

## A literary playground: Literary criticism and balance theory<sup>☆</sup>

Wouter de Nooy\*

*Department of Art and Culture Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738,  
NL 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

---

### Abstract

One of the central tenets in an institutional approach to literary criticism is the hypothesis that literary evaluation is a social process guided by institutional norms and constraints. Literary quality is not just hidden within a text; critics and other members of the literary field assign quality to texts. Previous judgements on the text, its author or on previous titles by the author, influence the evaluation of a text. Literary criticism is supposed to be orchestrated.

In this article, orchestration of literary criticism is studied from the perspective of social-psychological balance theory. Balance theory states that people tend to adjust their affections to affections expressed by or attributed to other people. As a result, affective relations display predictable patterns which reflect group structure. Network analysis identifies these patterns and can be used to investigate group structure.

Applied to Dutch literary criticism in the 1970s, it is found that literary judgements published in reviews and interviews comply with balance theory in certain periods. In those periods, authors' and critics' evaluations interact. Their judgements reflect factions, ranking, and cleavages within the literary field, which, to some extent, mirror literary movements and prestige as well as the structure of society at large. © 1999 Published by Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

---

### 1. Introduction

Sociologists of literature and culture are convinced that professional artistic judgements are more than just direct, subjective reactions to works of art. Works of art, for example literary titles, and their creators come with a social history of past approval

---

<sup>☆</sup> A draft of this article was presented at the VIth Biennial IGEL Conference, Utrecht, August 26–29, 1998. I am grateful to Kees van Rees for his valuable comments on the article.

\* Phone: +31 10 408 24 61 (office), +31 10 202 39 96 (home); Fax: +31 10 408 91 35; E-mail: [denooy@fhk.eur.nl](mailto:denooy@fhk.eur.nl)

and rejection that cannot be ignored. Therefore, judgements always relate to previous judgements, and literary criticism is said to be orchestrated.

However, it turns out to be very difficult to test the hypothesis that literary judgements depend on one another. Asked directly, literary critics will deny that they take into account reviews by their colleagues as they write their own reviews. Of course, a single instance of 'someone telling the truth as s/he has been told it' or a 'white lie' may be admissible, but in general, literati will maintain that their judgements are pure and uninfluenced by the opinions of their colleagues. And they may well sincerely believe so.

Sociologists of literature have brought to light examples of reviews in which literary critics changed their minds about a literary author to a judgement that is more consistent with general opinion (Van Rees, 1987). In one case which was presented a critic published a favourable review on the work of an author that he admitted to dislike in a private letter (Van Dijk, 1990). These results give us good reason to believe that social processes and strategies influence literary criticism to some extent, although little is known to what extent. Are we dealing with the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg' or have we encountered the 'rara avis'?

Analyses of large numbers of reviews have revealed that critical attention can be predicted to a moderate but significant degree. Institutional factors, including the amount of attention paid to previous publications by the author, can help predict the number of reviews that are dedicated to new literary work (Janssen, 1988, 1998). Although the results suggest that critics pay attention to their peers' judgements, alternative interpretations are at hand. A correlation at the institutional level – i.e. the total amount of attention to an author's work – may merely indicate that most critics do not change their minds about an author's titles over time.

An analysis at the institutional level needs to cope with the following problem. Critics who respond to peer judgements do not need to comply with those peers. Theory suggests that critics may also be following this strategy to distinguish themselves. In order to make their name, it is argued, literary authors and critics may choose to systematically disagree with some, or all, of their colleagues. So two opposite processes are assumed to be operational in literary criticism: agreement strategies and disagreement strategies. These strategies may be separated in case studies, but they have not been distinguished at the institutional level, up until now. Institutional analysis tends to focus on agreement in the broader sense: awareness, friendship, loyalty, and acknowledged influence (cf. Anheier and Gerhards, 1991; Gerhards and Anheier, 1989).

An approach capable of investigating agreement and disagreement strategies at the same time, needs to fill the gap between case studies and institutional analysis. Like a case study, this method should study separate judgements. However, attention should not be focussed on a single author or critic, but on all judgements of a set of authors and critics. One way to achieve this is to analyse the judgements within and between competing factions of authors who are assumed to agree internally, e.g. within a literary movement (De Nooy, 1991). Dominance of positive judgements within a faction or movement points towards agreement strategies, whereas negative judgements between factions indicate disagreement strategies.

In this paper, I will present a new way of investigating orchestration within literary criticism. This approach makes no *a priori* assumptions about the clustering of literary authors into factions or movements. Instead, group structure – the relative positions of literary authors as well as critics – is deduced from the judgements that authors and critics make about one another. The resulting social structure of literary criticism may consist of (opposing) factions as well as ranks. Therefore, this approach is suitable for investigating literary alliances (movements) and literary prestige at the same time. This approach is firmly rooted in a social-psychological theory (balance theory), which I will discuss first. Next I will apply this method to literary criticism in the 1970s.

## 2. Structural balance

The foundations of balance theory were laid by Fritz Heider as early as 1946 (Heider, 1946). The theory was well-established when he published his book on *The psychology of interpersonal relations* in 1958. Heider's theory deals with several notions that still dominate social psychology today, for example attribution, but I will only discuss the part known as 'balance theory'. Basically, balance theory is about the formation and transformation of affect relations between two individuals. The main tenet states that a person tends to agree with another person whom s/he likes in all respects, whereas a person tends to disagree with someone s/he dislikes. A situation that is consistent with this tenet is referred to as *balanced*.

In a balanced situation, people will feel comfortable. If there are discrepancies between affections and opinions, people will feel uncomfortable, and will feel a need to change the situation either by changing their feelings or by adapting their opinions. This theory has been tested extensively in small groups, e.g. groups of children, or students in educational settings. It has been used in several other contexts too, such as in international political relations to name but one.

### 2.1. Balance theory and literary criticism

Do literary evaluations conform to balance theory? In his book, Heider presents several examples of cultural preferences, so it cannot be ruled out that his theory applies to literary evaluations too. However, those who have applied the balance theory to settings that do not closely resemble the classic social-psychological group, have been criticised (e.g. Granovetter, 1979). Is it reasonable to assume that the institution of literary criticism resembles a small social group?

There are good reasons to expect that social-psychological group processes influence literary evaluations. The main reason for this is the conjecture that authors' and critics' personal identities are at stake in literary evaluation. Unfavourable reviews are sometimes explicitly taken as personal attacks by the people involved. Literary movements usually (albeit temporarily) represent factions of authors who support one another and who claim a common artistic identity. Literary authors and critics do not interact physically like the social groups that are studied in social psychology – which is not to say that they never meet. Nevertheless, it is very likely that they are

well aware of their peers' actions and opinions, because these are publicised or circulated in rumours and gossip.

For an empirical answer, let us look at the question whether literary criticism conforms to balance theory. In order to do this, we must first take a closer look at the balance theoretical models that originated from Heider's initial theory.

