

**Holland Fiction Series**

**ELINE VERE**

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH OF  
**LOUIS COUPERUS**

BY  
**J. T. GREIN**

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## INTRODUCTION.

### *THE DUTCH SENSITIVISTS.*

In the intellectual history of all countries we find the same phenomenon incessantly recurring. New writers, new artists, new composers arise in revolt against what has delighted their grandfathers and satisfied their fathers. These young men, pressed together at first, by external opposition, into a serried phalanx, gradually win their way, become themselves the delight and then the satisfaction of their contemporaries, and, falling apart as success is secured to them, come to seem lax, effete, and obsolete to a new race of youths, who effect a fresh æsthetic revolution. In small communities, these movements are often to be observed more precisely than in larger ones. But they are very tardily perceived by foreigners, the established authorities in art and literature retaining their exclusive place in dictionaries and handbooks long after the claim of their juniors to be observed with attention has been practically conceded at home.

For this reason, partly, and partly also because the mental life of Holland receives little attention in this country, no account has yet been taken of the revolution in Dutch taste which has occupied the last six or seven years. I believe that the present occasion is the first on which it has been brought to the notice of any English-speaking public. There exists, however, in Holland, at this moment, a group of young writers, most of them between thirty-five and twenty-five years of age, who

exhibit a violent zeal for literature, passing often into extravagance, who repudiate, sometimes with ferocity, the rather sleepy Dutch authorship of the last forty years, and who are held together, or crushed together, by the weight of antiquated taste and indifference to executive merit which they experience around them. Certain facts seem to be undeniable: first, that every young man of letters in Holland, whose work is really promising, has joined the camp; and secondly, that, with all the ferment and crudity inseparable from prose and verse composed in direct opposition to existing canons of taste, the poems and the stories of these young Dutchmen are often full of beauty and delicacy. They have read much in their boyhood; they have imitated Rossetti and Keats; they have been fascinated by certain Frenchmen, by Flaubert, by Goncourt, particularly by Huysmans, who is a far-away kinsman of their own; they have studied the disquieting stories of Edgar Poe. But these influences are passing away, and those who know something of current Dutch *belles-lettres* can realize best how imperatively a ploughing up of the phlegmatic tradition of Dutch thought was required before a new crop of imagination could spring up.

Rejecting the conventional aspects of contemporary Dutch literature, I will now attempt to give some sketch of the present situation as it appears to a foreign critic observing the field without prejudice. The latest novelist of great importance was Madame Gertrude Bosboom-Toussaint, who was born in . After having written a long series of historical romances for nearly forty years, this intelligent woman and careful writer broke with her own assured public, and took up the discussion of psychological questions. She treated the problem of

Socialism in *Raymond de Schrijnwerker* and the status of woman in *Majoor Frans*. Madame Bosboom-Toussaint died in , just too early to welcome the new school of writers, with whom she would probably have had more sympathy than any of her contemporaries. Her place in popular esteem was taken for a short time by Miss Opzomer (A. S. C. Wallis), whose long novels have been translated into English, *In dagen van strijd* ("In Troubled Times") and *Vorstengunst* ("Royal Favor"). She had genuine talent, but her style was heavy and tedious. After the new wind began to blow, although she was still young, she married, went to Hungary, and gave up writing novels.

Three authors of importance, each, by a curious coincidence, born in the year , fill up the interval between the old and new generation. These are Dekker, Busken-Huët, and Vosmaer. Edward Douwes Dekker, whose novel of *Max Havelaar* dates from , was a man of exceptional genius. Bred in the interior of Java, he observed the social conditions of life in the Dutch Indies as no one else had done, but his one great book remained a solitary one. He died in without having justified the very high hopes awakened by that extraordinary and revolutionary work. The career of Konrad Busken-Huët was very different. The principal literary critic of Holland in his generation, he aimed at being the Sainte-Beuve of the Dutch, and in his early days, as the dreaded "Thrasybulus" of journalism, he did much to awaken thought. His volumes of criticism are extremely numerous, and exercised a wholesome influence during his own time. He died in Paris in April, . These two writers have had a strong effect on the prose style of the younger school of essayists and novelists. They lived long enough to observe the dawn of the new literature, and their

relations with the latest writers were cordial if somewhat reserved.

