mediocre, always weighing pros and cons, according to circumstance. The tale is exceptional in several ways within Maartens oeuvre: it is an adventure story about two women in love with the same man, combining forces and conniving to help that man to flee from the Low Countries to England.

⁴⁸³ Insofar it is diametrically opposed to “The Heiress” where, as we have seen, scarcity of means oddly provided the solution to the problem.

This brings us to the next difference: the story is set a century earlier than the others, in 1812, at the time of the Napoleonic occupation. Maartens had the eye of a painter when he drew the following scene. It calls to mind his dictum that literature is a bit of life seen through a temperament, which is a paradox, as life itself. Seldom do we get such contrast between the objective eye of the painter and the undignified and passionate outburst of the man of flesh and blood behind the observing eye in his railing against Napoleon. They do not amalgamate; they are juxtaposed; the incommensurability of the points of view of one and the same artist:

By the water-side, planted against the foliage of a long-drawn garden, stood a summer-house, a white octagonal pagoda with dark green Venetian shutters, such as were beloved of Dutch patricians a hundred years ago. Here the stately eighteenth century merchant sat on summer evenings, solemnly smoking his long clay pipe and drinking his dish of still fragrant tea, whilst his eyes rested on some round-bellied rowing-boat that lazily rippled the slow water, and his thoughts were of mighty East-Indiamen, of pepper, palm-trees and gold. But here in this year of our Lord 1812, May morning or winter night, rain or sunshine, a cloud, low, unbroken, lay heavy upon the land. "This year of our Lord!" How ironical it sounds, while the devil, century after century, holds the throne which the Holy One rejected. As if the lord of Love, beholding Napoleon, were responsible for the crimes of a brute genius of evil climbing up to earthly godhead on a scaffolding of corpses that rot away beneath his feet. Under the blood-stained hand of the Conqueror, the Low Countries – annexed to his empire as "alluvial deposit of three French rivers" (including the Rhine) – lay panting, their liberties annihilated, their colonial commerce paralysed, their children drawn away, unremittingly, to death. (258-259)

"A Life"

"A Life" deals with an aspect frequently occurring in upper class society, which had already intrigued Maartens in his novels: adultery. Another ingredients are equally familiar: raised in the countryside by her aunt and uncle, a young girl is confronted with her husband's infidelity. For a moment we are in the world of *Dorothea* once more. However, the author's idealistic image of a girl's attitude raised under such circumstances, carefully posed against the demands of reality, is not the issue here, as was the case in *Dorothea*. The theme merely serves as an appeal to the "women of our class" to live their own lives, regardless of their husband's ways. This gives it a touch of resignation, of cynicism, even if, by way of compensation, it provides women of the world such as Eleanor, the heroine of the story, with some sort of a strategy against male supremacy. Regrettably so, lack of balance annihilates the effect desired: too much of the narrative reads like a social pamphlet in this story to cause real dramatic vigour to emerge from the crucial dialogue of the last pages.

⁴⁸⁴ I.e., the satire of the asylum dealt with abundantly in *The New Religion* and *The Healers*.

“An Author’s Story”

“An Author’s Story” is about a writer who is preoccupied with the idea of finding living models for his characters amongst his gentry neighbours in the country. It brings to mind Maartens’ preface to *The Greater Glory*, where he most emphatically rejected the accusation of writing *romans-à-clef*. The story is, once more, full of little details taken from Maartens’ domestic circumstances. There may be a particular satisfaction in recognizing these, but this again is immaterial in view of the perfect blend of plot, action and character, budding into a love story. As we go along, it is even more intriguing to see how these constituents have an impact on the author, hidden in the protagonist as well as in the narrator in the making of his story. Fiction within fiction, and fiction presented as reality, are both juxtaposed and amalgamated, providing a glimpse into the complexities of the creative process. Significantly, here, are the narrator’s references to the author’s story, insofar as they are fictionalised statements of Maartens’ own aspirations:

It was progressing favourably, very satisfactorily, as such work does. He had got in his shadow-characters all right – a youthful Sir Jeremiah, a quite unrecognisable Dowager Dorothy; the farcical element, rather ugly, was there. What he wanted now, vainly ransacking his memory or his imagination, was the great central light in his picture, the beautiful principal figure which would dwarf all the others to a background of foils. (307)

Another is the announcement that the protagonist’s forthcoming book will contain “the possibilities of a play” (326).⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, the protagonist expresses his views that his books were written to be liked, which is to say, with Maartens, that they dealt with life as a serious matter presented in a light-hearted manner. One of the characters, Mrs. Eversley, is also one of author’s admiring readers. Referring to his books she elegantly pinpoints the distinction between what was generally considered ‘great’ literature and the author’s “small way” of writing:

I like and enjoy and admire them,” she said, “more than everything I have ever read.” Her voice sounded very serious: all the nonsense had sunk away from it. “Oh, come!” he said, smiling, “and Shakespeare?” “More than Shakespeare,” she answered determinedly. “I can’t understand Shakespeare so well. Of course I know he’s infinitely greater.”

“Well, I’m glad you know that,” said James Upcott reverently; though wishing he wasn’t.

“He and a number of others. I didn’t say I thought your books were the greatest ever written. I said I enjoyed and admired them most of any I had ever read.” (310-311)

⁴⁸⁵ Maartens adapted *Joost Avelingh* for the stage into “The Sin of Hugh Mansion”, unpublished.

“Lord Venetia”

“Lord Venetia” is the story of a wealthy business man who makes his money “without effort, hereditarily.” (334) Lord Venetia’s wife, also his cousin, is increasingly prone to depressions, tormented as she feels by the way in which her husband makes his money.⁴⁸⁶ As a consequence of this, she ultimately decides to leave him. To act in such a way is not inconceivable as the projection of an ideal in fiction: it may not be obvious what a woman in her situation *ought* to do. The question remains if she would leave her husband – given the crude reality of her circumstances afterwards. When after his wife has deserted him Lord Venetia simply summons his servant to dismiss a royal visitor in such straight terms as to “go to the devil”(347), it seems that he has finally come to understand what happened: now that she has gone, he remains behind in utter loneliness. The suggestion though seems too hasty that, in the end, Lord Venetia might even be prepared to relinquish his disgraceful practices in order to get his wife back. Still, one might conjecture that Maartens had come to the conclusion that, on the whole, the men in these treatises of women’s victories had been treated somewhat too harshly.

Her Father’s Wife

This concept of treating the male protagonists with more generosity is particularly significant in “Her Father’s wife”. It definitely brings a change in that it does not concern a woman of noble character, but a vile creature who is willing to sacrifice her very child to her own selfish needs. The theme of beatification of motherhood, as presented in *Her Memory*, is treated here from an altogether different angle. We are dealing with yet another version of the recurrent autobiographical theme in Maartens of the father who raises his daughter alone. This time, however, the wife had not died, as in *Her Memory*. She had deserted her husband when their child was only four years old. During the ensuing years until she reached the age of eighteen, the girl was led to believe that her mother was dead. Even more so than in *Her Memory*, the absent mother is present as a sort of beatified entity, almost physically alive through the vivid imagination of the daughter. Unlike *Her Memory*, though, this ideal is violently torn to shreds when a strange woman suddenly appears, introducing herself as the mother. Being capable of sacrificing everybody else to satisfy her selfish desires, this woman embodies the opposite of female magnanimity as evoked in *Her Memory*. That novel had soothed Maartens’ sorrow over a life full of loneliness, physically abandoned by a wife who during her prolonged bouts

⁴⁸⁶ Maartens’ wife, Anna van Vollenhoven (1862-1924) was also his cousin. She was in a state of depression during much of their married life.

of migraine mostly dwelled in her boudoir, communicating with the outside world only through small notes. The character constellation in “Her Father’s Wife” is a wry allusion to the fact that Joost van der Poorten Schwartz bore the sole responsibility for his daughter’s upbringing. On this occasion, as Maarten Maartens, he was incapable of drawing the character of the mother more objectively. Determined by the author’s subdued anger, her ruthless and spiteful attitude to life was rendered too harshly, leaving us strangely incredulous. We are shown the supreme disregard of a wife for a husband whose only weakness was a lasting affection for his wife, in spite of her actions. When, after years of financially supporting her and submitting to her wiles, sheer necessity finally compels him no longer to succumb to her threats, her sudden return does not announce reconciliation, but total catastrophe.

Usually a staunch champion of the female sex, Maartens concludes his collection of women’s victories with this negative picture of the female sensibility. Obviously and noticeably, “Her Father’s Wife” goes against the grain: the story does not run as smoothly as its predecessors.

The men in “The Woman’s Victory” tend to waver between disinterested devotion and pitiless egoism. They mainly function as cataclysmic instruments, means to an end. Still and without exception, these stories are thoroughly refreshing and pulsating with energy. The reader steps from one to the other as from one room into the next, as if in a large house where different parties are going on at the same time – and is welcomed to participate on the spur of the moment. When the end unexpectedly comes, and the door is quickly closed upon him, he may wander in silent surprise to the next room, losing as little time as necessary, expecting to meet yet another different specimen of that many-faceted phenomenon in these stories, woman.

V. General Assessment

“I know what the critics keep going on about. But then my books would be like (so many of) the others.”

“Intrinsic merit is the very last element of literary success. The *last*, literally. Unless the seed be lost upon the wind, it bears fruit after a hundred years, and then for ever.” *Maarten Maartens*

V.1. Maarten Maartens and Realism

The writers of the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century were all – more or less – exponents of that new movement called naturalism.⁴⁸⁷ Still, there is probably not one amongst them in whose works there is not also a note of nostalgia and melancholy. There was a note of suffering, of unwillingness, almost an inability to accept that things would never again be as before. To a point, the writers of that period were all social insurgents, voluntarily or reluctantly, consciously or unconsciously, deeply disconcerted with a society in which the strongholds of tradition and status quo were flooded by change that ineluctably provoked them to succumb – as they perceived it – in their turn. It was a painful process, in many cases resulting not only in an attitude of resignation or even despair but – worse – of cynicism.

Arthur Quiller-Couch was one of the last exponents of the historical and romantic fiction in the great manner of Sir Walter Scott. ‘Q’ thought that those modern authors were all “naturalists”, wallowing in an “all-engulfing wave of filth and repulsiveness.”⁴⁸⁸ His prejudice against realism prevented him from acknowledging – if not from seeing – that there were numerous tendencies of all kinds within the vast scope of realism: moral, social, humoristic, neo-romantic and psychological.⁴⁸⁹ This cannot merely be explained by his own conservatism; it also served him in his endeavour to present Maartens favourably in contrast to the ‘naturalists’ he denounces:

In countries with a strong literary tradition authors and critics – even the youngest – could recognize Zola for the coarse showman that he was, and think out the movement in its true bearings, from Balzac and Stendhal to Flaubert, the Goncourt Brothers, Daudet, de

⁴⁸⁷ See Walter Greiner and Gerhard Stilz, eds., *Naturalismus in England 1880-1920* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983).

⁴⁸⁸ Quiller-Couch either ignored or deprecated the realists – even the foremost – who reflected the tendencies described above, such as Thomas Hardy, see Preface, *Letters*, xxi and xxv, to which view one might oppose Hardy’s own, who insisted that “a sight for the finer qualities of existence, an ear for the still sad music of humanity, are not to be required by the outer senses alone, close as their powers in photography may be.” (“The Science of Fiction”, in *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel [Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966], 118).

⁴⁸⁹ See F.W.J. Helmmings, ed., *The Age of Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

Maupassant. But for rustical [sic] ears Zola beat the drum: and rustical minds mistook the dirt on the flag for the emblem. Maarten Maartens did not.⁴⁹⁰

Around 1880, most critics were still bent on holding on to the principles of Victorian prose writing. Due to its increasingly negative connotations, however, they had to defend their criteria against the theory and practice of latter day realism. No one less than Henry James wrote:

This is what saves us in England, in spite of our artistic levity and the presence of the young radicals – this fact that we are by disposition the better psychologists, that we have, as a general thing, a deeper, more delicate perception of the play of character and the state of the soul. This is what often gives an interest to works conceived on a much narrower programme than those of M. Zola – makes them more touching and more real, although the apparatus and the machinery of reality may, superficially, appear to be wanting.⁴⁹¹

Gradually, however, Flaubert's aesthetic position became exemplary to the majority of critics. Due to the influence of other foreign literary currents, the process of artistic self-awareness was rendered more complex, such as the melancholy disposition and psychological refinement of the Russian school (Tolstoy, Turgeniev, Chechov), the decadence of Huysmans, Maupassant's predilection for the shorter form and Ibsen's social and psychological plays. All this had a negative impact on the perpetuation of the Victorian novel. The demands for new artistic criteria went beyond the established boundaries in criticism: to desist entirely from auctorial commentary and derivation, to turn away from the multi-layered plot-structure of the Victorian novel, to focus on a scenic representation and to have all episodes contribute to the central theme.⁴⁹²

Evidently this was not the category of authors to which Maartens belonged. In the 1870-ies and 1880-ies, the bulk of critics assumed that within an increasingly complex (and confusing) universe, a moral order of things should still be taken for granted as embedded within each human being. Hence it was the task of the novelist to lay bare the ideal reality beyond the layers of daily mediocrity and coincidence and to discover the balance between good and evil within life's vicissitudes, a task that would turn out to be more and more difficult.⁴⁹³ Yet there were writers, not the most eminent perhaps, whose works in spite of all change contained a germ of hope for the future. Such a germ is usually hard to detect as, on the one hand, they

⁴⁹⁰ Preface, *Letters*, xvi.

⁴⁹¹ *The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel (London: Mercury Books, 1962), 280.

⁴⁹² See Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 49-51, 61-62, 431-37. Critics of all directions contributed to the discussion, see also: Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 97-139.

⁴⁹³ Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 431; see also, e.g. John Stokes, ed., *Fin de Siècle/ Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*. (London: Macmillan, 1992) and by the same author: *In The Nineteens* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1989); cf. also Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter, eds., *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

took heed to safeguard the credibility of their – intrinsically pessimistic – views as much as they could, aware as they were of the threat of such ambiguity to the overall artistry of their work. On the other hand, the dilemma of living in a period of transition was that they could not entirely refrain from hinting at opportunities that the new century might offer.⁴⁹⁴

Without doubt Maartens was a moralist, but the moral message is never stated explicitly by the narrator it rather emerges from the story itself. Apart from *The Healers* and *The New Religion*, he is not one of those preachers in disguise, in whose prose the story is but a kind of excrescence, a device on the part of the author in order to pass on a particular message. His first aim is to amuse and to entertain. This is an aesthetic principle, not a concession to the readers for the sake of popularity. Maartens is not a doctrinaire shielding far loftier aims behind the writing of his story. Story and the plot come first; they must continually produce an image of reality, capable of suspending the reader's inclination to disbelief latent in the back of his mind.