## 2.2. Balance theoretical models

In the 1950s, network analysts formalised balance theory and extended it into the field of the analysis of three and more people. In the process, the psychological perspective that deals with a person's perceptions was replaced by the social-psychological and sociological notion of group-structure: psychological balance was translated into structural balance. Also, balance turned out to merely represent one of the structures that occur within the human group. For an excellent summary of all models, I refer to the book *Social network analysis: Methods and applications* written by Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust (1994). I will only briefly outline these models here.

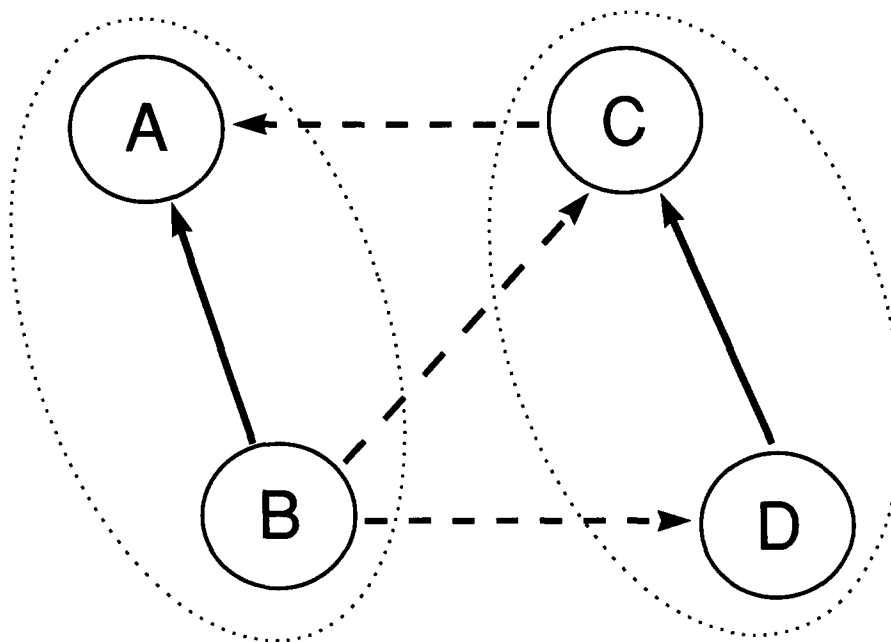


Fig. 1. A balanced network of affections.

Each balance theoretical model may be characterised by the meanings attributed to positive and negative affects.<sup>1</sup> The oldest model, structural balance, demands pos-

<sup>1</sup> Actually, the models are defined by the types of semicycles or the types of triads allowed. See Wasserman and Faust (1994) or De Nooy (1997) for details.

itive affections to join people within a group or cluster whereas negative feelings are supposed to connect people in different clusters. Fig. 1 represents a group of four people (A, B, C, and D) and their affective relations. B likes A and dislikes C and D; D likes C, who dislikes A. By convention, positive affections are rendered by a solid arc, and negative affections by a dashed arc.

Network analysts proved that a balanced group consists of no more than two clusters of positive relations (Cartwright and Harary, 1956). A perfectly balanced group conforms to two maxims: (1) the friend of my friend is also my friend (and never my enemy), and (2) my enemy's enemy is my friend (and never my enemy). In Fig. 1, the clusters are marked by dotted ovals, e.g. two opposing groups of friends. Balance usually indicates a polarised situation. In the field of literature, it could represent the polarisation of two movements or schools, for example, the movement in French literature that is associated with the first ten years of the magazine *Tel Quel* (1960–1983) versus 'la littérature engagée', inspired by Jean Paul Sartre (Pinto, 1991).

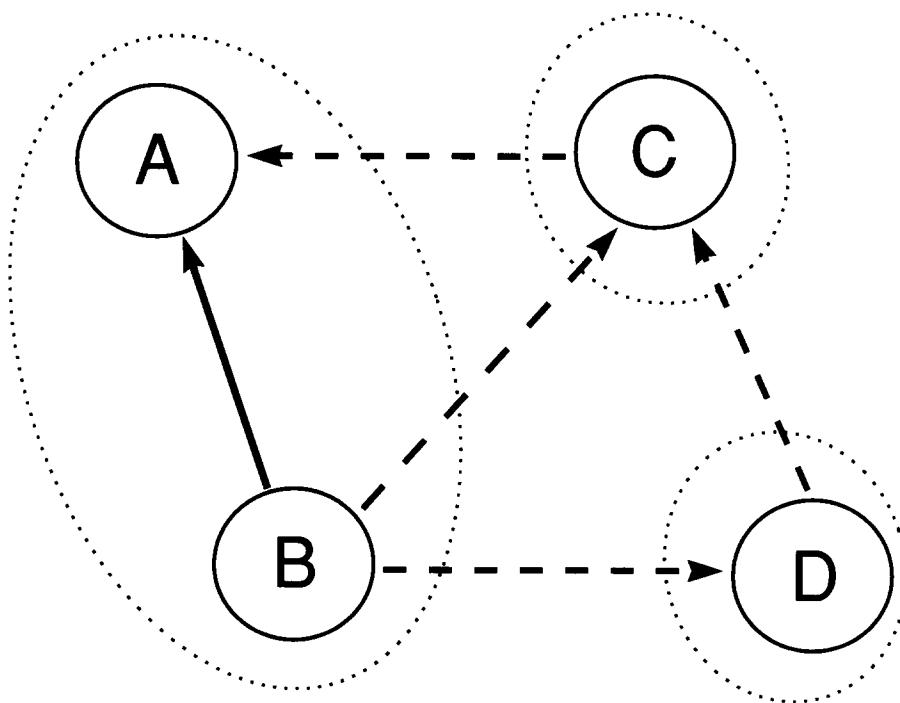


Fig. 2. A clusterable network.

Human groups are not always polarised. Often, they consist of three or more factions or clubs of friends. Such a group is called 'clusterable' since it can be partitioned into clusters, where all positive sentiments are found within clusters, and all

negative affects occur between clusters (Davis, 1967). In a 'clusterable' network the first maxim is still valid: my friends' friends are my friends (and not my enemies). This model may apply to a situation in which several literary magazines claim to market a new generation of young authors (De Nooy, 1991). Fig. 2, however, illustrates that the second maxim no longer applies: the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend. Person B dislikes D, who dislikes C. Nevertheless, B also dislikes C. A balanced network, therefore, is a special case of a clusterable network; it is more restricted.

In the type of network I will analyse, i.e. literary judgements in reviews and interviews, the difference between balanced and clusterable groups is not always meaningful. Each balanced network can be partitioned into two clusters, but balanced networks may also be partitioned into three or more clusters, if affective relations are not all known. If affective relations between persons C and D (Fig. 1) are unknown, the network is still balanced. A and B must be clustered, but C and D may either be grouped together, or they may be assigned to different groups, yielding three clusters in this balanced network. In both cases positive affects connect people within a cluster, and negative affects connect different clusters.