What Douwes Dekker and Busken-Huët did in prose, was effected in poetry by Carel Vosmaer. This estimable man, who died in , was well known throughout Europe as an art-critic and an authority on Rembrandt. In Holland he was pre-eminent as the soul of a literary newspaper, the *Nederlandsche Spectator*, which took an independent line in literary criticism, and affected to lead public taste in directions less provincial and old-fashioned than the rest of the Dutch press. Vosmaer wrote also several volumes of more or less fantastic poetry, a translation of Homer into alexandrines, and an antiquarian novel, *Amazonie*, . But Vosmaer's position was, above all, that of a precursor. He, and he alone, saw that a new thing must be made in Dutch poetical literature. He, and he alone, was not satisfied with the stereotyped Batavian tradition. At the same time Vosmaer was not, it may be admitted, strong enough himself to found a new school; perhaps even, in his later days, the Olympian calm which he affected, and a certain elegant indolence which overcame him, may have made him unsympathetic to the ardent and the juvenile. At all events, this singular phenomenon has occurred. He who of all living Dutchmen was, ten or fifteen years ago, fretting under the poverty of thought and imagination in his fatherland and longing for the new era to arrive, is at this moment the one man of the last generation who is most exposed to that unseemly *ferocité des jeunes* which is the ugliest feature of these æsthetic revolutions. I have just been reading, with real pain, the violent attack on Vosmaer and his influence which has been published by that very clever young poet, Mr. Willem

Kloos (*De Nieuwe Gids*, December,). All that cheers me is to know that the whirligig of time will not forget its revenges, and that, if Mr. Kloos only lives long enough, he will find somebody, now unborn, to call *him* a "bloodless puppet."

Of one other representative of the transitional period, Marcellus Emants, I need say little. He wrote a poem, *Lilith*, and several short stories. Much was expected of him, but I know not what has been the result.

The inaugurator of the new school was Jacques Perk, a young poet of indubitable genius, who was influenced to some degree by Shelley, and by the *Florence* of the Dutch Browning, Potgieter. He wrote in a *Mathilde*, for which he could find no publisher, presently died, and began to be famous on the posthumous issue of his poems, edited by Vosmaer and Kloos, in .

The sonnets of Perk, like those of Bowles with us a hundred years ago, were the heralds of a whole new poetic literature. The resistance made to the young writers who now began to express themselves, and their experience that all the doors of periodical publication in Holland were closed to them, led to the foundation in of *De Nieuwe Gids*, a rival to the old Dutch quarterly, *De Gids*. In this new review, which has steadily maintained and improved its position, most of the principal productions of the new school have appeared. The first three numbers contained *De Kleine Johannes* ("Little Johnny"), of Dr. Frederik van Eeden, the first considerable prose-work of the younger generation. This is a charming romance, fantastic and refined, half symbolical, half realistic, which deserves to be known to English readers. It has been highly appreciated in



Holland. To this followed two powerful books by L. van Deysssel, *Een Liefde* ("A Love") and *De Kleine Republiek* ("The Little Republic"). Van Deysssel has written with great force, but he has hitherto been the *enfant terrible* of the school, the one who has claimed with most insolence to say precisely what has occurred to him to say. He has been influenced, more than the rest, by the latest French literature.

While speaking of the new school, it is difficult to restrain from mentioning others of those whose work in *De Nieuwe Gids* and elsewhere has raised hopes of high performance in the future. Jacques van Looy, a painter by profession, has published, among other things, an exquisitely finished volume of *Proza* ("Prose Essays"). Frans Netscher, who deliberately marches in step with the French realists, is the George Moore of Holland; he has published a variety of small sketches and one or two novels. Ary Prins, under the pseudonym of Coopland, has written some very good studies of life. Among the poets are Willem Kloos, Albert Verwey, and Herman Gorter, each of whom deserves a far more careful critical consideration than can here be given to him.

Willem Kloos, indeed, may be considered as the leader of the school since the death of Perk. It was to Kloos that, in the period from to , each of the new writers went in secret for encouragement, criticism, and sympathy. He appears to be a man of very remarkable character. Violent and passionate in his public utterances, he is adored by his own colleagues and disciples, and one of the most gifted of them has told me that "Kloos has never made a serious mistake in his estimate of the force of a man or of a book." His writings, however, are very

few, and his tone in controversy is acrid and uncompromising, as I have already indicated. He remains the least known and the least liked, though the most powerful, of the band. The member of the new generation whose verse and prose alike have won most acceptance is, certainly, Frederik van Eeden. His cycle of lyrical verse, *Ellen*, is doubtless the most exquisite product of recent Dutch literature.