According to Quiller-Couch, Maartens' lack of adherence to the naturalist movement accounts for the Dutch aversion against him: after all it was the fashion of the day. Concentrating mainly upon the moral appeal in Maartens' work while at the same time corroborating his own argument; Quiller-Couch wrote: "Maartens had, by virtue of breeding, a puritan as well as a romantic strain in him [...] It had trained him to distinguish false coinage from true and detect the pseudo-science of 'Rougon-Macquart' for the base metal that it was. Moral and intellectual fastidiousness combined, therefore, to forbid his leading his countrymen on the road they hankered after."⁴⁹⁵ Naturalism was an unalloyed, monolithic, one-sided form of realism. An author of the calibre of Quiller-Couch could be biased against realism to such an extent that he chose to marginalize the realist strain in Maartens' work, presenting him as a fellow inheritor of the tradition of historical and romantic literature to which he himself belonged. Quiller-Couch dreaded its disappearance, as it also put his own artistic fate in jeopardy.

In the memoir to the *Letters*, following Quiller-Couch' preface, Jephson O'Conor takes a first turn towards realism: "Maarten Maartens was primarily attracted by ethics and was constant in his attempt to show the standards of the world of conventional Christianity contrasted with

⁴⁹⁴ For numerous aspects of the period, analysed in a great number of primary works, see William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), in particular ch. 11: "The way out is the way back: the anti-modernists", 234-252, and the extensive bibliography, both of primary as well as secondary sources, 315-355.

⁴⁹⁵ Preface, *Letters*, xvii.

a higher morality and truly Christ-like standards. He thus belonged to the group of writers who were turning from historical fiction to realism.”⁴⁹⁶

From our distant viewpoint, it seems incongruous to attach too much importance to moral drive as *the* impetus for realism. In fact, O’Conor ignores the aesthetic risks, which a strong moral attitude may involve. When the writer is unable to suppress his urge to accuse and condemn, he inevitably mars his endeavours. The result may be aesthetically disappointing and practically ineffective. The objective observer whose own morality is implied and hinted at in the tones and shades of the narrative, using the narrator as his mouthpiece, should always be aware of the danger of being overshadowed by the preacher in him. Maartens considered Tolstoy to be the greatest master of this kind of moral realism. Tolstoy’s symbiosis of realistic fact and moral appeal was the product of genius, the accomplishment of what he, Maartens, deemed his own artistic ideal. His mentality was, as he put it, “in closest sympathy, in its own small way – among the great of my time – with Tolstoy. Perhaps with less sentimentality – in the best sense of the word.”⁴⁹⁷ There is the particular strain in Tolstoy’s moral idealism that, driven by a missionary impulse, however noble, he is occasionally unrealistic and sentimental in his claims for social change. O’Conor corroborates this view, stating that Maartens’ “intense moral earnestness not only links him with the great novelists of the nineteenth century, such as Dickens, but makes him a forerunner of much of the realism of the present day; he is in the company of Ibsen, Shaw and Tolstoy.”⁴⁹⁸ Still – one may argue against certain aspects of Tolstoy’s writing: in spite of any such blemishes, his artistic instinct protected him from blurring the epic effect. Like the above named authors, however, Maartens did not always manage to avoid traces of didacticism when his sense of moral responsibility got the better of him.

Maartens already belonged to the next generation of moral realists. It encompassed writers ranging from Mark Rutherford to George Bernard Shaw. Aware of impending change, Maartens had pushed too far ahead in his thinking so as not to share with some of his contemporaries the scepticism perceptible in their writings. He therefore did not merely form a link, as O’Conor suggested in 1930, between the tradition of the past and the realist movement of his own day: his adherence to the latter was clearly the stronger. Aesthetic problems rooted in the vast area of realism were to interest him increasingly. His interviews,

⁴⁹⁶ Memoir, *Letters*, xxxiv; quite another category – not in any way to be confused with Maartens – is the Christian novel with a social clarion call, with Charles Kingsley as its figure-head, see also Robert Glenn Wright, *The Social Christian Novel* (London: Greenwood Press, 1989).

⁴⁹⁷ “Interview”, 3; reflections on Tolstoy re-occur; see e.g. *The Westminster Budget* (21 July 1893), 34; *Letters*, 71 and 197.

⁴⁹⁸ Memoir, *Letters*, xlix.

correspondence, and notes testify to the fact; opinions and reflections on the issue continue to re-appear in some form or other. As far as his books are concerned Maartens would naturally never go to such extremes in the actual treatment of his material, even when pessimistic or negative, as the two icons of the movement, de Maupassant and Zola, had done:

Probably it is well that the literary instinct is toward realism. Of course, everything literary must be in a way realistic – must answer to the realities in the soul or in life. I hope this doesn't mean that fiction must undertake the work of photography. Isn't that asking art to cease to be itself and become mechanics? – It is very easy to fall into error as to this matter of literary realism. It ought not to be necessary to point out that the habit of studying the details of life on its darker side alone is a perversion of the realist idea. This is the fault of the modern French School. Another one of its faults – though this is not participated in by all – is the belief that realism means a photographic reproduction of conditions. Zola is the foremost offender in both these respects – and that in spite of the fact that he meant to be, and is, a moral teacher of immense importance. Perhaps an artist has no business to be deliberately a moral teacher. Certainly he has no business to abandon the exercise of his faculty of artistic selection, suppression, and arrangement, and make himself merely an instrument of mechanical record. And certainly he has no business to devote himself to the scrutiny of life's horrors, mischief and degradations and represent them as the whole of the human scene.⁴⁹⁹

In *Her Memory* (1898), Maartens approaches the highest standards of the psychological realism of his day. Short as it is, it entirely complies with his own criteria quoted above. In this respect it is superior to all the preceding novels. In *Her Memory* he manages to suppress his tendency to overcrowd his canvas. Sensational and dramatic effects are toned down. He concentrates more vigorously on a swift plot movement, without any impediments to the main dramatic action, as was still the case in his earlier short novel, *A Question of Taste* (1891). Accordingly the style is more sober. Sentences are short, with fewer archaisms. From a stylistic angle, to say the least, there is something to be said for *Her Memory* as his most modern book. Van Maanen perceived its potential for Maartens' admission, as it were, into the realm of realism: "If he had continued his new manner, he might have improved it in some points, but this unique specimen will easily stand comparison with any other novel in his earlier and later manner."⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Interview given in *The New York Times* (14 April 1907). In the *Letters* there is a revelatory passage about Humphrey Ward, epitomising the notions quoted above: "To me Mrs Ward seems the negation of literature, a highly accomplished and intelligent woman, who sees much and carefully looks at it and reproduces without a touch of the artist. No, no, nowhere near *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, unless you like to put *Bessie Costrell* – her best – next to *Adam Bede*?" ("To Nellie Gosse", 22.5.1905, 240). Concerning the aspect of reproduction, permanent technical sophistication naturally had its impact on the arts a century ago as it has now: see e.g.: Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: the Legacy of British Realism* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰⁰ Maarten Maartens, *Poet and Novelist*, Ph.D. thesis (Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1927), 80. Insofar as *Her Memory* could be considered a longer short story, a next step might be to categorize it, together with a selection of other stories by Maartens as part of trends in modernism as categorized by e.g., P.A.M. Russell, *Modernism and the English short story, 1890-1920*, Abstr. in *IT* (1999), 7774.

From a similar point of view, an unknown American critic wrote: “To probe human character in the sympathetic as well as the analytical sense requires a much deeper knowledge than that of the mere material elements that constitute the various phases of life. This brilliant author, whose manner is intense and alive with interest, so blends the realistic with the idealistic in *Her Memory* that neither quality takes the precedence.”⁵⁰¹

Maartens expressed himself on *Her Memory* in a letter to Mrs. Gosse precisely as far as this balance between the realistic and the idealistic was concerned: “There is no view of life in *Her Memory*, please. Only a picture if you will accord that phrase. What the papers have been saying about ‘make the best of it’ etc. is simply – yes, I *will* talk slang – rot. Anthony does what I think such a man would have done. There is no preaching of mine in it.”⁵⁰²

A similar problem occurred with regard to the novel *Dorothea* (1904).⁵⁰³ Maartens wrote to Mrs. Gosse that taking into consideration the circumstances and beliefs of the heroine, Dorothea, he did not believe she could have acted other than she did,. In another letter he felt obliged to maintain that attitude of defence:

It is evident that I must have failed to give the right idea of charm in Dorothea, though I must say that Barrie [...] absolutely denies this, as far as he is concerned. Barrie thinks the amount of coldness exactly right. But the fact that so many others don’t think so proves that the shadowing should have been different. Personally, I think that if she had not been hard and puritan, the thing [i.e., her husband’s adultery] would not have happened, and my experience of the ‘pure’ woman is that she is incapable of sympathy or even charity – only hard pity and forgiveness. [...]But all this might be compatible with *charm*, and, so far this is absent, the book is the weaker.⁵⁰⁴

‘Charm’ as an aesthetic term is of crucial significance to Maartens. His own verdict regarding *Dorothea* is strongly based on this criterion: “But the *charm* should most certainly have been there,” he reiterated.⁵⁰⁵ To Maartens, lack of charm, unerringly entails the failing of artistic instinct. In his view all that remained had nothing to do with art: ‘artistic instinct’ was the author’s capacity to fuse his own subjective interpretations of the phenomena he observed into an entirety which, to the readers, would seem sufficiently truthful to sustain their illusion of reality. It was up to the author *which* phenomena to select from the infinite choice at hand. If the goal was attained, it meant that the selection had been fortuitous. “Plenty of talent and not a spark of genius”, was his verdict on Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Yet in the same letter he added with regard to another, far more famous contemporary, Rudyard Kipling, that he possessed

⁵⁰¹ *The Herald*, Boston (1898).

⁵⁰² *Letters*, 164-165.

⁵⁰³ After having published two volumes of stories: *Some Women I have Known* (1901) and *My Poor Relations* (1903).

⁵⁰⁴ *Letters*, 225.

⁵⁰⁵ In the same letter. With regard to ‘charm’, see also the comment by James Barrie on *The Greater Glory*, 7, and Maartens’ comments on Thackeray, ch. III passim.

“not much talent and no artistic taste, but the genius is there, triumphant, as genius will be, at least for some time.”⁵⁰⁶ When genius – a term undefined by Maartens – came into play, details of method such as composition and selection were apparently of minor importance.

As far as moral issues were concerned, they had always been at the core of Maartens’ works. The spirituality of *God’s Fool*, to pick the most conspicuous example, had emanated uniquely from the exceptional character of the hero, Elias. Such issues had always been cloaked by Maartens in a comical fashion, by the turbulent passions and intrigues of the little world in which they dwelled. Whereas the profound religious mood adds considerably to the value of many of the short stories published after the shock of the Boer War, Maartens’ increasing preoccupation with moral issues impairs the veracity of the novels. Often, it concerns a kind of morality based on what appear to be the author’s personal religious principles. They too manifestly permeate the texture of his books to retain our indulgence. The decreasing sales of his books were certainly also due to this, as it contributed to the loss of their interest in the eyes of the public. Unfortunately he was not sufficiently aware of this, maintaining it had always been his ‘sore point’ to have been neglected by serious critics.

Naturally, as Maartens’ suffering from outer and private circumstances increased, his own persistent search for solutions through religion gained in momentum: deep down, his battle was a struggle with his own growing despair. It had an impact on his artistic creativity, which can best be illustrated by looking at the change in the treatment of ‘religion’ as a theme. Religion had more or less been given weight as one theme amongst many, satirically treated or not, but always within perspective of the narrative tenor. At certain points, as we have seen, the scales are tipped: in the guise of the narrator, the author’s religious beliefs too obtrusively begin to pervade his books, imposing themselves on the attention of the reader.

Maartens uses satire to the full to show the influence of instituted religion in Holland. Doubtlessly it was one of the elements that had heightened the attraction of his prose to a foreign reading public. It made his literary outpourings repulsive in the eyes of many a bourgeois Dutchman, although he repeatedly claimed that he did no more than to satirize certain representatives of institutionalised religion, such as members of the provincial clergy, protestant or catholic. He took an interest in their day-to-day influence on the life of the community he was describing.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ *Letters*, 225.

⁵⁰⁷ Quiller-Couch gave Maartens credit for his satirical treatment of this issue as of so many others; yet he pointed out a possible weakness, saying that it “does undoubtedly, in a general impression of his work, throw the impostures and malignities which uglify religion into a prominence out of their perspective in ordinary life.” (Preface, *Letters*, xxiv).

Her Memory was written a different mood. The way in which the memory of the deceased mother is portrayed definitely has a religious propensity. In *Dorothea*, Maartens went a step further, exploring the religious issue as an individual – yet all encompassing – phenomenon, with its ethical and moral implications. A religious atmosphere is imbued even in such passages – less frequent than before – where the ‘old’ humorous and satirical Maartens is at work again: religion touches upon all aspects of human life. The reader is induced to deliberate upon religious issues and their impact on the characters; deeper levels of observation and intuition are stirred. It was the aim Maartens definitely had in mind when he wrote *Dorothea*. For all that, the satire in *Dorothea* is no less convincing and lasting in effect, embedded as it is in the novel’s comparatively rich narrative texture.