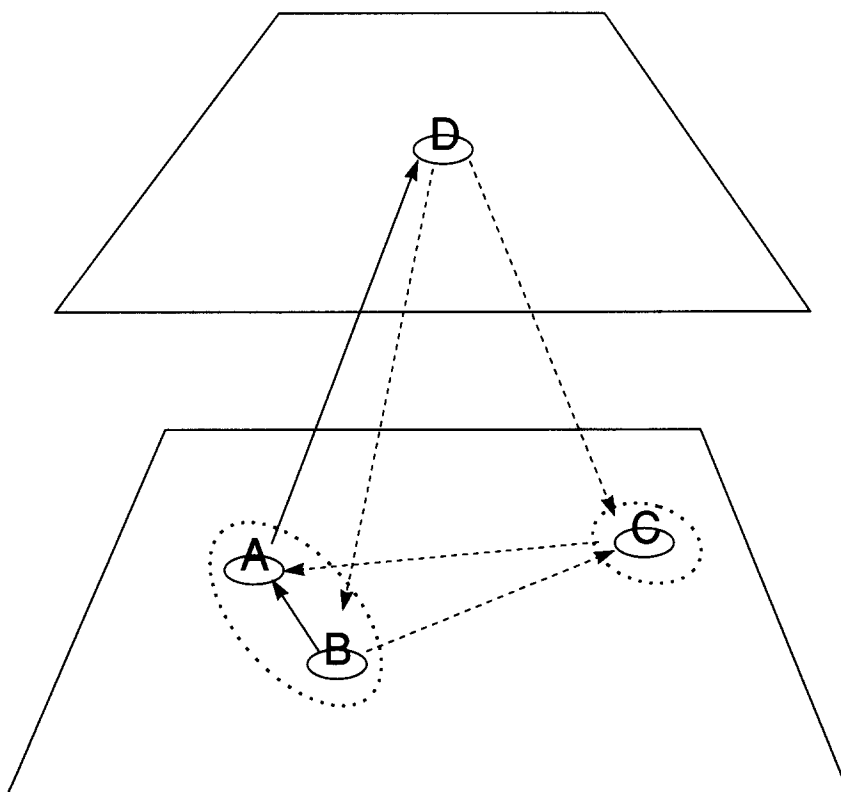


Fig. 3. Ranked clusters.

Implicitly, both models assume that all points and clusters belong to the same level. They represent competing factions, e.g. literary movements. However, human groups used to be ranked too; they consisted of leaders and followers, or stars and blockheads. This also holds true for the literary field: few authors are famous, while some are talented, and many are unknown. Network analysts discovered several models for affective relations that account for ranking within a human group. The first hierarchical model is called 'ranked clusters'. It assumes that asymmetric sentiments or choices point to social ranking. Everybody wants to play with the most popular pupil in class, but s/he does not want to play with all of her/his classmates. People tend to show esteem for their superiors. Positive sentiments may occur within clusters as well as between levels: from a person at a lower level towards a person at a higher level. However, the people in higher ranks may find fault with the people in lower ranks. Therefore, negative sentiments may point down from a higher level towards a lower level. Fig. 3 presents an example of ranked clusters. The bottom level contains two clusters: the friends A and B and their adversary C. Person A values person D, who criticises A's fellow B. This asymmetry in the affect relations places person D in a higher rank.

By now, it is common practice to gauge a literary author's standing by the number of positive reviews his or her books receive. Praise tends to concentrate on the more successful authors, for example the people with the highest literary standing. Praise, in other words, is directed to the higher ranks. Balance theory makes us aware that we should also take into account negative judgements in order to discover ranking. A pecking order exists because some people kiss (upward) while others peck (downward).

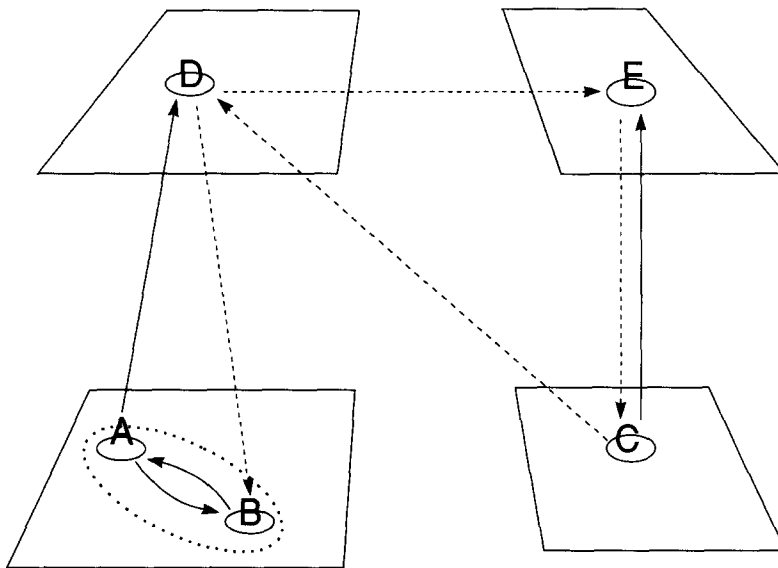


Fig. 4. Transitivity: cleavage.

The next model, known as ‘transitivity’ or ‘cleavage’, is even less restrictive towards negative affects. A person at a lower level may display his/her disapproval of someone at a higher level, if there is a cleavage within the hierarchy as depicted in Fig. 4. Points on one side of the cleavage are hostile towards points on the other side, boasting negative affects for them, regardless of their ranking. The classic example is the so-called ‘sex cleavage’ of children’s groups: there is a hierarchy of boys and a hierarchy of girls, but all boys think girls are stupid, and that is also what the girls think of the boys. The negative affect that crosses the cleavage from a lower point (C) to a higher point (D) characterises the cleavage model (Fig. 4).

It is quite a new development to think of cleavages in the literary field. Maybe, a cleavage existed between the *naturalistes* (e.g. Emile Zola) and the proponents of the *roman psychologique* (e.g. Anatole France) in France at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Rémy Ponton, both movements occupied powerful positions within the literary field (Ponton, 1975). So, they were probably ranked internally: some, but not all, members had access to influential magazines, etc. Internal ranking combined with the antagonism between two movements may well have created a cleavage: the rank and file of the naturalist movement criticising the top of the psychological novelists, and the lesser known members of the latter movement showing contempt for the best naturalist novels. Interestingly, Ponton argues that the movements are related to different social class-fractions. Is a cleavage within the literary field related to the stratification of society as a whole?