For the peculiar quality which unites in one movement the varied elements of the school which I have attempted thus briefly to describe, the name Sensitivism has been invented by one of themselves, by Van Deysse. It is a development of impressionism, grafted upon naturalism, as a frail and exotic bud may be set in the rough basis of a thorn. It preserves the delicacy of sensation of the one and strengthens it by the exactitude and conscientiousness of the other, yet without giving way to the vagaries of impressionism or to the brutality of mere realism. It selects and refines, it re-embraces Fancy, that maiden so rudely turned out of house and home by the naturalists; it aims, in fact, at retaining the best, and nothing but the best, of the experiments of the French during the last quarter of a century.

Van Deysse greets *L'Argent* with elaborate courtesy, with the respect due to a fallen divinity. He calls his friends in Holland to attend the gorgeous funeral of naturalism, which is dead; but urges them not to sacrifice their own living Sensitivism to the imitation of what is absolutely a matter of past history. It will be seen that Dutch Sensitivism is not by any means unlike French Symbolism, and we might expect prose like Mallarmé's and verse like Moréas's! As a matter of fact, however, the Dutch

seem, in their general attitude of reserve, to leave their mother-tongue unassailed, and to be as intelligible as their inspiration allows them to be.

To one of these writers, however, and to one of the youngest, it is time that I should turn. The first member of the new Dutch school to be presented, in the following pages, to English readers, is Louis Marie Anne Couperus. Of him, as the author of this book, I must give a fuller biography, although he is still too young to occupy much space by the record of his achievements. Louis Couperus was born on the 13th of June, 1862, at the Hague, where he spent the first ten years of his life. He was then taken in company with his family to Java, and resided five years in Batavia. Returning to the Hague, where he completed his education, he began to make teaching his profession, but gradually drifted into devoting himself entirely to literature. He published a little volume of verses in 1884, and another, of more importance, called *Orchideeën* ("Orchids"), in 1887, Oriental and luscious. But he has succeeded, as every one allows, much better in prose. His long novel of modern life in the Hague, called *Eline Vere*, is an admirable performance. Of *Noodlot* (literally to be translated "Fate" or "Destiny") our readers will judge for themselves at a later date. Such is the brief chronicle of a writer from whom much is expected by the best critics of his own country.

EDMUND GOSSE.

**ELINE VERE.**

## CHAPTER I.

They were close to each other in the dining-room, which had been turned into a dressing-room. In front of a mirror stood Frédérique van Erlevoort, with her hair hanging loose, looking very pale under a thin layer of powder, her eyebrows blackened with a single stroke of the pencil.

“Do hurry up, Paul! We shall never get ready,” she said, a little impatiently, glancing at the clock.

Paul van Raat was kneeling at her feet, and his fingers draped a long thin veil of crimson and gold in folds from her waist. The gauze hung like a cloud over the pinkness of her skirt; her neck and arms, white as snow with the powder, were left free, and sparkled with the glitter of the chains and necklaces strung across one another.

“Whew, what a draught! Do keep the door shut, Dien!” Paul shouted to an old servant who was leaving the room with her arms full of dresses. Through the open door one could see the guests—men in evening dress, ladies in light costumes: they passed along the azaleas and palms in the corridor into the large drawing-room; they smiled at the sight of the old servant, and threw surreptitious glances into the dining-room.

They all laughed at this look behind the scenes. Frédérique alone remained serious, realizing that she had the dignity of a princess of antiquity to keep up.

“Do make haste, Paul!” she pleaded. “It’s past half-past eight already!”

“Yes, yes, Freddie, don’t get nervous; you’re finished,” he answered, and adroitly pinned a few jewels among the gauze folds of her draperies.

“Ready?” asked Marie and Lili Verstraeten, coming out of the room where the stage had been fixed up, a mysterious elevation almost effaced in semi-darkness.

“Ready,” answered Paul. “And now calmly, please,” he continued, raising his voice and looking round with an air of command.