In the ensuing novel, *The Healers* (1906), Maartens only partly succeeded in his attempt at pure satire. Due to his own exasperation with doctors and medical treatment, he lapsed into a kind of invective, which turned the satire into sarcasm, not to say into cynicism. Although his negative experiences did not prevent him from effectively distinguishing between the hard-working individual doctor and the medical business of many a clever charlatan, the portrayal of the various types of doctors was overdrawn to the extent that the emerging caricatures failed to have the invigorating effect of satire. Maartens had always experimented with satire and realism, but in *The Healers* the amalgamation of the two is exceptionally incongruous. The occasional argumentation with religious implications does by no means stir deeper levels of the reader’s observation and intuition, as was the case in *Dorothea*. Instead, he uses religion as a weapon against what he considers the pseudo-science of medicine. Religion was no longer explored for reasons of its own, as an inner purpose; it became a means to end, the manifest propagation of Christian principles.⁵⁰⁸

The Healers may have been written as an exercise towards his next novel, *The New Religion* (1907), where the crusade against the medical practice is continued: the satire is fiercer and more effective. Even if vestiges of moral dilemma persist, it is no longer a ‘novel of conscience in disguise’ but what it professes to be from the outset: a satirical novel. Both books may be considered novels centred round a specific profession, in the sense that the stories themselves were meant to be subservient to the satirical exposure of the main issue at stake, i.e., the medical profession. *The New Religion* is Maartens’ harshest outburst against the medical practice of his time. The term itself, “New Religion”, refers to the medical

⁵⁰⁸ According to Quiller-Couch, frustration about medicine and medical practice was the second of Maartens’ ‘possessions’ that “spoil the artistry of two novels, *The Healers* and *The New Religion*, converting them to satire, almost to propaganda” (*Letters*, Preface, xxiv). Maartens wrote to Mrs. Gosse: “My impotent wrath turns against the *specialist* with his *home*, the *professor* with his *correspondence* abroad and his *percentages*.” (*Letters*, 5.1.1905, 239).

practice and the cult that surrounded the specialists administering to the leisured class. In Maartens' view, this mania had ousted the spiritual values of Christianity all over Europe. But his obsessive and exaggerated exposure of the abuses of medical science not only "spoil the artistry" (Quiller-Couch): they turned the story into a mere farce, curbing the impact of the satire. In using this method, Maartens did in fact not distinguish himself from the bulk of second-rate naturalists he frowned upon. The protagonists in *The New Religion* not only lack emotional and psychological depth. Even more so than in *The Healers* they are reduced to mere vehicles of the author's views. The satire resides in the derivation of the term 'religion', now used merely to designate the new creed of the cult of the body, *en vogue* at the turn of the twentieth century in a medical and practical as well as in an aesthetic sense. Together with the worship of money – things inseparable to Maartens – this craze is presented as one of the main symptoms of the general moral decay of the period.⁵⁰⁹ Maartens called *The New Religion* "the only one of my books which is frankly autobiographical, in source, not in incident."⁵¹⁰ However, even if only "in source", Maartens himself never came near to being as terrorised, harassed and financially ruined by medical 'specialists' as suggested in the book. In their way, *The New Religion* as well as *The Healers* is social documents, testifying to certain tendencies in society at the time. For that reason, they may be read as comments on society, in spite of their ludicrousness as a result of exaggeration and inconsistencies of method. On the other hand, these satirical novels were as much an outcry of impotent wrath against Maartens' own time as his persistently clinging on to the spiritual values, crumbling in the grim face of materialism. This, Maartens felt, swallowed all, like the "sea waters engulfing a sinking ship."⁵¹¹ As the wreck went down, he knew there was not much point in stubbornly holding on to what was left. He knew this was extremely unrealistic, yet in spite of this and in accordance with his moral and artistic calling, he stuck to his guns. He would increasingly do so, the more so as he was convinced that they held the key to nothing less than the rescue of civilization. Even if from another angle, Edmund Gosse touched upon the heart of the matter when he observed about Maartens' last novel, *Eve: An Incident of Paradise Regained* (1912) that it was too puritan. Maartens' stories indeed seem oddly puritan, 'clean', in the light of the rapid shifts occurring in literature at the turn of the new century, with all their eclectic – as well as experimental tendencies. Seen from that perspective, his novels

⁵⁰⁹ In contrast to our own day, it was at that time a problem that exclusively concerned the leisure class, other aspect in which Maartens may be considered a precursor, criticising a fashion that would increasingly dominate the new century.

⁵¹⁰ "Interview", 2.

⁵¹¹ This was the metaphor Maartens used, referring to the dangers that threatened world peace in his visionary official address to the Peace Congress at the Carnegie Hall, Pittsburgh, 1907 (TS in Maartens archive).

possess an innocence and purity one would no longer expect to linger in a doomed world. Gosse sent him a long critical letter on *Eve* that contained a comparison with Emile Zola. Maartens, he wrote, was “too excellent an artist to swamp the main characters in a regular descent as that other puritan, Zola, would have done.” Yet he also carefully expressed a criticism of the moralist in Maartens: when too severe, Maartens was in danger of destroying the credibility of the image of reality he tried to evoke. It was a criticism, which “affects you and all writers of this species of romance. You neglect, you wilfully ignore, the effects of time.” In fact, Gosse was saying that Maartens took a far too puritan stance with regard to the question at stake in this novel, the problem of adultery, and that he thus persistently failed to perceive what Gosse called, on the contrary, “one of the most volatile of human experiences.”⁵¹²

In the course of his artistic development, Maartens had increasingly stressed the overall importance of a Christian ethos as the way to the salvation of mankind. Although it is obvious in all of his works that Christian principles are important to the author’s philosophy of life, he never openly declared himself in favour of any particular religious denomination. On the contrary, he had always stressed the underlying problem: the discrepancy between religious principles on the one hand and the institutions, which claimed to put them into practice on the other. If anything, detachment from the Church as an institution had always been manifest in his books. Even if this pattern is not actually blurred in *Eve*, it is a more complex matter: in her utter moral despair Eve, the heroine, seeks comfort in Christianity. Inconsolable within her inner self, she finds comfort with a catholic priest and, through his guidance, allows herself to become a convert to the Catholic faith.

Insofar as it represents the culmination of a religious avowal, *Eve* brings Maartens’ literary achievement to a close. As such it is profoundly autobiographical: Maartens’ last heroine’s moral and existential despair and her emotional state, paving the way for her religious

⁵¹² Quotations taken from *Letters*, 11.6.1912, 311. As far as Gosse was concerned, he defended Zola. See the extract from “The Limits of Realism in Fiction”, in Walter F. Greiner and Fritz Kemmler, *Realismstheorien in England (1692-1912)* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1979), 144-149. Gosse’s appeal was not too much effect: rather than dealing with contemporary issues, the depiction of timeless values was still considered the vocation of the novelist. His friend Leslie Stephen, the renowned critic, wrote that, as it was not possible to make objective statements about the order that governed the phenomena of existence, idealization became the quality in virtue of which a poem or a fiction did not present merely the scientific or photographic reproduction of matters of fact, but incarnated an idea and expressed a sentiment (Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 55). With regard to George Eliot for instance, Stephen wrote that Eliot’s books “owe their charm to the exquisite painting of the old country life – an achievement made possible by a tender imagination brooding over a vanished past [...] but they owe their greatness to the insight into passions not confined to one race or period.” (*Hours in a Library* [1892] [New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968], 222). Readers, as well as critics, wished for a synthesis between the real and the ideal. This fully complies with Maartens’ thoughts on realism (see: Appendix 1).

awakening, reflect the author's personal condition. Maartens, no longer capable of finding comfort in his ethical convictions, projected his aspirations into the salvation of the heroine. Like Eve, he had the urge to lay down his tortured self in the blissful hands of the Church, thus to be reconciled with existence. He had reached the point where he could no longer conceal his desire to surrender his exhausted and rebellious self. As an idealistic projection of his own deepest aspirations, *Eve* represents the farthest he could go. At the end of the novel, having witnessed "the story of a life that can never be a whole life story" (214), one is left with an ambiguously mixed sense of awe and exasperation. Maartens, one feels, is close to encountering something noble, true and good while at the same time there is a something persistently out of focus: the incongruence between the mimetic and the diegetic passages, i.e. between showing the characters and intervening in an admonishing manner, reminiscent of a sermon, that generally affects Maartens' novels.

V.2. The author's growing sense of artistic inferiority

Maartens was increasingly apprehensive about the artistic value of his literary achievement. In the correspondence and the notebooks there are frequent attempts to subdue his disillusionment by assuming an attitude of indifference, such as: "I care, of course about the whole silly worry and failure, but in a curiously impersonal manner, as if it were all about some friend."⁵¹³ In this light-hearted manner, Maartens concealed a deep personal grief. This is particularly clear from his reactions to an article by Henry James on the state of the contemporary novel. Now, towards the close of his artistic productivity, the realisation, lain dormant for so long, was acutely pressed upon him that his work might not withstand the cold and clear gaze of the critical scrutiny he had solicited so long in vain. There is bitter irony in the fact that James' essay, crushing the remains of his hopes, was published the same year Constable started issuing the *Collected Edition* of Maartens' works.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ "To Nicoll", 25.1.1912, *Letters*, 305.

⁵¹⁴ H. James, "The New Novel", in *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (New York: University Press, 1948), 181-214; the numbers added to the quotations in the following refer to the pages in this edition. The essay was first published in H. James, *Notes on Novelists with some Other Notes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914). "All the English novelists of the time read the article and many felt themselves ignored; the Master, undisturbed, had had his say": Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 698. Concerning James as a psychological realist: cf. Edel, Leon, ed., *Henry James: The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956). Maartens had begun a new novel, "The Lovelife of Carol Casteel", the writing of which he continued during the winter of 1913-1914. As he was increasingly wrestling with ill-health, the manuscript was never completed. The paralysing effect of the James essay may also have contributed to this.

Maartens' daughter Ada reported her father's reaction in a letter, dictated by himself, to his most intimate correspondent, Lady Gosse: "He has had another bad attack – three days – which he describes himself entirely to his having locked himself up by himself in a railway carriage with Mr. Henry James's article on the present novel! He begs and *entreats* you to send him by the next post a line on a card to say what it means. He read it 17 times in an hour and then lay unconscious till the train reached Amersfoort."⁵¹⁵

In his essay, written in the elaborate style of most of his later criticism, Henry James explored the methods used in contemporary novel. On the verge of the impenetrable and without ever using the term realism, he examined the techniques of a number of outstanding novelists of the realist school, such as Arnold Bennett, D.H. Lawrence, H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Compton Mackenzie and Edith Wharton, setting out to extract from the works of these authors the elements in which they distinguish themselves both from the bulk of their contemporaries as well as from each other. James's first aim was to draw attention to the deplorable state of criticism, too lenient as it was, in his view, about the current developments in the literature of the period. His entire essay is a demonstration of what he himself deemed to be called criticism worthy of that name. He was particularly vociferous in his demands for that reason. He called on the critical reader no longer simply to accept what was being put in front of him. While pointing at the mediocrity criticism, he equally professed to attack the aforementioned tendencies. He accused the critics of indulging in the methods that imperturbably invaded the market. As far as the authors were concerned, James stated that instead of seeking to distinguish themselves from the flood of production and in spite of differences in their treatment of character and range, they revelled in the amassing of detail. "Saturation" had become the new standard: the "extraordinary mass of gathered and assimilated knowledge [...] of any such variety, intensity and plausibility" had become the "new feature of the novelist's range of resource." (184)

In his essay, James actually advocated his own aesthetic concept of psychological realism. Thirty pages long and hermetic, each page contained enough to have deeply perturbed Maartens, destroying the last vestiges of his artistic self-respect. James claimed that the authors of the past were perfectly justified in closely adhering to a more concise plot structure, tone and setting, insofar as such conventional principles of method corresponded with the expectancy of their readership. However, the ongoing process of democratisation on all levels of society had lead to a shift of perspective towards the "nearer view of commoner things." (186) According to James, readers searched for the rendering of a vision in literature

⁵¹⁵ "To Mrs. Gosse", 5.4.1914, *Letters*, 344. It is not known if there were any reactions concerning the

in accordance with the ongoing changes and demanded literature that fulfilled their expectancy. Consequently, the authors who were called to express that shift began to take a different stance towards the past:

Was it not for all the world as if even the brightest practitioners of the past, those we now distinguish as saved for glory in spite of themselves, had been as sentimental as they could, or, to give the trick another name, as romantic and thereby as shamelessly ‘dodgy’? – just in order *not* to be close and fresh, not to be authentic, as that takes trouble, takes talent, and you can be sentimental, you can be romantic, you can be dodgy, alas, not a bit less on the footing of genius than on the footing of mediocrity or even of imbecility? (187)

According to James, the Victorian adherence to certain aesthetic criteria had been consistent with this goal in view. Contemporary writers were now in a position to perceive the “tricks” their great predecessors had had on stock. In their obsession with saturation, contemporary writers had forgotten to keep in mind that their Victorian precursors had realized their own vision. To the new generation of writers, however, the Victorian aesthetic criteria were now losing their overall validity.

James showed that saturation was not necessarily an evil. Himself being one of the foremost exponents of transition, he had sought a way towards an aesthetic formula of his own. Distinctly in contrast to the earlier tradition, his method was not void of a particular kind of saturation. At the same time it retained elements of that tradition that still appealed to him. He pointed out that saturation impeded the rendering of a vision when it became the end in itself because certain aesthetic rules were neglected in the process. The following comment on Arnold Bennett exemplifies James’s approximation:

When the author of *Clayhanger* has put down upon the table, in dense confused array, every fact required, every fact in any way evocable, to make the life of the *Five Towns* press upon us, and to make our sense of it, so full-fed, content us, we may very well go on for the time in the captive condition, the beguiled and bemused condition, the acknowledgement of which is in general our highest tribute to the temporary master of our sensibility. Nothing at such moments – or rather at the end of them, when the end begins to threaten – may be of a more curious strain than the dawning unrest that suggests to us fairly our first critical comment: ‘Yes, yes – but is this all? we see, we see; but where is the interest itself, where and what is its centre, and how are we to measure it in relation to that?’ (189)

As Maartens felt his position to be already discredited, the essay is crowded with deliberations that perturbed him. Considering the waning appreciation of his books, it added fuel to his latent fears that his work was no good after all, leaving him in a state of frantic unrest. The article must have hit him like the verdict ‘guilty’ passed on an innocent man; its author, Henry James, as prosecutor and judge rolled into one. Even if Maartens was not once mentioned in

the paper, the conviction that had been vexing him deeply and persistently for years was now ‘officially’ confirmed by one of the foremost representatives of the literary establishment. Maartens, too, had achieved no more than to become, in James’s eyes, one among the crowd of writers, “fabulists in general on a vain hunt for some projected mass of truth, some solidity of substance as to which the deluge of ‘dialogue’, the flooding report of things said, or at least of words pretendedly spoken, shall have learnt the art of being merely illustrational.”(207)⁵¹⁶ According to James, “merely illustrational” was the result of the work of the novelist who “from that straggle of ungoverned verbiage” tried to show he knew all about a certain “congeries of aspects, the more numerous within their mixed circle the better, and is thereby to set in motion, with due intensity, the pretension to interest.”(190)

As has been shown, Maartens’ doubts concerning the genuineness of the appreciation of his work were not unjustified. So it is not difficult to imagine how observations such as the following may have led him to assume that his readers had lost interest in his work because he no longer fulfilled their present criteria, whatever they once may have been. James emphasised that fascination was a *conditio sine qua non* in literary art: it was the amused state of the reader, enkindling his interest once ignited. This corroborated Maartens’ awareness of the fact that, at some point, his readers must have stopped ‘being amused’ with what they read:

That appreciation is also a mistake and a priggishness, being reflective and thereby corrosive, is another of the fond dicta with which we are here concerned but to brush aside – the more closely to embrace the welcome induction that appreciation, attentive and reflective, inquisitive and conclusive, is in this connection absolutely the golden *key* to our pleasure. [...] It all comes back to our amusement, and to the noblest surely, on the whole, we know; and it is in the very nature of clinging appreciation not to sacrifice consentingly a single shade of the art that makes for that blessing.” (191)

And what of James’s excessive remarks on Tolstoy, of whom he said that, “observing the distances, we may profitably detect an unexhausted influence in our minor, our still considerably less rounded vessels.”(191) when we remember that Tolstoy was the great Russian with whom Maartens identified in his “own small way”, identification which, considered from James’s perspective, turned out negatively for Maartens. Within the general tenor of the essay it was but another observation adding fuel to the fire, rendering him incapable of judging the article objectively.