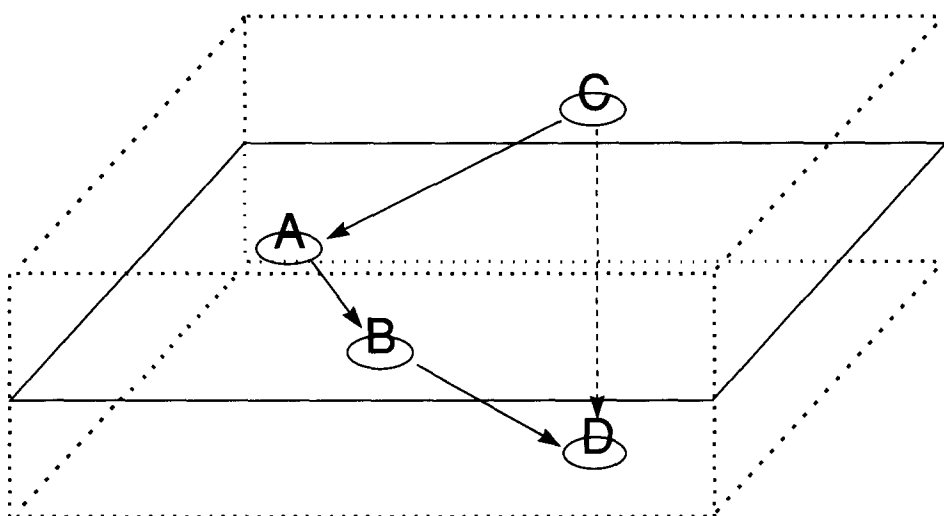


Fig. 5. Hierarchical cluster.

Finally, the most recent hierarchical model allows negative affects in a cluster as well (Johnsen, 1985). In this model, negative judgements in a cluster express people’s ranking in the cluster. Within a faction the sender of a negative affect (e.g. C

in Fig. 5) is ranked over its receiver (D). For the sake of convenience, I will refer to this model as the model of hierarchical clusters.

We can imagine a literary movement (a cluster) to be ranked internally. The leader or most successful member of a movement can afford to find fault with some of his/her followers. The model becomes applicable once a movement starts to fall apart. The group has succeeded in drawing the attention. Now, its members try to make a name for themselves, and can afford to voice their disagreement.

### 3. Group processes within literary criticism

The models presented in the previous section assume that affective relations reflect group structure. If a group consists of sets of friends or factions, affections are balanced or clusterable. Asymmetric affective relations are associated with social ranking. Affections coincide with group structure because people adjust their feelings to group structure as they experience it, and they experience group structure by way of the affections that they perceive or suspect. If no formal or external group structure exists, e.g. at children's playgrounds, affective relations may even constitute group structure. Affective relations are part and parcel of the group processes that enact group structure, and, therefore, enable us to investigate group structure. If they display a pattern predicted by one of the models, it may be concluded that group processes guide affections. Fitting models reflect the main characteristics of group structure, viz. the existence of factions, rankings, and cleavages within the group.

In this section, I will test whether the opinions that literary critics and authors have of one another display patterns predicted by balance theory. A positive outcome to this test has far-reaching implications. It would mean literary critics and authors adjust their evaluations to peer judgements. In this interpretation, literary evaluation is not the 'pure' intellectual activity it is supposed to be, since it is subjected to everyday group processes. Also, patterns emerging from evaluations would reveal the structure of the literary field as its members experience it: the authors' and critics' reputations. I will apply balance theoretical models to Dutch literary criticism data from the 1970s. Let me introduce the data briefly before we turn to the results.

#### 3.1. *Dutch literary field in the 1970s*

In the 1970s, a large number of new literary authors appeared on the Dutch literary scene. At the same time, the reading public was expanding considerably. Newspapers and weeklies supplied the readers with information about literature in new literary supplements and there were many new positions for critics and reviewers. Along with these new authors, several new critics appeared on the scene too. Since newcomers have to make a name by critically defining their position, the advent of many new authors and critics gave rise to a heated debate that lasted all decade. As a result, it is relatively easy to trace the affect relations in this set of authors and critics. The 1970s are very suitable for investigating structural balance in the literary field.

The following case study focuses on the relations between the main participants in literary discussions in the 1970s (see De Nooy, 1991, for details). First, 28 literary authors were selected who were portrayed as representatives of new literary movements or currents at the time (see the Appendix in this article). With few exceptions, they made their *début* in the 1970s. The reviews of their books that appeared in the national newspapers and magazines were collected as well as the interviews they gave in the period from 1970 to 1979. The contents of the interviews and reviews were analysed. A critic's judgement in a review or an author's judgement in an interview were coded on the basis of three categories: *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative*. The judgement score was based on explicit evaluations of and connotations associated with the critical terms used. Next, I selected the literary critics who reviewed the 28 literary authors most frequently: A total of twelve critics were selected. The reviews and interviews with the critics that appeared in the 1970s were collected and analysed too. Reviews of critical prose, e.g. collected essays, and replies to reviews usually contain standpoints in stead of evaluations: the reviewer agrees or disagrees with a particular opinion. Therefore, judgements about critical texts were coded as *agrees*, *is neutral* or *disagrees*. Over 500 judgements were coded. Although positive evaluations were the most frequent, quite a lot of negative judgements were found too. Less than 20% of the evaluations were neutral.

### 3.2. Analysis

For each year, a network was constructed including the authors and critics who judged or who were judged. No distinction was made between literary authors and critics. Several authors worked as critics as well, so it is impossible to make a clear-cut division between these two categories. This is quite a radical step away from previous research designs that either investigated the reputation of a set of literary authors, or investigated the practice of a set of critics. In my design, authors and critics are supposed to be equally involved in the game of balance.

Not all authors and critics were judges or were judged for each year. Especially at the beginning of the decade, part of the authors selected had not yet made their *début*. Also, the number of judgements varies from year to year. In consequence, the size of the network under analysis varies. The first rows in Table 1 show the number of actors and judgements in each year's network.