The warning was well needed. The three boys and the five girls who did duty as ladies’-maids, were rushing about the room laughing, shouting, creating the greatest disorder. In vain Lili tried to save a gilt cardboard lyre from the hands of the son of the house, a boy twelve years old, while their two rascally cousins were just on the point of climbing up a great white cross, which stood in a corner, and was already yielding under their onslaughts.

“Get away from that cross, Jan and Karel! Give up that lyre, you other!” roared Paul. “Do look after them, Marie. And now, Bet and Dien, come here; Bet with the lamp, Dien at the door; all the rest out of the road! There’s no more room; look on from the garden through the window of the big drawing-room; you’ll see everything beautifully, at a distance. Come along, Freddie, carefully, here’s your train.”

“You’ve forgotten my crown.”

“I’ll put it on when you’re posed. Come on.”

The three girls hurried to get away, the boys squatted in a corner of the room, where they could not be seen, and Paul helped Freddie to climb on to the stage.

Marie, who, like Lili, was not yet draped, talked through the closed window with the fireman, who was waiting, muffled up, in the snowy garden, to let off the Bengal light. A great reflector stared through the window like a pale, lustreless sun.

“First white, then green, then red,” Marie called out, and the fireman nodded.

The now deserted dressing-room was dark, barely lit by the lamp which Bet held in her hand, while Dien stood at the door.

“Carefully, Freddie, carefully,” said Paul.

Frédérique sank down gently into the cushions of the couch; Paul arranged her draperies, her chains, her hair, her diadem, and placed a flower here and there.

“Will that do?” she asked with tremulous voice, taking up the pose she had studied beforehand.

“You’re delicious; beautiful! Now then, Marie, Lili, come here.”

Lili threw herself on the floor, Marie leaned against the couch with her head at Frédérique’s feet. Paul draped both girls quickly in coloured shawls and veils, and twisted strings of gems round their arms and in their hair.

“Marie and Lili, look as if you were in despair. Wring your hands more than that, Lili! More despair, much more despair!”

Freddie, more languishing, turn your eyes up, set your mouth in a sadder expression.”

“Like that?”

Marie screamed.

“Yes, that will do! That’s better; now be quiet, Marie. Is everything ready?”

“Ready!” said Marie.

Paul arranged one or two more things, a crease, a flower, doubtful whether everything was right.

“Come, let’s start,” said Lili, who was in a very uncomfortable position.

“Bet, take away the lamps; Dien, shut that door, and then come here, both of you, one on each side of the folding doors of the big room.”

They were all in the dark, with beating hearts, while Paul tapped at the window, and joined the boys in the corner.

Slowly and doubtfully the Bengal light flamed up against the reflector, the folding doors opened solemnly, a clear white glow lit up the tableau.

Smiling and bowing, while the conversation suddenly changed into a muffled murmur, the guests pressed forward into the large drawing-room and the conservatory, blinded by a burst of light and colour. Men got out of the way of a couple of laughing girls. In the background boys climbed on the chairs.



“The death of Cleopatra!” Betsy van Raat read out to Mrs. Van Erlevoort, who had handed her the programme.

“Splendid! magnificent!” one heard on every side.

Ancient Egypt seemed to have come alive again in the white glow of the light. Between luxurious draperies something like an oasis could be perceived, a blue sky, two pyramids, some palms. On her couch, supported by sphinxes, lay Cleopatra, at the point of death, an adder curling round her arm. Two slaves were prostrate in despair at her feet. The parti-coloured vision of oriental magnificence lasted a few seconds; the poetry of antiquity revived under the eyes of a modern audience.

“That’s Freddie,” said Betsy. “How lovely!” and she pointed out the dying queen to Mrs. Van Erlevoort, who was dazzled by all this luxury. Now, however, the mother recognized her daughter in the beautiful motionless statue lying before her.

“And that’s Marie, and the other—oh, that’s Lili—irrecognizable! What beautiful costumes! how elaborate! You see that dress of Lili’s, violet and silver? I lent her that.”

“How well they do it,” murmured the old lady.

The white glow of the light began to flicker, the doors were closed.

“Splendid, auntie, splendid!” Betsy cried, as Mrs. Verstraeten, the hostess, passed her.

Twice the tableau was recalled, first in a flood of sea-green, then in fiery red. Freddie, with her adder, lay immovable, and

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