⁵¹⁶ Strikingly, Maartens is not once mentioned in the correspondence between Henry James and Edmund Gosse: Rayburn S. Moore, ed., *Selected Letters of Henry James to Edmund Gosse, 1882-1915: A Literary Friendship* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988). Even more significantly, his name is lacking in Ann Thwaite’s biography, *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape, 1849-1928* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984).

As James went on to say, the novelist's art consisted of half saturation and half application, a duality of method from which the necessity of selection followed naturally. The method he had advocated and successfully practised up to that point implied a constant comparison of all elements before they were selected to fill the canvas. The question arises as to how these elements were being exhibited: to which extent, in what shade, etc., leaving a "refinement of design to be recognized." (203) This was the inevitable process neglected by those writers who went about their business haphazardly, thus running the risk of overcrowding their canvas. Maartens must have felt the blow when he read on: "The phenomenon is too uncanny, the happy-go-lucky-fashion, as we know it in general, never has been trustable to the end; the absence or the last true touch in the preparation of its viands becomes with each renewal of the adventure a more sensible fact." James went on to say that the principle of selection was indispensable for "any approach whatever to the loaf of life with the *arrière-pensée* of a slice." (200) At this point, his approach comes close to what Maartens, referring to his own conception of reality, had called "life as seen through a temperament". The 'slice' as well as the 'temperament' imply some form of limitation, i.e. of selection, of a particular perspective.⁵¹⁷

In his persistently ironical vein interspersed with occasional flashes of sarcasm, even cynicism, James went on, furthering his expostulations. The "slice of life" had to be "illustrational of the loaf" itself (201). This could only be realised if the "yearning imaginative faculty" of the artist diffused itself as, what he called, a "noble sociability of vision." (206) If the 'slice' no longer sufficiently illustrated the 'loaf', it meant that the link between fiction and reality was disrupted. From that moment onwards, disbelief on the part of the reader was the inevitable consequence.

Although the term 'vision' occurs early in James's essay, it took him seventeen pages of elaborate argumentation to arrive at his main contention: the artist was driven by his vision, taking shape artistically in the process of creation. From the very outset, that vision implied a limitation of scope, and within that scope, the elements selected would fuse in such a manner that the sense of discomfort previously referred to was, as a matter of consequence, "conjured

⁵¹⁷ These arguments were identical in principle to Maartens' own artistic criteria, where he stressed the importance of the artist's "faculty of artistic selection, suppression, and arrangement" (cf. Appendix 1). Considering the question of temperament, Goetsch's assessment would at least not exclude Maartens, insofar as, according to the critics of the period, the novelist was not supposed simply to imitate reality in a generally understandable manner. On the contrary, he had to give shape to his own impressions of that reality according to his own temperament, remaining faithful to both: his impressions as well as his disposition (cf. *Romankonzeption*, 84). A more recent study that elucidates some of the difficulties, conditioned by the particularities of the period in meeting these criteria: Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: the Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *passim*.

away.”(206) From this very awareness, a vision emerged, resulting in the extreme satisfaction that “the fusion has taken place, or at any rate a fusion; only it has been transferred in wondrous fashion to an unexpected, and on the whole more limited plane of operation.”(206) Throughout the work of art, the vision should remain so important so as to be constantly perceived, felt, or understood emotively by the reader.

Had Maartens been able to study the article more objectively he might have distanced himself from its content. He would have understood that, as a dramatic realist, he belonged to the tradition preceding the modernist transition. Although Maartens wrote his books during the same period as the authors aimed at by James, his manner was of quite a different kind. With regard to the preponderance of ethical values in Tolstoy, for example, values whose importance James repeatedly stressed, there is a point to be made for similarities of certain aspects of method. From James’s vantage point, such comparison would not be to Maartens’ discredit. Although far from being on Tolstoy’s footing, Maartens shared with the great Russian master the moral determination to defend the values he upheld.

Particularly in his short stories Maartens’ art does justice to the following two Jamesian criteria: firstly, the slice of life in “coincidence at once with reality and charm – a fact aesthetically curious and delightful” (198). Secondly, James adhered to a concept of ‘temperament’ also characteristic of Maartens. Talking about Hugh Walpole, James said that this temperament added a quality of freshness to “every cup of his excited flow.”(199) On the other hand, his defence of the condition that was most essential to the realist method, the Flaubertian aesthetic quality of *impassibilité*, would oppose any concept of temperament that allowed for the narrator’s noticeable presence on the scene: “We take for granted by the general law of fiction a primary author, take him so much for granted that we forget him in proportion as he works upon us, and that he works upon us most in fact by making us forget him.” (204) James’s “claim for method in itself, method in this very sense of attention applied” (203) was an extremely exacting one.⁵¹⁸

It is neither here nor there to put Maartens’ achievement to the ultimate test of the Jamesian criteria set out above. As a matter of fact, James himself would have been the last person to put forward any claim beyond the plausibility of his argumentation.⁵¹⁹ With hindsight, the aim of the essay was not least to foster more serious criticism, of which it was itself an early case in point. The method by which an author directs his motives and impulses – with the intention

⁵¹⁸ With regard to Edith Wharton for example, James noted “the treasure of amusement sitting in the lap of method with a felicity particularly her own” (209).

⁵¹⁹ See Walter R. McDonald, “The Inconsistencies in Henry James’s Aesthetics”, *TSSL* 10 (1969), 585-597, passim, also: Sergio Perosa, *Henry James and the Experimental Novel* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

of rendering their essence visible and determining their logical course – is not always evident in Maartens' novels. The term 'method' suggests a whole range of subtle conditions, which, as we come to a conclusive evaluation, it has been our aim to distil from the work itself.

V.3. The method of Maarten Maartens

V.3.1. Introduction

Maarten Maartens was a writer from the beginning: his earliest letters, at the tender age of six, already show an unerring and indelible inclination towards the observation of his surroundings.⁵²⁰ The written comments are satirical, the drawings themselves very simple and apparently straightforward impressions, which, however, often lend an ironic twist to the tale. Thus, these letters anticipate the concise treatment of the many types of people he was to create in his books. With regard to a number of novels as well as short stories, his practice was to compile a list of the protagonists as well as to draw sketches of the way he imagined them to look like.⁵²¹ His very own stance is there from the start: everything is observed from a satirical angle. The drawings represent types, which possess one or two outstanding features, pointing at a particular disposition of character. They are already described in the tone of amused benevolence typical of Maartens, rendering his characters ridiculous and touching at the same time.

The material from which his poetics – or, as he put it, his “temperament” – can be determined, is the work itself.⁵²² Maarten Maartens was not a critic. He was not given to theorising on the nature of his vocation. As it came to him naturally, there was no particular reason that he should. Comments by himself on his own art are rare. Equally seldom was he inclined to criticise the work of his fellow writers, although his correspondence shows that he expressed his views with ease and a ready instinct to separate wheat from chaff. He noted the distinctions of a particular work of art as he perceived them in general terms rather than commenting upon that work in either positive or negative terms. Maartens' judgement of other writers was not so much based on theoretical principles than on ready instinct. His opinions stemmed directly from his own artistic inclinations, i.e., from his own subjective

⁵²⁰ Letters to Herbert Warren, Maartens' school-companion in Britain. Originals are kept in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁵²¹ Maartens also kept lists of names of people he knew in his notebooks. Needless to say they never occur in his books, but the real people behind them may have struck his imagination.

⁵²² “Interview”, 2.

views on the intention of the writer in question. To assume how that writer should proceed in trying to achieve his aims, as for example in the case of Maupassant, was beyond his interest. The spontaneity of Maartens' prose resulted directly from the most outstanding trait of his artistic "temperament": a natural inclination to satire. The second – the idealistic, spiritual element – had yet to come into play: His first impulse was to emphasize the humorous side, particularly of people and their professions. This accounts to a large extent for their habits and prejudices. Living in a world that abounded with material, he wrote leisurely and with natural eloquence, as though after having formed an impression he had but to write it down. His style makes it hard to imagine he might ever have been grappling laboriously for the right word or phrase. As if to give evidence of this, his manuscripts are written in an immaculate long hand, with very few corrections or insertions. In this respect he was indeed a born storyteller, as Arthur Quiller-Couch put it.⁵²³ Aware as he was of traditional influences on his style, he greatly admired Thackeray's narrative technique, which had an impact on his own work. The fact that English was not his mother tongue definitely played a role. It led Edmund Gosse to assume it was precisely because of this that Maartens was more scrupulous in matters of style than some of his English fellow writers.⁵²⁴ Although his narrative is occasionally somewhat elaborate there are no traces of strain or artifice. Compared to Thackeray, Maartens is sober in the sense that, with few exceptions, his style is subservient to his wish to be clear and concise. He coaxes the words into complying with his aims rather than passively surrendering himself to their spell. He is determined to express himself as straightforwardly as possible in accordance with his themes; to do otherwise would seem artificial.⁵²⁵ Even on such rare occasions where descriptions abound, entailing opulent yet to the point clusters of vocabulary, stylistic devices are never used for their own sake.

Maartens' style is naturally determined by the various demands and characteristics of the narrative, for example when stylistic solemnity or vernacular is required. Like Thackeray's though less vehemently, it shifts to and fro between sobriety and its opposite, exuberance. Both writers let themselves be instinctively guided by their natural instinct for style that seems to take its course on the pulse of the moment.⁵²⁶ In other terms, the narrative modulates the style – e.g., serious, sentimental, satirical, ironical. There is no danger of style becoming

⁵²³ Preface to *Letters*, xxv.

⁵²⁴ Review of Maarten Maartens, Poet and Novelist, W. van Maanen, *The Sunday Times* (8 Jan. 1928).

⁵²⁵ Burdett resumed: "His style is fluent and conversational, but with no beauty peculiarly his own. Where it charms us is in its wit; where it moves us we are drawn to the man more than to the writing, to that high soul whose spiritual ambitions were cruelly at odds with the world under his eyes" (127). Furthermore, he added that Maartens, unlike Hawthorne, could not be read for the beauty of his style alone, presuming readers were no longer interested in their mutual theme, a concern for cases of conscience (cf. 128).

an end in itself, as is the case with the prose of some of his contemporaries.⁵²⁷ It is unimpeded in its modulations, sure of its poise, catching the right tone at the right moment.

V.3.2. Ambiguity of intention: The comical vision with a stain

The idea of entertaining a sophisticated readership had already inspired the creation of *The Black Box Murder*, but in *Joost Avelingh* Maartens first came to his own. The comic element, so primordial in all of his novels remained more subdued than might have been, had not his preoccupation with moral dilemmas outweighed all other interests. As he proceeded from novel to novel, however, other, more deliberate intentions demanded their due, sometimes impairing the intrinsically comical intention. Being a comical writer was not so much an intention than part of an inborn vocation: it was his instinctive artistic aptitude, the pivotal point of his temperament. There were moments when it was in his power to suppress this vocation but never entirely to ignore it. When off guard, if only for a moment, comedy emerges like a cork from under the deeper waters of the ‘other’ intentions he cherished and sought persistently to advocate and communicate to his readership.

Concerning the nature of his intentions, one is left bewildered and puzzled at unexpected instances: is the narrator being serious, or is he merely trying to poke fun at everything? If ambiguity of intention – aspect of the modern novel – was intriguing, it was irritating and confusing to those readers who felt that their expectations had not been fulfilled. As they were first led to entertain those expectations by the author himself – as were, equally, the few critics and many reviewers – it follows that the author was either unsure of his intentions or that, subconsciously, he constructed a narrative that did not comply with the views he consciously advocated. Accordingly, the critics differ in their assessments: Virginia Woolf could take *The New Religion* at its face value of being a ludicrously funny and entertaining book. From his standpoint of a militant critic of civilization, George Bernhard Shaw immediately welcomed it in the advocacy of his own cause, whereas Arthur Quiller-Couch, looked upon the matter from his nineteenth century angle.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ This does of course not imply a lack of interest in style, as implied, with regard to Maartens, by J.A. Russel in his *Romance and Realism* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1959), 134.

⁵²⁷ Arguably, Henry James is a case in point himself, whose verbose style sometimes smothers the transparency of the narrative.

⁵²⁸ Quiller-Couch did not perceive this comic side of Maartens’ narrative as observed by Woolf, at least not in *The New Religion*. In a general sense though, he did, as some pages earlier in a remark about Stevenson, who “continues to be loved for the nerve of narrative in his books as well as for *his jolly way of putting things*” (emphasis in the original) adding that “our leading critics just now have little concern with narrative and little with Maarten Maartens as a brilliant practitioner of it” (xx-xxi).

V.3.3. The panorama and the picture

The divergent characteristics of Maartens' style are often in accordance with the genre: the shift between exuberance on the one hand and sobriety on the other hand, reflecting the two poles of his prose: the novel and the short story. 'Panorama' as opposed to 'picture' has the pretence of some form of completeness, of epic dimension if not in detail. The 'picture' suggests, on the contrary, a selection. By the very act of limitation, the author creates a wealth of suggestion with far greater intensity than the 'panoramic' writer who is essentially like an historian, proceeding from scene to scene, supplying more events, and enumerating more facts.