Literary evaluations display regular patterns if they are guided by group processes. Each balance theoretical model is connected to a characteristic pattern which may be identified by the structural locations of positive and negative judgements. For example, in a balanced group, all positive affects are found within clusters of people, whereas all negative affects are located between clusters (cf. Section 2.2). Structural locations of judgements can be measured by means of the semicycles that a network contains, i.e. rings of judgements (A likes B, B dislikes C and C dislikes B in Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, each balance theoretical model is identified by a par-

<sup>2</sup> See Wasserman and Faust (1994) or De Nooy (1997) for details.

ticular type of semicycle. For example, if an affective network contains balanced semicycles, the affective relations display the pattern predicted by the model of structural balance. In other words, the model of balance fits the affect relations within the group. Fitting a balance theoretical model to an affective network boils down to counting the occurrences of semicycles. The bottom half of Table 1 lists the frequencies of the semicycles that identify the balance theoretical models.<sup>3</sup> The table shows that even small networks may contain large numbers of semicycles, so the analysis must be done by computer.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1  
Balance theoretical models per annum, 1970–1979

	Year									
	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
# Actors	10	18	20	24	23	28	35	29	25	27
# Judgements	9	23	38	50	44	50	66	83	48	53
<i>Model</i>										
Balance	0	0	7	14	2	0	12*	23	14**	2
Clusterability	0	0	1	2	0	1	4	6	6**	1
Ranked clusters	0	2	10	42*	33*	19	58**	313**	50**	19
(% cyclic pairs)		(.00)	(.55)	(.71)	(.20)	(.27)	(.60)	(.48)	(.66)	(.00)
Cleavage	0	0	2	6	0	1	11**	9	15**	0
(% cyclic pairs)			(.00)	(.00)		(.00)	(.00)	(.31)	(.00)	
Hierarchical clusters	0	0	0	0	5	2	1	13	0	1
(% cyclic pairs)					(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.01)		(.00)

\* Significant at the 0.05 level (Monte Carlo simulation conditional on overall-sums)

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level (Monte Carlo simulation conditional on overall-sums)

How many semicycles are needed to decide that a particular model fits the data? The absolute number of semicycles is not a reliable measure of fit. Semicycle counts depend heavily on the size of the group and the number of affective relations. In order to discriminate between random patterns and systematic patterns of affections, statistical significance of the counts is approximated by means of Monte Carlo simulation. For each network 1,000 random networks are generated with the same number of persons and affects as in the original network. If less than 5% or 1% of the random networks contain the number of semicycles found in the original network, the original semicycle count is statistically significant. The pure chance of finding this number of semicycles is considered to be too low. Therefore, it may be concluded that affective relations display patterns predicted by balance theory.

<sup>3</sup> Semicycles are analysed up to length 5 and statistical significance is approximated by means of a Monte Carlo simulation conditioned on the number of positive judgements and the number of negative judgements in each year.

<sup>4</sup> Software operating under Windows 95 is available from the author.

Finally, if a ranked model is significant, the ranking must be checked. The examples of ranked models in section 2.2 (cf. Figs. 3 and 4) display consistent or a-cyclical ranking, viz. ranking without contradictions. If author A ranks over critic B, critic B does not rank over author A, at the same time. However, a significant number of ranked semicycles does not guarantee a consistent ranking. Authors and critics may be ranked cyclically, for example author A ranks over critic B, critic B ranks over author C, and author C ranks over A, at the same time. Since cyclic ranking is incompatible with our notion of social ranking, a hierarchical model with a substantial amount of cyclic ranking must be rejected. The bracketed numbers in Table 1 give the proportions of cyclically ranked pairs.

### 3.3. Results

Do balance theoretical models fit the data on literary evaluations? Table 1 does not contain significant results for all years. Probably, the networks are too small and too sparse to test for balance in 1970 and 1971. In 1972, literary evaluations still do not display a clear balance theoretical model. Balance theory does not seem to guide the judgements passed that year by the authors and critics analysed. The literary evaluations of 1973 and 1974 conform significantly to the model of ranked clusters. However, the model is not very stable<sup>5</sup> and ranking is consistent only if a more complex model is taken into account. For 1973, a cleavage must be introduced (although this model is not significant by itself) in order to attain perfect, a-cyclical ranking. In 1974, the (insignificant) model of hierarchical clusters is needed to obtain a-cyclical ranking. In 1975, there is no balance theoretical model that fits. So, the first part of the decade provides scanty support for the claim that literary evaluations are guided by balance. In two years, the judgements tend to conform to a rank order or hierarchy of authors and critics.

In contrast, the second part of the decade produces some remarkable, stable results.<sup>6</sup> In several years, a ranked model including one or more cleavages clearly fits the judgements. In 1976 and 1978, the ranking is perfectly a-cyclical; in 1977, about one third of the ranking is cyclical, unless the model of hierarchical clusters is chosen, which is statistically insignificant by itself. Apart from ranking, the judgements also display balance and clusterability in 1976 and 1978. In these years, literary evaluations clearly display patterns predicted by balance theory. Finally, 1977 seems to be a year of transition, and the evaluations published in 1979 no longer fit a balance theoretical model.

We may conclude that balance theory does not always explain literary judgements. In a few years, however, judgements show predictable patterns which are not to be expected unless authors and critics adjust their judgements to one another. This is a time of polarisation, given the large number of balanced and clusterable semicycles, and a time of ranking and separation (cleavages). In Pierre Bourdieu's words,

<sup>5</sup> It only surfaces in analyses up to semicycle-lengths 4 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> The results are stable because they do not change if other semicycle-lengths (usually from 3 up to 6) are being used.

this is a period of position-taking (Bourdieu, 1985). If there is a struggle over the ranking of people within the literary field, this struggle seems to go through critical phases in which balance theoretical principles guide literary evaluations.

#### 4. Critical space

Now, let us look at the ‘moments of balance’ in greater detail in order to assess the face validity of the model. The pattern of affective relations discloses group structure. Therefore, literary evaluations can be used to assign authors and critics to clusters and ranks. Do the ranks and clusters make sense in relation to our understanding of the authors, the critics and the period? What positions do they occupy in ‘critical space’?

If not all affective relations are known, which is the case here, critical space can only be reconstructed partially. Some members of the group occupy unambiguous positions, whereas others may be assigned to several positions within the structure as a result of incomplete information. The analysis will be restricted to people with unambiguous positions.

In 1976, a minority of the authors and critics under investigation held unambiguous positions (14 out of 40). Nevertheless, they make up a structure with three interesting characteristics (Fig. 6).<sup>7</sup> First, critical space is ranked. It contains at least three levels: the authors Matsier, Hotz, and Van Marissing at the top, Luijters, Mulder, Nuis, and Mertens at the bottom, and the remaining authors and critics in the middle. Note that critics populate the bottom. This result recurs in 1977 and 1978. As yet, it is not clear whether this is a technical artefact (critics pass judgement more often than authors), or a substantial finding. The people at the top are authors. It is difficult to claim that the ranks represent the status of authors and critics within the literary field at the time, although the example offers some support for the claim. Matsier and Hotz are the only ones who received several favourable judgements and no negative judgements at all. This may be interpreted as undisputed quality. Van Marissing is a special case, as I will go on to show.

The second interesting feature of the structure is the cleavage between Van Marissing, Robberechts, Vogelaar, and Mertens on the one hand, and their colleagues on the other hand. Negative judgements bridge this cleavage, e.g. from Nuis and 't Hart to Van Marissing, and from Mertens to Meinkema. The left side of the cleavage is easy to interpret; here we find authors and critics known for their Marxist and experimental (conception of) literature in which the technique of montage holds a central place. In a political sense, they constitute the left wing of the literary field. Please note that this literary movement is not represented by a cluster within the larger structure, but by a separate hierarchy, constituting a world on its own. However, the cleavage is not insurmountable: some positive evaluations cross the cleavage. Some of these judgements reflect the ranking of experimental authors, for

<sup>7</sup> The networks are drawn with Pajek, software for network analysis (<http://vlado.fmf.uni-lj.si/pub/networks/pajek/default.htm>).

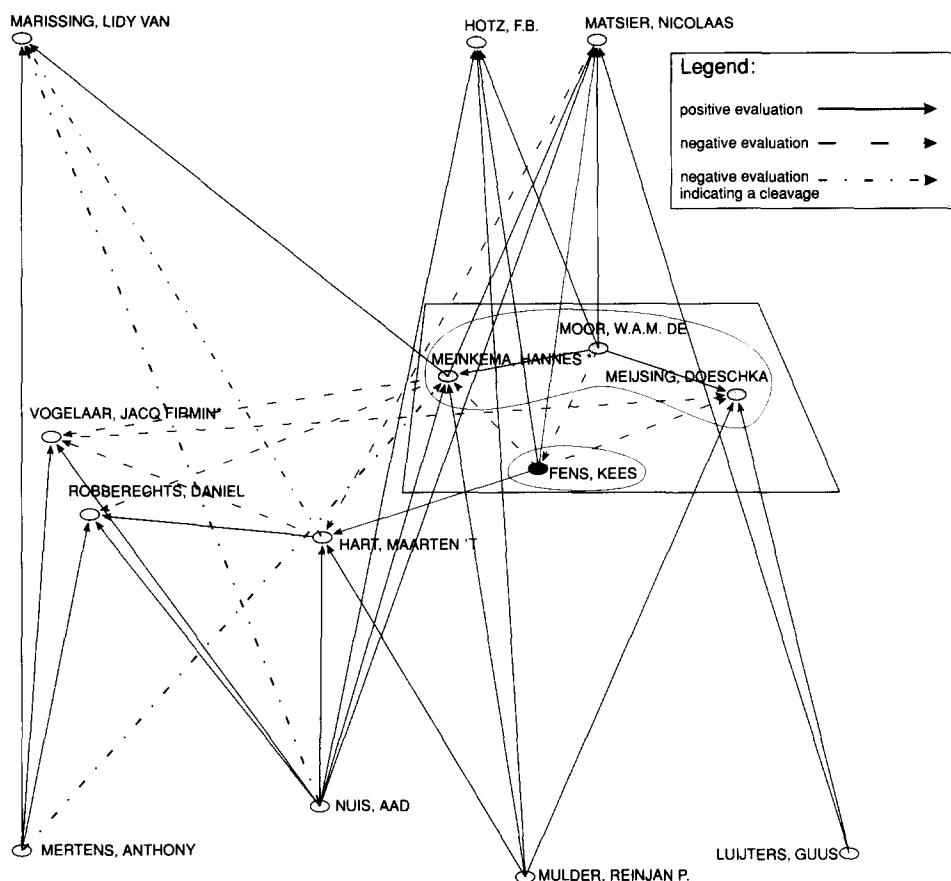


Fig. 6. Critical space in 1976.

example the judgements connecting Mertens, Robberechts, Meinkema, and Van Marissing (in this order), rank Van Marissing over Mertens. This semicycle crosses the cleavage. Since a cleavage disrupts the fundamental idea of ranking, because a negative judgement can never point upwards, the ranking of experimental authors may be quite meaningless if it is due to judgements that bridge the cleavage. Also, it should be kept in mind that the hierarchies on both sides of the cleavage are incompatible, and incomparable. Van Marissing's position at the same level as Hotz and Matsier, therefore, does not mean that they are equal in rank. It is more of a graphical choice: for the sake of clarity, each figure is drawn with a minimum number of levels.

Most authors and critics that are drawn at the same level do not necessarily belong to the same rank. There are four exceptions to this assertion, which brings me to the third characteristic of the critical space in 1976. Two critics (De Moor and Fens), and two authors (D. Meijnsing and Meinkema) necessarily belong to the same level.

They are clustered into two antithetical groups: Fens (by himself) versus Meijsing, De Moor, and Meinkema. The latter group does not match the literary classifications of the time. For example, a critic clustered Meijsing with Matsier, Kooiman, et cetera, but he grouped Meinkema with 't Hart, Luijters, et al. (Goedegebuure, 1976). Both authors are women, so maybe this reflects a gender-bias. However, this pattern does not emerge for other years, so this conclusion may be premature. The clusters represent a temporary polarisation between two critics (Fens and De Moor), who argue over books written by two female authors.

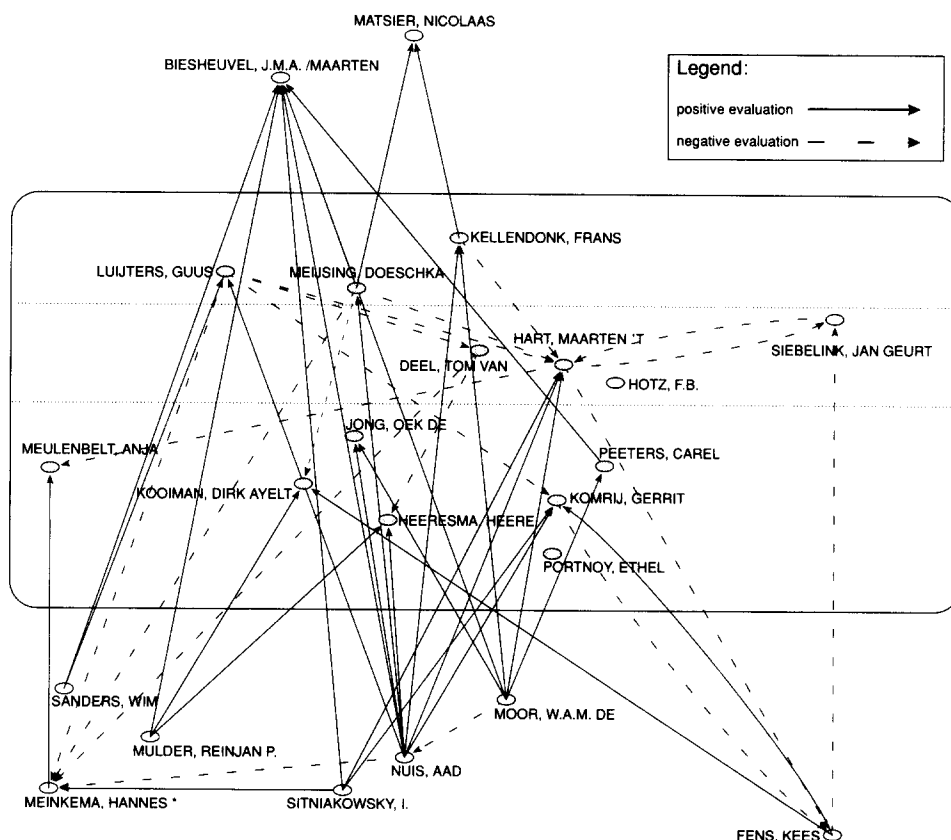


Fig. 7. Critical space in 1977 (positive arcs within the hierarchical cluster – boxed – are omitted).