In Maartens' novels, details abound in little anecdotes about the life and habits of the minor characters. Attracted as he was by everything that crossed his path, he was not always aware that problems occurring (when presenting a structured picture) could be resolved by carefully selecting and structuring of details. At times, his imagination got the better of him while he took for granted that his readers would be as much entertained as the narrator himself.⁵²⁹

In Maartens' novels, as in Hardy's, abundance of detail leads to the reader's intimacy with the scene, because the components – such as surroundings, landscape, or furniture – are always presented in their interrelationship with the characters. The narrator does not hesitate to invite the reader to join him in his privileged familiarity with the scene. Ever since the publication of *Joost Avelingh*, this was one of Maartens' outstanding qualities, which reviewers never tired of mentioning:

It is in this achievement [i.e. the picture of Dutch life] that these novels possess their distinctive interest, showing us the character and quality and the local colour which belong to this homely Dutch life, and bringing up into light those elements of humour and pathos and tragedy which belong to what at first sight may appear merely dull and commonplace.⁵³⁰

In contrast to the epic scope of 'panorama', the idea of a 'picture' is impressionistic. Even if not described accurately, details still enhance the general notion of completeness. They must

⁵²⁹ Virginia Woolf observed in her review of Maartens' novel, *The New Religion*: "Although such a form of light-hearted amusement was, oddly enough, not the author's intention in this novel, it should nevertheless be considered an essential quality".

⁵³⁰ "A Dutch Novel", in *The Spectator* (June 6, 1891), 797-799. There is no doubt that there is an element of romanticising in this approach. The Dutch critic W.G. van Nouhuys largely ignored this perspective in his review of *Joost Avelingh*, even if he admitted there were well-written passages about Dutch life in the novel. In spite of his prejudice against Maartens, whom he took to be an Englishman writing about the Dutch, his objections touched upon certain structural weaknesses: "Our writers have produced much better than Maartens gave us. I have to admit that the intrigue is cleverly composed. It will certainly enthrall superficial readers, interested in crime stories. But Maartens does not prove a great artist. He uses too many tricks, too many romantic commonplaces [...] The hero of the book is an abstraction. Apparently the writer attempted to follow the psychological method, but he was too much overwhelmed by melodrama." (*De Nederlandsche Spectator* [17 February 1890]).

serve the function of giving shape and depth to character, atmosphere and setting. In a sense, a description of the ‘panoramic’ order is passive – mere additional information – whereas there is an active requirement in the ‘picture’: details should compose the frame, furnished in its turn by the reader’s imagination.

‘Picture’ in the Maartensian sense is a metaphor that stands for purity in art. It simultaneously implies a number of aspects, only to be seen from a certain angle, both in a literal and in an abstract sense. This in turn requires a selection of significant details, necessary for the creation of a picture that complies with the author’s larger vision, i.e., the final image emerging that is something more than the sum of all the evoked pictures in their totality. It is up to the author to select the details both in terms of quality and quantity, for want of better terms. In order to do this appropriately, it is crucial that his intentions are quite clear to himself, consequently to his readers. One of the underlying problems, precisely, is Maartens’ ambiguity of intention. The problem does not lie, as some critics believe, in superfluity of detail. Provided that the intention is obvious, there is no reason why the author should not succumb to his propensity to abound in anecdotal descriptions. Maartens could naturally never get away from this, the very root of his temperament. One of his conscious intentions must have been to entertain his readers by dint of this facet of his method: cumulative narrative.

V.3.4. The novels: details for details’ sake

Amongst Maartens’ few ‘serious’ critics, some had felt that, in his novels, he allowed himself to be too much carried away by the flow of the narrative. True, funny, or to the point, he was not only lauded but also reproached for his exuberance of detail.⁵³¹ If he felt no need to discard or, at least, to play down many an incidental event, it was because, for some reason, he saw no cause to question its necessity. To James Barrie, he wrote: “I know what the critics keep going on about. But then my books would be like (so many of) the others.”⁵³²

Within a single scene, on the other hand, critics agreed that Maartens was able to concentrate fully on the careful rendering of the significant detail. The emphasis lies always on the single scene. Such scenes occur in the novels permanently. Here, Maartens complies with his own criteria of selection.⁵³³

⁵³¹ Quiller-Couch, *Letters*, Preface, xxiv. See also Burdett, Van Maanen and Wim Zaal.

⁵³² MS letter to Roberson Nicoll, 25.01.1912, Maartens Archive, Doorn.

⁵³³ As we have seen, lack of selection was Maartens’ criterion for criticising Emile Zola’s work which he considers a second kind of art (Interview given in *The New York Times* [14 April 1907]).

By distinguishing between a panorama and a picture, Maartens implied that the art of choosing from the innumerable traits offered by nature was, after all, considerably more difficult than that of merely observing them attentively and describing them accurately. He considered his own art pictorial, not panoramic; he observed, perceived and wrote with a pretence of fullness, not of completeness. While filling his canvas, it was limited to the things visible from his standpoint at that particular moment. However, a problem arises at instances where he was too much carried away by the sheer number and variety of details. The reader senses a lack of scrutiny on the author's part in attaching these details to the main action. Many a time there is a digression in the story, apparently as there seems to be no other reason, for diversion's sake. At such moments there is something uncomfortable in the notion that we are dealing with a writer who no doubt aims at the presentation of an illusion of reality, but who does not seem eager to get on with the job of telling his tale. Again, the problem does not lie in the single scene – nor in the short story as a whole, which is like a single scene, organically speaking. Here, Maartens' choice unerringly has the Chechovian proclivity, i.e., he provides the detail that fuses the typical expression with the individual character, thereby furnishing the reader with just the right key to the distinctive quality of the object in focus. Structural problems only arise when a quantity of scenes, impressions, dialogues, and authorial comments is to be moulded into the all-encompassing shape of the novel.

V.3.5. The short stories: The significant detail

In the short story, the significant detail gives life to the main character as well as rendering the entire scene plausible.⁵³⁴ Accordingly it must be distinguished from the use of details as elements of the narrative composition within the larger structure of the novel. Within such a frame the minor details, while maintaining their own ground and their own characteristic propensities, are put in relation to one another with the ultimate purpose of strengthening the major significant detail, e.g., a scene between a couple, a description, gradually pulling the major significant detail into focus. As a next step, all-consecutive material is put into what might be called 'relief', i.e. to arrange properly all details, enclosing the main one now in focus, in order to sustain it permanently as the one major focal point. This principle is valid within the single scene, as well as within the macro-structure of the larger form. The most important function of the faculty of choice is to create relief. Relief, that is to say, between the scenes themselves. It is all a question of control: from the ability of selection of detail we

⁵³⁴ For the concept of the 'significant detail' as well as 'relief' I am indebted to Peter Cortland, *The Sentimental Adventure: An Examination of Flaubert's Education Sentimentale*. The Hague: Mouton, 1967.

have arrived at the capacity to control the material in its entirety. This process of control already begins in the creative mind – the control of the imagination – before put into practice, i.e., preliminary to the actual process of writing. In the short story, Maartens seeks neither cold perfection nor aridity: he exercises control. Graceful, as nothing ever seems calculated or premeditated, the ineluctable result of the creative process. Due to this controlled gracefulness, his short stories are concise and to the point. The narrative is absolutely clear and straightforward, yet it subtly embraces poetry without ever appearing to seek for it.

Maartens' correspondence shows that his initial successes, as a novelist, never induced him into insouciance. Still he apparently found he had no reason to be particularly concerned, lest his readers might misunderstand the intention of his work. When a detail – or a cluster of details – seems out of place or superfluous, it disrupts the reader's pleasure. The reader now feels at a loss in an abundance of well-wrought but insignificant details. It is inevitable and only natural that he will always 'single out' the interest by relating the chain of detail – i.e. the narrative – to the main idea. When that link is hard to perceive, or when absent, the interest is imperilled. Disconcertion also arises from the impression that a quantity of material is presented in just one book that – given due attention – would require several volumes. On the other hand, too many side-plots grapple with one another in search of the reader's favour. When something seems out of place in the narrative, it blemishes the general effect of the picture, impairing the reader's enjoyment, numbing his curiosity. The result is impatience, even annoyance, of being disconnected to the story, resulting in an impression of long-windedness.⁵³⁵

On the narrative level, the picture arises from a particular composition of details. Well balanced, they imbue the reader with a feeling of harmony, of complete disinterestedness. The scene presented exists uniquely by and for itself, which is the ideal stage of *impassibilité* as postulated and practised by Gustave Flaubert.⁵³⁶ Flaubert made a composition of particular details, leading to the larger autonomous picture, the shadow of its creator having become invisible. Already in Maartens' *Joost Avelingh*, the book he spoke so highly of, Osbert Burdett detected the incongruity of matter and method. Already in that novel he observed that

⁵³⁵ Interestingly, it was Artur Quiller-Couch who coined the phrase: "It begins with 'in short' and proceeds to be long-winded" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1334). Amongst Maartens' novels, Burdett's considered his own definition of plot particularly valid for *Joost Avelingh*: "A good plot is like the plan of a good building – not a frame of coincidence into which the characters have to be squeezed by pressure from without, but the necessary tangle produced by the tempers and circumstances of an organically related group of people" (115).

⁵³⁶ Still authoritative in defining Flaubert's over-all significance for realism: Hugo Friedrich, *Drei Klassiker des französischen Romans* (1939) (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1961), 118-155, particularly 121-127, 131-132. The critic H.G. Keene suggested a distinction between the subjective art of the

the author's own Puritanism impaired the balance. As he put it, one indeed does not so much "question the credibility of Joost's repentance as the author's impartiality. Joost is the scapegoat required by all Puritan storytellers. Because he is his hero, no excuses are allowed to him." (117)

Insofar as Maartens had no wish to reproduce a *tableau* from nature that presented all aspects of its selection with equal emphasis, he distinguished himself from Emile Zola, the father of naturalism. Beyond that, however, his idea was not merely to present a picture by a particular composition of details, in the Flaubertian sense, but to present it in an idealized form.⁵³⁷

Theoretical observations on art by Maartens are rare. Apart from occasionally referring to his 'temperament' and some reflections in his notebooks, there is not much to go by. Few as they are, these thoughts reveal, however, in a nutshell, his concept of art. Each of his prose works gives proof of his endeavour to practice – to the full of his powers – the principles set out above. His artistic temperament demanded of him that he present a picture painted from a particular angle. The selection of details that complied with that call was, ultimately, a controlled presentation of his own aesthetic ideal. Maartens was well aware that the propagation of such an ideal as a concept of art went against the current trends, not only in literature but also in other forms of art, such as painting and sculpture.

By 1901, he had passed the zenith of his popular renown, the sales of his books steadily declining. This may also have fuelled his notion that, in reality, he belonged to the 'intrinsically unpopular class.'⁵³⁸ He had come to understand that his popularity, as far as it went, had been based, on the whole, merely upon one quality: his artful rendering of the Dutch microcosm, in particular its comical presentation. Once having thoroughly realized the fact, he became the more eager to emphasise that other, Puritan, strain in his work: to prove, as is clear from the quotation on art above, that his concept of reality is the projection of an ideal beyond the actual state of man's awareness of himself.

Ultimately, "some sort of mark" meant that the representation and communication of his vision as Maartens had put it, was of no less importance to the author than the means he applied to reach his goal. In order to pass this vision on to the reader, the narrative not only had to conjure up an illusion of reality, it would have to sustain that illusion as well. If this is the case, organically speaking, the effect of the totality of the work is greater than the sum of its parts. It is this very effect that shows that the author's vision – i.e., in Maartens' case, the

novel and the objective "dunghill artists", i.e. Zola, while he considered Flaubert and Balzac as subjective novelists: *The Literature of France* (S.l., s.n., 1892), 209.

⁵³⁷ An entry in one of his unpublished notebooks, quoted in full, clearly testifies to his – essentially romantic – outlook, see Appendix 1.

⁵³⁸ See quotation on popularity (11 April 1901, *Letters*, 200).

ultimate reality – has been communicated. By means of selection the artist creates and maintains an illusion of reality that is complete in itself while complying with his own vision of the world, or, in his own words, life seen through a temperament.

In Maartens' prose, every narrative component that favours the natural eruption of his temperament is appropriate. However, there is a danger: in order that the illusion may sustain the spell, the writer must remain out of sight, behind the stage. The realist writer needs to apply all his powers to appear natural, not artificial. If not, the sustenance of the illusion is anew imperilled. To sustain the illusion, we must be continually under the impression that we are listening to the narrator, not to the author. This instantly happens, though, when the latter draws the attention to himself, either noticeable in certain stylistic fluctuations, or directly, by means of authorial intrusion. Scarcely can Maartens avoid doing so throughout, but, as it is his aim to sustain a particular illusion, he should at least not be caught in the act. Allowing himself uncontrolled outbursts of intrusion disrupts the narrative balance, compromising the structure as a whole. Rather than impede the flow of the narrative, all elements must be well integrated into the texture so as to propel it ahead. Nothing should stand apart: whatever is present has its justification through its being integrated in the momentary sequel and, beyond that, to the action as a whole.

V.3.6. Nationalities and localities: the Dutch scene and the foreign typicality

When it concerned his own people, the Dutch, Maartens occasionally employed the use of vernacular, a literary device popular amongst the Romantics. This was part of the familiar ground of the tradition, something readers were used to and expected to encounter in a contemporary novel.⁵³⁹ Around 1900, small countries such as The Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark were like blank spots in the mind of the European citizen. General notions of what was typically German, French or English had existed for a long time, but a general concept of what was typically Dutch did not really exist in the collective consciousness of any educated readership outside Holland. Maartens' was the first author to present the Dutch scene to the larger nations of Europe. He was one of the first writers of fiction to have opened the Dutch gates to an international public. His method may be termed 'local colour' insofar as it evokes an atmosphere or produces a typically Dutch scene. This is often the case in conversations between the Dutch protagonists and it contributed significantly to his success. Thackeray and

⁵³⁹ It was frequently applied by Thackeray as well as Hardy, although Hardy declared that the artist should merely point at certain characteristics of vernacular (see Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 39). That the fashionableness of local colour as the piling-up of picturesque details could disparage the edifice of the fictional illusion, was one aspect demonstrated by Henry James in his article on the contemporary novel.

Hardy had worked with the same tools, attaining similar results, but with a difference: Maartens could not use any of the vernaculars of his own people, i.e. the Dutch, because he wrote in English. He had to translate the mood and atmosphere, rendered by such vernacular, into an English that evoked an atmosphere or a scene, which his foreign readers would appreciate for its *Dutch* typicality. This kind of ‘local colour’ is, however, at risk of becoming ineffectual when it is added to the narrative in order to give that narrative a particularly local shade at instances where one expects nothing but objective description. The opposite has a similarly incongruent effect: when the local type – a milkmaid for example – we have previously encountered suddenly uses a style that can hardly be expected of a milkmaid. At such instances the caricature, strictly limited to types of people, is abandoned for the sake of conveying an idea. On a deeper level, the evocation of local setting adds shades to the narrative, revealing the moral and ethical values of a particular community and its attitude to social institutions, such as the Church and politics. More particularly, it reveals ways of social interaction between members of a single household within a single social class, or between members of different social classes.