The structural features found in 1976 more or less recur in 1977 and 1978. Critical space contains at least two levels; the top level is reserved for authors, whereas critics mainly populate the bottom. Cleavages surface, although not in both years. In 1977, critical space contains a minimum of three levels. Again, we find critics at the bottom (Sanders, Mulder, Sitniakowsky, Nuis, De Moor, and Fens) and Matsier at the top, now joined by the author Biesheuvel. The middle level consists of one large hierarchical cluster, i.e. an internally ranked cluster (enclosed by a box in Fig. 7).

For the sake of clarity, the (numerous) positive arcs within the hierarchical cluster are not included. The hierarchical cluster is subdivided into three levels: Luijters, Meijsing, and Kellendonk at the top, Van Deel, 't Hart, Hotz, and Siebelink in the middle, and Meulenbelt, Kooijman, De Jong, Heeresma, Komrij, Portnoy, and Peeters at the bottom of the hierarchical cluster. Neither this cluster nor its sub-levels represent specific literary movements. In Section 2.2, I hypothesised that a hierarchical cluster occurs when movements break up. Indeed, for a single author, 1977 is a period of transition from a cluster in 1976 to an isolated position in 1978 (Meijsing), but the reverse development is more general (Luijters, 't Hart, and Hotz). Finally, the cleavage that marks experimental literature has vanished, probably because of sparse data on the part of experimental authors. They receive and pass few judgements in 1977.

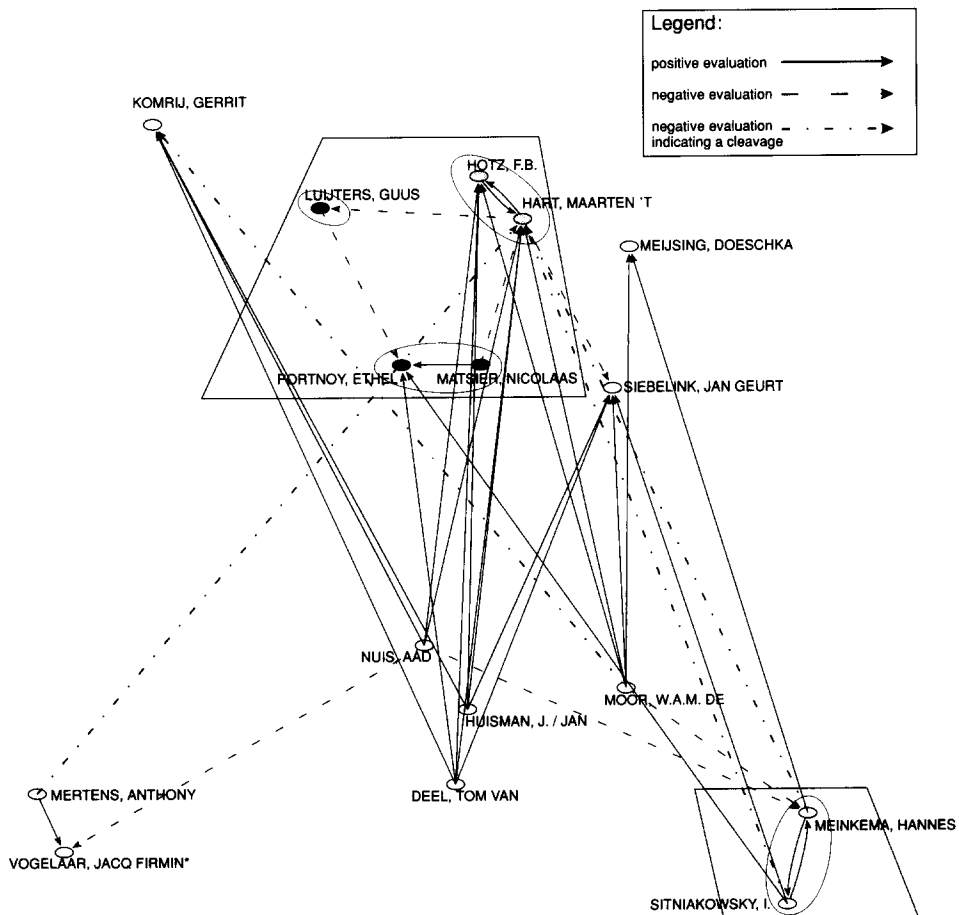


Fig. 8. Critical space in 1978.

Critical space is relatively flat in 1978, containing no more than two layers (Fig. 8). Again, critics are situated at the bottom and authors in the upper half of the structure. The cleavage that marks experimental literature surfaces again, but the experimental sub-field is no longer ranked internally. Also, there is a new cleavage separating Meinkema and Sitniakowsky from the mainstream. This cleavage does not represent a literary movement. It could, however, indicate a new separation within the literary field. Sitniakowsky reviews literature for a popular, right-wing newspaper (*de Telegraaf*), which commands little respect within the literary field. In 1978, Meinkema is one of the major representatives of so-called Feminist or Women's literature in The Netherlands. Although their political preferences clearly do not match, both Sitniakowsky and Meinkema represent political positions; they are 'socially marked'. This does not fit the role model of the autonomous intellectual that prevails within the literary field. Political or social involvement may arouse suspicion and disapproval with members of the literary field. The relation between cleavages within the literary field and the structure of society at large, hypothesised in Section 2.2, seems to make sense.

Because of their mutual positive evaluations, Sitniakowsky and Meinkema make up a cluster in 1978. However, the critical space contains more clusters. At the top level, Luijters, Hotz, 't Hart, Matsier, and Portnoy are clustered into three rivalling factions. One faction, containing 't Hart and Hotz, corresponds to a contemporary classification on the basis of literary currents, except that Portnoy, clustered with Matsier in the network, was assigned to that current as well (Nuis, 1977). The interpretation of clusters remains obscure, not because they clash with our intuitions, but mainly because they are unexpected. More examples are needed to determine their meaning.

## 5. Discussion

Applied to Dutch literary criticism in the 1970s, balance theoretical models offer rather hard evidence that critics and authors sometimes act like children in a playground. Their literary evaluations follow general, social-psychological rules for friendship formation and social ranking. In such periods, judgements expressed in reviews and interviews respond to one another. They probably serve a higher goal than just informing anonymous readers about new books. They also address an inner circle of authors and critics. To them, judgements express affiliations, deference, or contempt. They help shape or (re)define group structure: the social space of literary criticism. Sociologists take an increasing interest in the interaction between language and social structure (e.g. White, 1992). Literary criticism offers an interesting example and test case for this theory.