In *Vanity Fair* also, we are given examples of types representing different nations. By exhibiting their characteristic habits and ways of speech, such as accent, style, and vocabulary, their portrayals contrasted with the surrounding world. Since they are types, as is shown in the peculiarities of attitude, mentality and behaviour, we readily accept them as, for example, typically German or French. Similarly, a critic noted that Maartens’ “English were really English, his German really German, his French really French.”⁵⁴⁰ Maartens insisted that it was purely coincidental that his plots and characters were embedded in a Dutch setting. He never considered the Dutch setting a limitation, not even where he enlarged his scope, as in *Her Memory*. In his novels he evoked the tone of the vernacular of locals rather than actually using it. Maartens depicted his foreign types in a Thackerayan manner that strikes one as being immeasurably simple, considering to the insight he possessed, necessary to render the subtleties of prejudice and misunderstanding between the classes, or within the boundaries of a class that was by no means his own.

Maartens was ideally placed to portray his own class – at home or abroad. Although he lived quite secluded from the surrounding peasant communities, he was able to feel his way into their world and to render the passionate and instinctive sensations of the ‘simple people’. Maartens’ strength resides in his unerring ability to identify with all classes and all social strata. Certain details and images appertaining to each of these presented themselves to his

⁵⁴⁰ “Interview”, 3.

mind, although they were inherently alien to his own ways of feeling and thinking. The form of the short story enabled him in particular to render, a prodigiously imaginative impulse as a brief but complete tragedy in itself.⁵⁴¹ The link between, on the one hand, observation and description of nature and, on the other hand, the profound exploration of the human beings integrated in those natural surroundings and shaped by them, had been established long before. Thomas Hardy was perhaps the last of the great in the tradition of writers who resorted to descriptions of nature to create a unique atmosphere of intimacy with the scene. Maartens, although he is part of the tradition, may not reach Hardy's excellence in this respect, but in his peasant stories there are moments where the local colour pushes outward, by its own momentum as it were, into all four corners of the work.⁵⁴²

V.3.7. Maartens' method of characterisation

From the beginning, Maartens' method of characterisation consisted in the exploration of character in its myriad aspects, its inherent intricacies, differences, fears and convictions, doubts and prejudices. He began a story as a painter might start a painting: fixing the centre of interest first. Once this had been done, the page would gradually be filled out with shapes and colours in the background. It is quite the opposite of Hardy's typical opening of a story: a dark spot appearing in an undefined distance, gradually gaining human contours as the spot approaches. While the focus draws closer, surroundings are being filled out with details, revealing contours, eventually making up for the whole. In Maartens, there is no such 'coming into the picture' by way of a gradual development. Man is not, as in Hardy, revealed to be but a mere trifle in the face of surroundings of a size forever beyond his measure; on the contrary, he is put there first, all the rest that follows being made subservient to his presence.

Maartens' characters do not develop as if gradually disentangling them from the larger body of surroundings. Their presence is much more front-stage. In Hardy's stories, the surroundings, the natural as well as the social ones, are conjured up as a presence in the background, ominous yet invisible, a power that constantly holds the strings, giving the characters an air of puppets, forever at the mercy of that power. In Maartens, on the contrary, the characters are swiftly sketched in brief, clear strokes long before we are aware of their surroundings. In the course of the ensuing plot events, they, too, have to fight against the

⁵⁴¹ This is in accordance with "Dramatise, Dramatise", another of Henry James' criteria, i.e., all things occurring should predominantly be rendered scenically, which meant a larger economy of narrative means as well as a drastic reduction of narrative intrusion (cf. *Prefaces*, 138).

⁵⁴² In his stories about Dutch peasants, Maartens equally realised to perfection what he proclaimed the principle of artistic creation, as shown earlier: *My Poor Relations (Short Stories)*, London: Constable, 1903) and

strokes of an unmoving, unmitigated fate. Yet Maartens' characters are not placed in a deterministic world. They have no choice but to act according to their inner strength. The illusion of a free will – subconscious if anything – enables them to carry on and resist fate.

Maartens aimed at creating rounded characters, with mixed results. At any rate, they are clearly portrayed individually and socially. In spite of their functioning as projections of the author's moral aspirations, the main protagonists retain their stance as individual characters. His minor characters, on the other hand, are predominantly types. On the whole, Maartens is a creator of types rather than of characters.⁵⁴³ He describes his types as they invariably appeared to him: visible and perceptible in their typicality. "The Van Weylerts", Maartens' first and unpublished novel, already shows how different types are being introduced, juxtaposed to one another in their characteristics, a device by which the plot momentum is accelerated if not unleashed.⁵⁴⁴

In Maartens, chance intervenes at pivotal points, causing the plot to take unexpected turns. Yet the reader has already grown too familiar with the characters so as not to expect them to rebel against their fate, in accordance with the traits of character that had been previously set out before us: whatever they do or decide, they do not hesitate to pick up the glove that destiny has thrown at their feet. They are restless in their attempt to confront the very forces assaulting them.

Already early in his career Maartens was aware of the real problem at stake in his novels, as shown by one of his letters to M. H. Spielmann. He knew that his treatment of character put the durable appreciation of his work at stake:

I fear you too favourably touch on one very sore point with me. It is this very question of 'living characters' which turns up anent my Dutch entourage. My feeling is that my people *don't* stand out, that I only create types, that none of my characters, except the 'Fool' [Elias Lossell in *God's Fool*] remains with the reader as a person he has known – as the great novelists' people do. It is the point I feel most miserably down about.⁵⁴⁵

Brothers All (Short Stories, London: Methuen, 1909). These volumes were not discussed at any length because they contain exclusively tales about Holland.

⁵⁴³ See in particular ch II, *passim*. When applying E. M. Forster's distinctions between flat character and round character, Maartens' characters would be round, his types flat; cf. *Aspects of the Novel* (1924) (London: Arnold, 1974), 46-50.

⁵⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, Maartens had a foreboding of what was to happen later. Especially in the Netherlands, readers were tempted to search for actually existing people behind his types. Had he published "The Van Weylerts", its preface would have been the first attempt to ward off openly that persistent search. While the main interest resides in the description of Dutch manners and morals, as may be inferred from the subtitle "A Dutch Story", this story was Maartens' exercise in the characterisation of the differences between lower-class, middle-class and upper-class Dutch, reoccurring in all of the ensuing novels. More conspicuously than in his later works, "The Van Weylerts" is full of autobiographical elements. This may have been the reason why he did not publish the novel. Apart from that, it abounds with interesting descriptions and satirical typifications of Dutch customs and ways of life.

⁵⁴⁵ *Letters*, 6 1.1895, 96-97. With regard to this issue of character, George Gissing complained that the modern novel of ideas had just the same flaws as the old novels of moral purpose: "Its common characteristic is

Even if Maartens passed this verdict upon himself at so early a moment in his achievement, and even if it held some truth for the books already published, the self-criticism definitely cannot be maintained for much of the work written afterwards. In many, if not in all of the novels there are characters who directly appeal to the reader's imagination, sticking in his memory. As a matter of fact, this is the result of their very typicality while, at the same time, they retain enough of a character's individuality. Paradoxically, as the author is not sufficiently interested in them to imbue them with his own moral expectations and principles, many a minor protagonist can hold one's own as an independent character. As the author takes a more objective stance; the result is that, often, minor rather than major characters stand out in the reader's mind. The reader remembers Maartens' characters as types rather than as integral characters. We may even forget their names but still remember their dominant character traits, the representation of a typical set of physical features. As in Thackeray, it is the particular fusion of traits that sparks our interest and makes us feel attached to these people.⁵⁴⁶ Rather than remembering in particular Mevrouw van Hessel in *Joost Avelingh*, the *dominee's* wife in *Lis Doris*, or Mevrouw Romeyn in *A Question of Taste*, we recollect the type of the intolerant and narrow-minded mother. They are women each of whom "habitually found all opinions unreasonable but her own." (*Joost Avelingh*, 10) At certain instances, the narrator steps in to make generalising comments of this kind. As a rule, his minor characters do not appear to grow in any way, emotionally or psychologically, as a result of their experiences. Basically their viewpoints remain as limited as before and they continue to act accordingly. The minor characters form such clusters of types, representing a particular social class. Examples of the 'true blood' aristocrats are the Barons Van Trotsem (*Joost Avelingh*), Van Rexelaer (*The Greater Glory*), Van Helmont (*My Lady Nobody*) and Knoppe (*Eve*). Van Trotsem is "a heard-headed, not so soft-hearted, old fashioned country-gentleman, with an immense idea of the greatness of his race, and of himself as its representative, but not otherwise of noticeable vanity; a good landlord because a so conscientiously painstaking

a lack of the novelist's prime virtue, the ability to create and present convincing personalities. In the argumentative and exhortative novel we are not concerned with persons, but with types" ("The Coming of the Preacher", *Literature*, vi [1900], 15-16, quoted in Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel*, 87-88). Even if Maartens novels, properly speaking, cannot be considered as belonging to either of these categories, Gissing's comments shed a light upon some of the structural weaknesses Maartens was aware of. In spite of this, Gissing – like Maartens – endorsed the traditional view that literary value should somehow be combined with the spiritual improvement of society. Gissing and Maartens met at a party at Edmund Gosse's home, Hanover Terrace, London, early 1892: Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 371.

⁵⁴⁶ For characterisation in Thackeray, cf. for example John Watson, "Thackeray's Composite Characters: Autobiography and True 'History' in *Barry Lyndon*", *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 87 (1997), 25-42.

one.”(*Joost Avelingh*, 10) This is equally true for his peers. Entirely in line with their social status, his peers hold on to traditional values: equity, justice, family honour, tradition, loyalty and magnanimity. Although minor characters, they retain a relatively prominent position in the narrative, endorsing what they see as the positive qualities of their class. This in contrast with the peerless degenerates, such as Jonkheer Arthur van Asveld: “He was very stupid and boasted of his stupidity, he was very impecunious and lived on his debts and his losses at play” (*Joost Avelingh*, 45).

When features are added to the types in the course of the story, providing us with a more complete impression, this does not upset our initial concept but rather strengthens it. In the case of Mevrouw van Hessel, for example, it is shown that she possesses – besides her overbearing intolerance – other character traits, even like motherly feelings. Often, such qualities are generalised: in this case, women act – and react – more or less similar in similar circumstances. The notion of ‘type’ is once more strengthened; while at the same time it expands the reader’s ability to identify with the character in question: “Mevrouw sailed towards him – “Hendrik.” She stood before her husband. There was that look in her eyes – the mother’s look – which makes all women kin.”(*Joost Avelingh*, 75) The verbs ‘sailed’ and ‘stood’, both denote the character’s strong determination. Another, perhaps the most telling example, is Cornelia in *God’s Fool*, who will always stick in our mind as a very strong character. If ever there was a woman’s victory over her husband in Maartens, this is it. Compared to Thackeray’s women in *Vanity Fair*, Cornelia’s rebellious and openly challenging attitude is decidedly modern.⁵⁴⁷

In Maartens prose, there is an abundance of women of many kinds, from Dowager and Duchess down to the cook, but there are no good mothers. There is no positive concept of the mother in Maartens as such, let alone that she is presented as an ideal character. On the contrary: she is hard-hearted and intolerant. The women are not mothers themselves, who fulfil motherly tasks in the traditional sense of having to take care of others as the one and only justification of their existence. Examples are Cornelia, motherly devoted to Elias (*God’s Fool*) and Suzanna, emotionally tied to her nephew Arnout (*An Old Maid’s Love*). In *A Question of Taste* as well as in *Her Memory*, the ‘good’ mothers who permeate the story from beginning to end, are dead. Only when the real mothers are long dead are they idealised.⁵⁴⁸

His female protagonists, none of them mothers, are too good to be true. They are forever patient, loving, understanding and forgiving creatures, in short, they possess the best qualities

⁵⁴⁷ In Thackeray’s novel, all but Becky Sharp, who had no choice but to act secretly, blindly abide to their husbands’ uncompromising views.

⁵⁴⁸ The expression, only a dead Indian is a good Indian, disrespectfully springs to mind.

one could wish for, but to a degree that is slightly grating on the reader's sense of proportion, such as Ursula (in *My Lady Nobody*), Yetta (*Lisa Doris*), Dorothea and Eve. This idealisation does not comply with the concept of character discussed earlier: protagonists who acted in accordance with the plot, not with the author's moral principles. Maartens' specimen of the gentle wife is very much like Thackeray's Amelia in *Vanity Fair*, devoted to her husband, soft, understanding and patient. We find it with Agatha in *Joost Avelingh* ("She could not bear anyone to think there was anything Joost could not do" [98]), Jennie in *Harmen Pols*, Tomasine in *The Healers* and the Baroness Gertrude in *The Greater Glory*. Significantly, these heroines are described without the ironical edge Thackeray persistently added to Amelia.⁵⁴⁹

Usually the good men (not merely the main characters) are tall, blond, self-possessed, strong and broad-shouldered. The type of this young male – straightforward, natural and of stalwart built – can be found in all social classes. Generally the main heroes possess honest blue eyes, occasionally a big blond moustache and they have a bright and rosy complexion. To mention but the most outstanding ones: Joost Avelingh, Elias in *God's Fool*, Arnout (*An Old Maid's Love*), Harmen Pols and Egon (*Dorothea*).⁵⁵⁰

The author induces his own moral ideal, in that he evokes a relationship between physical beauty and a morally impeccable state. This introduces an element of spirituality that, at moments, entirely transcends the character. We have seen this to be particularly true of Elias in *God's Fool*. Maartens' principal characters are heroes and heroines in an ancient, mythological sense: Insofar as they exemplify the purest moral standards. With the exception of the 'Fool', however, one is somewhat reluctant to acknowledge these standards as part of their individuality. Again too much they seem to represent the ideal of the author. A century ago readers may hardly have had less difficulty accepting such a degree of altruism, projected into a character, than we have now. Physical beauty, female and male, almost becomes a prerequisite for a generosity, loyalty and magnanimity beyond measure. Seen thus, the main

⁵⁴⁹ A concise analysis of the character of Thackeray's Amelia is presented by Robin Gilmour in his *Thackeray: Vanity Fair* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 15 and 30. Maartens' last heroine, Eve, is, in fact, the only exception to the rule, in liberating herself of the compulsion to serve which, initially, she had 'inherited' from the female heroines that preceded her.

⁵⁵⁰ For a while at least Egon is not immaculate: he has a limp until he has an operation. It seems as if Maartens could not bear his protagonist to be imperfect throughout, subjected as he was to an idealistic image of his hero to the extent that he could not even bear one exception to confirm the rule. One may refer directly to the Bible to seek for an explanation of Egon's brotherly counterpart, Konrad, the 'Kain' of the story; there is a similar constellation in *God's Fool* between the two brothers Hendrik and Hubert. We are never very far removed from Maartens the preacher, with his life-long and fervent devotion to the Holy Bible. As far as Maartens' other invalid hero, Elias (*God's Fool*), is concerned, it must be kept in mind that, although mentally handicapped, he is perfect in spirit, his – equally perfect – body being merely 'at rest' due to his mental disability.

characters turn into types of another order, of one and the same ideal way above. Yet often this is not what we expect, wishing them to develop organically, gaining in human depth rather than celestial height.

There are also minor characters within this category, such as Kees Hessel (*Joost Avelingh*) and Kenneth (*The Healers*). However, as the author's own convictions are less prominently imbued into them, they are depicted more objectively. On the reader's side there is a need to imagine the heroes and heroines to develop organically, more so than the minor characters. Those we more willingly accept the way they are, firmly set in their habits and convictions. One group of minor characters are small, dark and mostly fat men. Sly and cunning manipulators, they are interested in making as much money as they can, unscrupulously, sustained by a system that not only conforms their practices, but even encourages them. Often, they are Jews. Given such circumstances, the decline of the 'decent' man of business is inevitable. Hendrik Lossell (*God's Fool*), of good intent, is also prejudiced and narrow-minded. He incorporates the moral decay of all those parvenus in their strife up the social ladder. Even those who have reached the highest step on that ladder (such as Count Rexelaer, as opposed to Baron Rexelaer) are no different. Neither is Mopius (*My Lady Nobody*) in his middle class sphere: thriving on public envy is a grace to them as they are possessed by ambition only.

Social decay is present in all strata of society, a manifest sign of the transition that is taking place. More than in any other novel, these strata are kaleidoscopically interwoven in *Dorothea*. In seeking to marry a wealthy heiress, Count Pini is one amongst the growing number of aristocrats who have no choice but to stoop to Mammon if they want to keep up the social pretence of their status. In the case of some others, such as Lord Archibald, it leads to the crisis of having to grapple with the loss of self-esteem, deeply hidden and destructive. In the case of Count Rhoden, it even degenerates into idiocy, while Franz von Kauenfels turns into a pure cynic. The men and women who swiftly and smoothly come to terms with the 'New Age' of materialism, are present throughout in Maartens' books. An early example is Madame de Mongelas in *An Old Maid's Love*: this woman of the world is sensuous, artistic, cosmopolitan, pretty and, above all, absolutely egoistic. The men are of the same calibre: Dorothea's father, Colonel Sandring, Melissant in *Eve* and Otto Pareys in *Lis Doris* are extremely worldly and as self-centred in their pleasure seeking as they are superficial.

The type of the poet is also presented in a dual constellation, positive and negative, again not without the autobiographical blend. In possession of creative powers, Reinout in *The Greater Glory* is persistent in his artistic inclinations. As Maartens himself, he is propelled by an inner

drive to give shape to his imagination, no matter how much this puts him at odds with the hostile environment. The same counts for Alfred in *A Question of Taste*.

After finishing his doctorate in law, Joost van der Poorten Schwartz could have opted for a wide variety in professions and have made a brilliant career. But his artistic temperament thwarted any expectations his family had in those directions. Having obtained first-hand knowledge about the system of law in his country, showing him that what is legal is not necessarily just, he nurtured a life-long aversion against lawyers. In his prose work, lawyers are portrayed without exception as opportunistic and unscrupulous cynics, seeking nothing but their own advantage at the cost of their clients. Thomas Ahlers in *God's Fool* is presented as "a sharp young man whose moral side is blunt" (153). The other profession Maartens constantly vilified was the medical profession. The numerous specimen of doctors sneered at in his works are money-grabbing charlatans, vivisectionists and cold-hearted cynics to a man. The gallery is completed with the type of the intellectual who assumes the attitude of the distant observer, examples being Mark Lester in *Dorothea*, Old Suerus in *Harmen Pols*, as well as the priests in *An Old Maid's Love* and *A Question of Taste*.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵¹ The Dick Trotwood type in *David Copperfield*.

V.4. The pitfall of mixing modes

Like Chekhov, Maartens had a pessimistic concept of the human condition. Still, he believed against hope that the world would be a better place in some distant future: he was not content merely to record life as he saw it; the “picture” he gives us also encompasses an ideal reality beyond and above the actual scenes in his stories. It is essential to the reader’s delectation that the picture resulting from the narrative be sustained as a controlled illusion of harmony. This was the author’s highest aim, and nothing should distract from it. When not emotionally involved in the intricacies of the individual characters, the reader should at least be presented with a stringent plot, and digressions should not distance him from the story.

Of all aesthetic devices, irony in particular needs handling with utmost care. When irony turns into the author’s self-complacent demonstration of his convictions, this is most disruptive to the illusion of reality. Maartens’ affably mocking tone, too, is essentially ironic. Added to this – and inherent to his temperament – there is always a benevolent, playful and witty side to it.⁵⁵² As a rule, he presents his minor characters as types seen from a comical angle, a method perfectly well suited for the practice of satire. This aim was consequently pursued in *The New Religion*: The tenor of the entire novel is unmistakably satirical. In the descriptions of the Dutch scenes there is a joyful kind of childlike trust in the order of things, also on the part of the narrator himself. To sustain the illusion, he must appear to be just as credulous as he expects of his readers. As long as there is this *entente cordiale* between narrator and reader, the author exerts his control over the reader. There is no harm in playing a little on a weakness appertaining to all human beings: irrational belief. Hence a certain amount of credulity can be expected from the reader. However, the author should be aware at all times not to strain the reader’s imagination, unless exaggerations are in compliance with the mode in practice. On the whole, sustaining the reader’s credulity is the surest way to maintain the illusion of reality. Any change of tone may cause the first transgression towards another mode, towards the mixing of modes, which puts credulity instantly in jeopardy.

Although Maartens’ style remains sober and uncluttered, the consistency of the narrative structure in his novels is impaired when there is an over-concentration on subplot details and on subject material. As a result, the narrative sags and appears disproportionately long at such instances whilst imperilling the illusion of reality. When this is the case, reality seems to be

⁵⁵² Goetsch points out that readers expected of the Victorian novel, “as a rule, that events described [...] ought to be passed on to the reader by a benevolent narrator sympathising with the scene in front of him” (transl. from the German), (Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 51). Cf. Jerome H. Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (1951) (repr. Cambridge University Press, 1981); Barbara Dennis, *The Victorian Novel* (New

perceived from behind a pane of glass, or as if one is looking at a picture, rather than giving the impression of immediate presence, needed again and again to sustain the reader's interest in the scene.

At times there is a lack of formal economy, e.g. when Maartens holds strong views on a particular subject matter, for instance law of medicine, he does not always manage to stay objective; in those cases the narrative is not always consistent. However accomplished it may be, his style lacks the necessary rotundity to compensate for such structural flaws. The author writing in the realist mode arranges his material in such a way as to present a clear view of the subject, in a manner that leaves the reader unaware of any intrusions. Maartens quite simply attains this goal by having the narrator appear to be going through his experience with the reader during the very act of narration. Provided the author does not aim for a particular effect, that illusion of a shared experience draws the reader inexorably into a fictitious world. The intrusion of the narrator's own opinions or prejudices frequently impairs the consistency in the dynamic progression of the narrative. It disrupts the transparency of the structure, making the reader question the narrator's standpoint and becoming aware of differing voices. Instead of walking a straight path, we have the impression of going through a labyrinth. As long as all the details are judiciously ordered to establish a plausible context, even far-fetched subject matter can be introduced. One may not believe all, but provided it is consistent with the logic of the specific pattern presented, as in *The New Religion*, it will be accepted.⁵⁵³

Repeatedly, Maartens relishes in introducing digressive details that distract from the main theme. They appear to have become the aim in itself. One is no longer able to see the wood for all the trees, so to speak. Possibly there is a connection between Maartens' 'crowding of the canvas' and his profound fear that he was ultimately unable to communicate his ideas. Amassing detail may have been an attempt to compensate for that inability. As far as its aesthetic justification is concerned, the "detail for detail's sake" may have an alienating effect if it is not subservient to the all-encompassing idea: the vision, emanating from the narrative.

While telling his anecdotes and describing his people, the narrator assumes a reserved yet confidential manner of conversation. For long stretches of narrative, the reader is unaware of the moralist hiding behind the *raconteur*. Marvelling at his own desire to re-create things that the inner eye perceives, the author seems to be oblivious of his initial purpose. When, however, that moral vision suddenly modulates the narrative, the reader is left slightly puzzled and vexed. There is no consistency with the narrator's previous attitude of the ironic but

York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Peter Garrett, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1980.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Virginia Woolf, 148-150.

benevolent observer. This has the effect of breaking a tacit agreement. While Maartens' infallibly sound judgement enriches his work with some of the most lucid perceptions in realism, his morals were too absolute and exacting. Ironically, he chose to ignore what no writer can entirely afford to forget: not only literary fashions but also moral standards change. Unless the author embraces a moral or ethical relativism, he runs the risk of becoming soon unfashionable. In Maartens' novels, there is a discrepancy between his artistic bent on the one hand and his moral vision on the other. They are not sufficiently complementary to provide the reader with a sense of a coherent and overall vision. Burdett seems the only critic to have been aware of this underlying problem, even though he failed to perceive its real cause:

Observant as he was of life, rich in creating character, endowed with a graceful narrative skill, something in his imagination itself was lacking for fusing all his gifts into a unity larger than themselves. (...) There is an arbitrary limit to the frames of his stories in the oddest contrast to the width of his observation, his cosmopolitan ease, his dramatic instinct. (...). He was a writer of great gifts, but of restricted imagination, as if, with the whole of life before him, he was viewing it from the windows of the manse. Consequently, there is something spiritually overwrought in most of the novels. (127)

The inconsistency is of an aesthetic order. It should not be confused with Maartens' refusal to sacrifice his convictions by making concessions to popular taste and to write potboilers. However, to retain his ideals while at the same time remaining within the pale of contemporary taste would have required a more consistent aesthetic approach to his subject matter.

VI Conclusion

Maarten Maartens was much more than just the pseudonym for a Dutchman by the name of Joost Maria Willem van der Poorten Schwartz (1858-1915) who published English novels and who had chosen this penname because it sounded Dutch while it could still easily be pronounced by his English readers. Under his own name, he lived retired in the country in the Netherlands while, under his heteronym Maarten Maartens, he led a life as a writer and a man of the world.

Schwartz was born in 1858 as the son of a Polish theologian and preacher of Jewish descent. From his sixth year until he was twelve, the family lived in London, where English became his second mother tongue. From 1873 he visited the *Preußisch-Königliche Gymnasium* in Bonn. Highly international at the time, it definitely determined his cosmopolitan attitude and outlook on life. In 1889 his first novel *The Sin of Joost Avelingh* was published by Remington. He owed to its immediate success a certain renown that would accompany him during the following years. Soon he became known in Britain and the United States, but also in Germany, as author of novels and short stories in which, above all, he fictionally gave shape to the culture and mentality of the Dutch people and their society. His books, written in English, were published in London by renowned companies, such as Bentley, Constable and Heinemann, in the USA by Appleton.

In 1892 Maartens became a member of the *Authors' Club* and of the *Athenaeum* in London. Several of his encounters with famous writers and critics such as Edmund Gosse, Thomas Hardy and Meredith turned into friendships, as was the case with James Barrie and Arthur Quiller-Couch. In interviews, Maartens often referred to what he called his double personality and said that he led a double existence. While his novels were appreciated abroad, critics in his own country either ignored them or made disparaging comments about them. Again and again he felt compelled to defend himself, as in the preface to his fifth novel *The Greater Glory* (1894) where he wrote: "The morals I seek to describe are those of the entire human race. It is only by the merest accident that my scene is laid in Holland, a country whose inhabitants, I suppose, are no better, nor worse, than my neighbours."⁵⁵⁴ Even if one might conclude from these remarks that his initial success also made him a little presumptuous, they reveal as well that Maartens did not merely want to be considered a kind of cultural ambassador of his home country. This indeed was to be his fate ever since his first novel had appeared. In the years following, up to the publication of his last novel, *Eve, or Paradise*

⁵⁵⁴ Flaubert's famous dictum comes to mind: "Tout universel commence par le regional."

Regained (1914), he would suffer from the fact that again and again in the numerous reviews of his books, before anything else, the following was emphasised: his lovingly ironical depictions of the Dutch from various layers of society. Maartens' eager desire to be taken seriously by the critics would however ultimately remain unfulfilled.

It was not before 1924 that a first critical essay was published, surprisingly not, as one would have expected, by a British, American or German critic, but by the renowned Dutch critic Lodewijk van Deysse. Another significant detail is that Van Deysse did not discuss any of the novels that had given Maartens his reputation, but one of his early tragedies, *Nivalis*. In 1928 a doctoral dissertation was printed, dealing with the complete work, but again written by a Dutch scholar, Willem van Maanen. However, the author did, in fact, not go very much beyond the level of describing the contents of the novels. Two years later, in 1930, Maartens' daughter Ada van der Poorten-Schwartz published *The Letters of Maarten Maartens*, a selection of her father's correspondence, through which it was her main purpose to present him as a *noble character*. For that reason, many details that were relevant for a literary evaluation were omitted.

At last, in 1970, there appeared a short critical comparison between Maartens' novel *Eve* and Fontane's *Effi Briest*.

Granted that the above listed publications provide valuable insights into particular aspects of Maartens' work, no critic has as yet ventured to give a literary-historical assessment of his prose works. The question has remained unanswered whether Maartens is merely to be considered a *minor author* within the cultural-historical context of his time, who still gives us captivating glimpses into a social microcosm long gone by, or whether, and to which extent, he achieved his aim to surpass this aspect.

In this dissertation the attempt is made to close this gap in research somewhat further. Apart from the published works, also a number of unpublished manuscripts are included, amongst which there are a play, several complete and fragmentary novels as well as short stories, private and literary correspondence and a number of notebooks containing philosophical and literary reflections.

The uniform edition of Maartens' works was issued by Constable & Company in 1914. From 1894 onwards, the Tauchnitz Edition published all of Maartens' novels and short story volumes. It continued to do so with some of his better-known novels such as *God's Fool* (1892) until 1933. Since then his books have been out of print, with the exception of *God's Fool* and the collection of short stories *Some Women I have known* (1901) in Dutch translations in 1967.