Fleshing out the models with authors and critics yields recognisable results as well as surprising and yet obscure results. Authors of undisputed quality (at the time) occupy the highest rank. Critics dominate the bottom layer, but as yet it is not clear whether this is a technical artefact or a substantial finding. In both cases, however, the low positions of critics may reinforce the impression that critics are frustrated

authors. Clusters within a level are rare and they resemble literary movements to a lesser degree than expected. Unexpected cleavages cut through critical space, separating the mainstream from its margins. Sometimes, a margin represents a literary movement with clear political orientations. In another instance, a margin is related to social strata or categories which are dominated in the literary field: women and the popular press. Cleavages seem to be related to the demarcation and self-definition of the literary field with respect to society at large. It would be very interesting to find out what will happen to the authors and critics in the margins. Will they constitute an independent literary sub-field or will they be expelled from literature?

Finally, let us return to the origin of balance theory. Heider (1946, 1958) focused on a person's affections and opinions, as well as on the opinions or affections s/he attributes to other people. In an institutional or structural approach, it makes sense to pass over individual attributions and concentrate on expressed affections. After all, expressed affections are known to all members of the institution and help them structure their relations, whereas attributed affections are private. However, there is no reason to limit the investigation to affections. Topics, such as literary predecessors or stylistic features, may also divide or unite authors and critics. If authors agree or disagree on a topic, the topic can easily be included in the method proposed in this article. This would yield new insight into the relations between language, conceptions of literature, and social structure.

## Appendix

Selected authors and critics, their principal role and judgements in the 1970s.

Name	Role	Number of judgements	
		Passed	Received
Andriesse, Peter	Author	12	15
Arion, Frank Martinus	Author	3	10
Biesheuvel, J.M.A. /Maarten	Author	1	36
Heijden, A.F.TH. van der (Canaponi, Patrizio*)	Author	2	5
Deel, Tom van	Critic	55	11
Donkers, Jan	Author	1	15
Fens, Kees	Critic	37	16
Hart, Maarten 't	Author/critic	20	58
Heeresma, Heere	Author	1	33
Hiddema, Arie B.	Author	0	12
Hotz, F.B.	Author	3	14
Huisman, Jan	Critic	19	0
Jong, Oek de	Author	5	10
Kellendonk, Frans	Author	4	17
Keulen, Mensje van	Author	3	25
Komrij, Gerrit	Author/critic	42	29
Kooiman, Dirk Ayelt	Author	12	40
Luijters, Guus	Author/critic	54	24

Name	Role	Number of judgements	
		Passed	Received
Marissing, Lidy van	Author	4	18
Matsier, Nicolaas	Author	4	15
Meijsing, Doeschka	Author	11	17
Meijsing, Geerten Jan Maria (Joyce & Co*)	Author	0	8
Meinkema, Hannes*	Author/critic	8	21
Mertens, Anthony	Critic	16	1
Meulenbelt, Anja	Author	0	7
Moor, W.A.M. de	Critic	58	1
Mulder, Reinjan P.	Critic	30	1
Nuis, AAD	Critic	48	3
Peeters, Carel	Critic	37	12
Plomp, Hans	Author	2	21
Portnoy, Ethel	Author	4	17
Robberechts, Daniel	Author	0	8
Sanders, Wim	Critic	12	0
Siebelink, Jan Geurt	Author	1	17
Sijtsma, Bernard J.	Author	0	8
Sitniakowsky, I.	Critic	30	1
Spaan, Henk	Critic	18	2
Trolsky, Tymen	Author	4	8
Vervoort, Hans	Author	12	16
Vogelaar, Jacq. Firmin*	Author/critic	20	21
Total		593	593

\* pen name

## References

- Anheier, H.K. and J. Gerhards, 1991. The acknowledgement of literary influence. A structural analysis of a German literary network. *Sociological Forum* 6, 137–156.
- Bourdieu, P. 1985. The market of symbolic goods. *Poetics* 14, 13–44.
- Cartwright, D. and F. Harary, 1956. Structural balance: A generalisation of Heider's Theory. *Psychological Review* 63, 277–293.
- Davis, J.A., 1967. Clustering and structural balance in graphs. *Human Relations* 20, 181–187.
- De Nooy, W., 1991. Social networks and classification in literature. *Poetics* 20, 507–537.
- De Nooy, W., 1997. Cycles and paths, not triads. Paper presented at Sunbelt XVII International Social Network Conference, San Diego, CA, 1997.
- Gerhards, J. and H.K. Anheier, 1989. The literary field. An empirical investigation of Bourdieu's sociology of art. *International Sociology* 4, 131–146.
- Goedegebuure, J., 1976. Het jonge, doodvermoeide Nederlandse proza [The young dead tired Dutch prose]. *Hollands Diep*. (23 October).
- Granovetter, M., 1979. The theory-gap in social network analysis. In: P.W. Holland and S. Leinhardt (eds.), *Perspectives on social network research*, 501–518. New York: Academic Press.
- Heider, F., 1946. Attitudes and cognitive organization. *Journal of Psychology* 21, 107–112.

- Heider, F., 1958. The psychology of interpersonal relations. New York: John Willem and Sons.
- Janssen, S., 1988. Institutional factors influencing the selection made by literary reviewers. *Spiel* 7, 281–291.
- Janssen, S., 1998. Side-roads to success: The effect of sideline activities on the status of writers. *Poetics* 25, 265–280.
- Johnsen, E.C., 1985. Network macrostructure models for the Davis-Leinhardt set of empirical sociomatrixes. *Social Networks* 7, 203–224.
- Nuis, A., 1977. Inleiding [Introduction]. In: A. Nuis (ed.), *Korte verhalen uit de jaren zeventig* [Short stories from the seventies]. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Pinto, L., 1991. *Tel Quel*. Au sujet des intellectuels de parodie. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 66–77.
- Ponton, R., 1975. Naissance du roman psychologique. Capital culturel, capital social et stratégie littéraire à la fin du 19e siècle. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 66–81.
- Van Dijk, N., 1990. Ter Braak als literairpolitiek strateeg. Over de herwaardering van Elsschot [Ter Braak as a literary strategist. About the revaluation of Elsschot]. *Spektator* 19, 183–194.
- Van Rees, C.J., 1987. How reviewers reach consensus on the value of literary works. *Poetics* 16, 275–294.
- Wasserman, S. and K. Faust, 1994. *Social network analysis: Methods and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, H.C., 1992. *Identity and control: A structural theory of social action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

**Wouter de Nooy** works at the Department of Arts Studies at the Erasmus University Rotterdam in The Netherlands. He completed his Ph.D.-dissertation on classification of literature in 1993. Among his current interests are literary criticism, social network analysis, the structure of art worlds, and visual arts policy.