As the author has by now become completely unknown, it seemed necessary, first of all, to present him and his work in the general context of his time, to examine which were the themes that interested him and in which way he gave shape to them. As research proceeded, it became obvious that many aspects concerning the author's private situation as well as his personal experiences had taken shape fictionally in his novels and short stories. This of course was unknown to his readers at the time. Yet knowledge about certain details grants particular insight into the psychic disposition of his main characters, particularly in his novels. This explains why interpretations are partially biographical. It has not been the purpose, however, merely to study the works in order to draw conclusions regarding the author and vice versa — above all the aim was to elucidate at which instances and in what manner the author had aesthetically remoulded his own experiences.

Maartens considered himself a realist writer, his role model being Thackeray whose technique and thematic approach he adapted to suit his own themes. However, at the time it was as hard to define the term 'realism' as it is now, if its meaning is not determined by the particular social and historical circumstances of the author. Nowadays we are aware of the fact that reality in the post-structuralist sense cannot be conceived simply as something mimetically reproducible. Still, there seems to be some truth in Linda Hutcheon's notion (1988) about art granting access to 'truth' because an artist has a special insight into 'reality'; but, on the other hand Catherine Belsey has a point when she stresses: "Language is a system which pre-exists the individual and in which the individual produces meaning. In learning its native language the child learns a set of differentiating concepts, which identify not given entities but socially constructed signifieds. Language in an important sense speaks us."⁵⁵⁵

Walter F. Greiner and Fritz Kemmler have introduced their selection of texts illustrating the historical dimension of the debate on realism in English literature with a number of these.⁵⁵⁶ The authors point at the historical continuation of the process of argumentation, showing that the concept of realism has to be understood in a large sense. Naturalism, too, was integrated into that debate. The great realist writers of the nineteenth century, including Maartens' examples Thackeray and Hardy, were also convinced of the impact the realist novel had on the enlightenment of society, making it more human in instructing and educating the reader. Their central aim was to depict man increasingly caught up in the conflicting interests of his time. Maartens, too, is no exception as far as these last aspects are concerned. Beyond that, he

⁵⁵⁵ Belsey, Catherine, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen 1980), 44.

⁵⁵⁶ Walter F. Greiner and Fritz Kemmler, eds., *Realismstheorien in England (1692-1912). Texte zur historischen Dimension der englischen Realismusdebatte* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1979), Introduction xi-xliv, here xiv-xxxi.

still belonged to the representatives of a novelistic tradition who sought to render their vision in a fusion of reality and ideal. Due to this elementary principle, it was evident that reality could by no means be depicted in all its facets. As shown by Hardy's fate, eroticism and sexuality in particular were taboo. On the other hand change, cultural as well as in aesthetic terms, had already take place during the eighteen nineties, the period in which Maartens' novels were published.

Maartens had always avoided the extremes of unadulterated romanticism on the one hand and orthodox realism on the other. Not only did it gain him the esteem of those of his friends who did not espouse the avant-garde, it also enabled him to retain a certain renown for over a decade. Around the turn of the century, however, times had changed more drastically than was generally understood. It was a time in which it became more and more problematic still to refer to something like an all-encompassing Victorian "consciousness". Not only the elite, equally large parts of the average reading public generally took to modernism in art.⁵⁵⁷

The changes at work can be detected in Maartens' work, even if the elementary principles of the technique of realism are sustained, such as the causal plot-string while continuously referring to a reality outside the novel. In Maartens, sub-plots as well as narrative digressions frequently interrupt the principal string of action, although they are not necessarily organically interwoven. Another problem is that the narrator carefully depicts the psychological motivations of the main heroes and heroines from an internal perspective, whereas the minor protagonists, usually in sub-plot entanglements, are basically set down as types.

On the whole, Maartens assumes Thackeray's standpoint of the distant and ironical observer with, at times, similar echoes of melancholy and resignation. However, his attitude is more matter-of-fact throughout, not indulging, like Thackeray sometimes, in an idyllic escapist attitude removed from reality.

In Maartens, the setting as such does not have an important function, neither in the novels nor in the short stories. It serves merely as the background where the action takes place. Events are all located in the present, i.e., at about the time the books were published. They are narrated in chronological order, although flashbacks occur in the novels enabling the reader to understand the momentary psychological disposition of the main characters. As far as they are concerned, their relationships with the outer world as well as the presentation of the setting are less predominant. This is due to the fact that the emphasis is on their psychological make-

⁵⁵⁷ Contrary to poetic realism, the traditionally normative criteria for the presentation of reality and, analogous to that, the traditional fabric of the novel were no longer accepted, as the artistic construct of the novel was increasingly based upon artistic principles of its own, cf. Goetsch, *Romankonzeption*, 77, and Elizabeth Deeds Ermar, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press), 1975.

up, which, in addition, is implied rather than described. Whereas the minor characters remain vivid and memorable, the main characters appear frequently sterile and artificial; as hybrids, they are the consequence of an objective realist depiction as well as of a subjective projection of an ideal. This is in accordance with the author's moral vision, although it was Maartens' aim to depict his characters as "true to life".

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, there had also been a shift in narrative perspective: the norm was no longer exclusively an omniscient and reliable narrator. In Maartens' novels as well there is an auctorial narrator, but he does not pretend to know and to control everything. In fact we are dealing with a kind of subjective narrative perspective, which the author defined as the representation of reality "according to a temperament". Principally, the story is unfolded by the narrator from his own subjective perspective. Also he does not insist on sustaining throughout an illusion of reality, i.e., a fiction, at all cost; on the contrary, occasionally his reflections are of a metafictional order which disrupt the illusion. Then the reader becomes more than a simple companion and turns into an accomplice.

This method of presenting the auctorial narrator with his own subjective angle is one the most conspicuous characteristics of Maartens' novels as well as of his short stories. It is also one of the outstanding features of writers on the threshold between Victorianism and modernism.

Compared to the United States, the short story appeared relatively late in Britain. Due to the elasticity of its form on the one hand and its meticulously timed length on the other hand, Maartens considered it to have great possibilities. Equally, he exploits to the full the opportunities stemming from its limited perspective. He carefully selected all the details and moulded them into a shape that gives an impression of a singular unity, economy of means, concentration and artistic composition. Finest shades of connotation lead to an unparalleled intensity of implication. Apart from that, it is of great significance how the story leads towards its close, as well as the way in which it actually ends. In order to attain these goals, it is of crucial importance that the reader participate in the action to an extent that would neither be possible in longer narrative texts nor in other shorter narrative forms. Evidently shortness is an essential criterion but it is by no means sufficient. The short stories published by Maartens in collections are exceptional as to the large extent in which the protagonists come to life in the dialogues. Therefore the dialogues constitute the backbone of the stories. A conflicting and dramatic juxtaposition of characters usually generates action and themes. The end is marked by the reaction of one of the main protagonists, either by his or her explicit statement or by an emotional response noted by the narrator. This reaction is determined in part by a fatalistic disposition of character and, also, by heredity and milieu, as in Hardy.

Insofar Maartens is to be considered a representative of the British short story as he used the new medium to develop his own dynamically dramatic form within the increasingly problematic context of gender relations around 1900, above all within the institution of marriage. However, with his type of short story Maartens cannot aspire to reach the standard of such authors as James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield or Sherwood Anderson in the United States. Maartens is a more conservative writer who nonetheless is entitled to “a place—however small” as he put it himself, in English literature.⁵⁵⁸

To explain this assessment in more detail and to summarise the conclusions from my research, Maartens’ attitudes towards the literary scene have to be considered. In his early creative period, up to *Her Memory*, he overestimated the impact of his work. From *Some Women I have Known* onwards, he underestimated the increasing preponderance of modernism in literature. This new trend reflected, after all, the changes in contemporary moral standards. He deliberately avoided succumbing to the literary fashion, as many of his contemporaries did. He realised the undermining impact that trend would have on his own place in literature. Still, he pretended to remain outwardly unaffected. He sought to communicate ethical standards that were too exacting to an audience in search of liberation from Victorian standards and morals. Maartens was particularly sensitive to the changing position of women in society. It is all the more surprising that he so irrevocably persisted in the advocacy of his own moral postulations, unperturbed by the cultural changes in Western society around the turn of the century. Around 1910 he thoroughly realized that his reputation was waning. The question remains whether he might have achieved more, had he refrained from moralizing authorial intrusions. However, as in Hardy, the reader is lavishly rewarded who is desirous of a picture of a community and its traditions as it existed over a century ago.

Maartens’ predilection for literary tableaux quite naturally points at the short story as its most suitable form. Stripped of all non-essential detail and moralizing, the short story enabled the artist to escape from the calling of the preacher. Not only did its moral impact remain untainted; it became more persuasive. In his short stories, Maartens did not feel compelled to tackle the larger social issues that preoccupied him. The short form allowed him to ignore the changes in literary tastes and fashions, giving his attention exclusively to the essential detail, which, to him, represented a universal truth. If he had more thoroughly exploited its potential to give shape to his unique observations, the short story in the English language would have been the richer for it. A number of short stories have remained unpublished to this day, but there are four collections, as well as a number of uncollected stories published in magazines

⁵⁵⁸ Draft of letter to Constable & Co, ca. 1912, Literary Correspondence, typescript (Maartens archive).

that offer invaluable insights into prevailing attitudes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To this day Maarten Maartens' short stories continue to be unique literary explorations of the human condition.

APPENDIX

Source: Notebook Nr. 3 [n.d.]; provisionally numbered by myself; p. 127, Maartens Archive.

“Art is the ultimate reality. At least, the highest art is. But there are two absolutely distinct forms of artistic representation: the reproduction of things exactly as they are, and the reproduction of things as they are not but as they ought to be. The former, the photographic form, is all the fashion. Nowadays, reproduction of the ugly, the uninteresting, the vulgar, so literally and accurately that every beholder must readily admit: Yes: that is exactly as vulgar, as uninteresting, as ugly as the original – an operation in the hospital ward, a drunken wedding feast in a “cabaret de banlieue”, a douche in a hydropathic [sic] establishment. It is wonderfully well done, but photography does it better. Once more, this is skill, as much skill as you please, consummate skill, but not art. Realism? The name is absurd, an utter misconception. Naturalism, if you will – for want of a better word. The real is that which exists at the bottom of all semblance, the central fact enclosed in all outer manifestation. And the real is the eternally existing. Through all modifications of ugliness and littleness it is essentially beautiful and great for it is the human, the soul in its development toward God. All other visible appearances are but phases of its development and art is one of the mightiest factors of this development. The function of art then is not to represent man as he is, which is a passing phase – but to strive to represent man as he ought to be – and therefore as he will be – which is the lasting reality. To achieve this realisation in its completeness is an impossibility, but none the less a necessity on that account, to be able “sie zu ahnen” – to feel more of it, to live closer to it than other men is the one distinguishing quality which makes the artist. All the rest is but technique, adroitness, and a quickness of the fingers or the eyes. Artistic genius is the power of seeing the invisibly real a shade more clearly than other men. Seeing the invisible? Even so; the invisible i.e. that the eye cannot see. This power is immensely limited, and the artist is truest where the limits are least great. Art then is the ultimate reality, and artistic achievement the less uncertain conception of what that reality will be. It is not necessarily confined to the beautiful, although primarily occupied with it. But it is confined to the great. With the little, the trivial, the vulgar it has nothing to do. It may represent the passions or pleasures of the humblest, but the passions and pleasures it represents must be sublime. There is nothing great in an old gentleman having his toes cut, and whatever all our painting may maintain to the contrary, the supreme talent in the reproduction of such a scene cannot lift to the height of a work of art. But the poorest match seller creeping back under a cab seller to shield her infant from the rain may lift the soul to as

pure a height as one of Raphael's Madonna's, for the sentiment the mother feels is sublime in itself. All art then is a matter of heartfelt emotion, and according as it awakes that emotion it has a claim to the title. The mistake of the idealists and romanticists lies in the impression that [the] gigantic only – a King's son, an angel, a slaughter of thousands – arouses emotion. Every beggar's brat does it, and a daisy suffices or a butterfly. Emotion, then, is the only lasting reality – the feeling of the human soul. The feeling of the human soul may be concentrated generally with love (admiration, approval, ambition) and hate (disapproval, discontent, jealousy). But hate, surely, is only a misconception of mutual relations. Some day as the horizon clears, love will remain only. And art is the perpetuation of love.”

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The following consists of a list of the literary works of Maarten Maartens, beginning with the poetry he published under his real name J.M.W. Schwartz, previous to his debut as a novelist. The novels were first published in London, followed in the same year in New York by D. Appleton and Co. Exceptions are *The Black Box Murder*, which was printed anonymously in Britain, and pirated in The United States, and *My Poor Relations*, the American edition of which appeared two years later. As far as could be ascertained, American publishers – other than Appleton – have been added in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, their volumes were issued in New York as well. Maartens' first novel *A Question of Taste* was also published in Australia and New Zealand. With the exception of *The Black Box Murder*, all the prose works appeared under the pseudonym of Maarten Maartens. A number of them were serialised in magazines previous to publication in their entirety, such as, for example, *God's Fool* in the *Temple Bar*. In 1902, a uniform edition of the novels that had appeared up to that date was published by Macmillan. Maartens' last volume, a collection of Dutch poems, appeared under the pseudonym of Johan van den Heuvel, the name referring to "De Zonheuvel" ("The Sunny Hill"), his home from the turn of the century until his death in 1915.

The bibliography, first compiled by Van Maanen in 1927 and subsequently enlarged by Maartens' daughter, Ada van der Poorten Schwartz in 1930, was further completed and added here in its entirety in order to facilitate possible further research. It contains all significant material either dealing with Maartens or in which his name is mentioned, including the German –and other foreign criticism. The sources particularly selected for analysis have been marked with an asterisk. However, the list as it stands by no means claims to be exhaustive: hundreds of unsigned articles and reviews collected by Maartens himself are still extant in the Maartens Archive.⁵⁵⁹ They were sent to Maartens as newspaper clippings by a firm specialised in that trade, by the name of Romeike. Maartens collected them in albums. References to these reviews in the notes of this study do not contain biographical data such as page numbers and columns, as no data were given in the clippings apart from the name and date of the periodical in which they were published.

⁵⁵⁹ For a complete list of those reviews available in the Maartens Archive, see the bibliography of my master's thesis "Author in Double Exile: The Literary Appreciation of Maarten Maartens", Regensburg University, 1985.

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 The Sin of Hugh Manson (c. 1892)

1.1.3. Notebooks

Some twenty notebooks are preserved in the Maartens Archive. Their contents ranges from aphoristic reflections of literary and philosophical purport to cookery recipes. For an inventory see the Maartens Archive. In this dissertation, two notebooks are mainly used, one comprising, in particular, thoughts on Thackeray and George Eliot, the other containing aphorisms.

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