Desecrating Celebrity. Proceedings of the IV International Celebrity Studies Journal Conference

Edited by Romana Andò and Fabio Corsini
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Proceedings of the IV International
Celebrity Studies Journal Conference

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## Celebrity Strategies for the Market and Beyond

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Abstract
In the Dutch Golden Age every literary publication of major importance was packed with preliminary laudatory poems. These para-textual poems provide indications about the content of the work and contain praises to the author and his work, sometimes in rather excessive terms. As publishers used to arrange these contributions, there is certainly also a strategic aim involved: they manipulate the image of the author involved. Moreover, they not only strengthen the fame of the author but also steer the interpretation of the author’s work and personality in a particular direction and exclude alternative ways of giving meaning to the data. In this article, I discuss these means of manipulative practices. As an example I consider the literary career of the Dutch playwright Gerbrand Bredero (1585-1618). His regular publisher Cornelis vander Plasse supported Bredero’s publications never neglecting his commercial instinct. Some of the strategies of this publisher are discussed, one of them being the publication of almost 30 elegies immediately after the death of Bredero.

Introduction
In the 17th century the Dutch Republic became a world power. It was a period of economic growth, a strongly growing population, rising wealth, and a boost in demand for books. From 1590 onwards, the book production industry increased swiftly as did the quality of the produced books. Since the conditions were favourable, the number of booksellers and publishers showed a strong growth.
An important factor that contributed to the success of printing and bookselling in the Netherlands was the lack of political authority, thus of control, the result of the country’s political structure and absence of a state religion.¹ The Dutch Republic of the 17th century was a loose confederation of seven provinces of which Holland (the west side of the country) was the most powerful. Moreover, due to the long-established tradition of tolerance, the book trade benefitted largely from the continuous arrival of newcomers, not only potential customers on the market in books but also numerous printers and booksellers from the Southern Netherlands (which is Belgium nowadays).² Religious and economic immigrants provided the necessary manpower, skills and creativity. The notable success of the publishing, printing and bookselling business in the Northern Netherlands (the Netherlands nowadays) also affected the quantity of book sales.² Presumably more books were printed in the Netherlands than in all other European countries put together during the 17th century.⁴

Publishing houses in the Dutch Republic were concentrated in cities and towns. Leiden, Amsterdam, and The Hague developed as centres of book production: around 1619 there were more than 30 publishers in Amsterdam, 12 in Leiden, and 10 in Rotterdam.⁵ Due to publishing

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houses like the Blaeu firm cultural production reached high levels in terms of scale and quality in this period. But to become famous as a literary writer in a booming city like Amsterdam must not have been an easy task, as early as the first decades of the 17th century. There were no newspapers or magazines, no real theatre or centralized cultural meeting place, and literary criticism did not really exist. Therefore, advertisements for books in Dutch newspapers did not exist yet.

In this paper I will discuss some publishing strategies in the Early Modern Period. I will describe some different ways in which a publisher could attribute to the fame of an individual author in this period. The availability of a huge amount of books for domestic consumption points to a substantial reading public in the Dutch Republic. Although the printing firms were often separated from the publishing houses - books were printed all over the Netherlands - , most of them were produced in Amsterdam, the country's main book trade centre. This was a cultural centre as well, the place to be for writers who wanted to profit from the economical and cultural hub.

As an example of celebrification and the effect of a publisher’s acting on the celebrity of a single Amsterdam writer, my focus is on the poet and playwright Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (1585-1618) and his childhood friend Cornelis Lodewijcksz. vander Plasse (1585-1641), an Amsterdam bookbinder, bookseller and publisher. To get a clear pic-

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8 Admittedly, there was a large number of auction catalogues in this period. See Bert van Selm, 'Een menighte treffelijcke Boecken'. Nederlandse boekhandelscatalogi in het begin van de zeventiende eeuw, Utrecht, 1987; Bert van Selm and J. Gruys (eds.), Book sales catalogues of the Dutch Republic, 1599-1800 on microfiche, Leiden, 1990 vlgg.
10 Hofijzer, 'The Dutch Republic', p. 27.
ture of how their relationship has come into being, and how it continued even stronger after the author died, I will consider some of the main events during the ten-year literary career of Bredero and the following twenty years, in which his publisher Vander Plasse did his utmost to publish all writings of his beloved friend after the latter had suddenly died. In what way did this publisher try to exploit reader engagement? And what was the impact of all his efforts on the publication of Bredero’s oeuvre? Some of the publisher’s decisions, as I will show, enhanced Bredero to become not only an Amsterdam celebrity during the first half of the century, but also a national one in the 19th- and 20th-century Netherlands. Today, Bredero is considered one of the ‘big five’, or even ‘big three’, the most important writers of the Dutch Golden Age.¹¹

Selective matching

Bredero died in 1618, at the early age of 33, unmarried, without children. At that moment Amsterdam counted almost 50 booksellers. But it is evident that Vander Plasse, Bredero’s regular publisher since the very beginning, should take care of the literary legacy. He collected all he could find of Bredero’s work scattered across the city, even the smallest fragments. Twenty years later, in 1638, he finally had the opportunity to publish Bredero’s collected works (Alle de wercken), the first time as well that Bredero’s complete drama was brought out. This compilation of 1638 marked the very end of a publishing relationship that took a lifetime. In his introduction to this volume, Vander Plasse elaborates on three aspects of Bredero’s mastery: his talent, the quality of his poems and drama, and the unprecedented popularity of this Amsterdam author during his life.¹² Some laudatory poems in the preliminary pages point at the tireless efforts of his publisher. During 20 years after Bredero’s death he took the initiative to make his readers familiar with everything Bredero had written or had started, as some


¹²G.A. Bredero, Alle de wercken, Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1638, fol. A4r.
of his plays remained unfinished. As we will see, he also gave Bredero a lasting identity, by revealing his portrait and personal notes. According to Vander Plasse, there was no need to honour foreign writers, if one compared Dutch authors to the worldfamous ones from Antiquity:

Heinsius and Hooft are our Homer, Vondel our Pindar, Coster our Virgil, and the (ah!) deceased Bredero our Terence.\(^{13}\)

The equation of all these Dutch authors one-to-one with the top-classics is an ultimate form of praise. By comparing Bredero to Terence and by mentioning him between other well-known Dutch poets like Hooft and Vondel, Bredero is wrapped in a laudatory cloak from the first stroke of the pen. The strategy to disseminate 'names that represent quality' has been described by Sébastien Dubois, in his article about the structure of the literary market.\(^{14}\) This strategy, 'selective matching', consists of the selection and association of high-status authors. In his view the incorporation of a specific writer into a series of authoritative and high-quality authors is an extremely efficient mechanism for building reputation and the establishment of poets. In this way, it becomes evident that editors and publishers are core actors in the poetry world,\(^{15}\) in the early 17th century as well, as the relationship between Bredero and Vander Plasse clearly shows.

In any case, these laudatory remarks from publisher Vander Plasse regarding Bredero (who died twenty years earlier) don’t arrive unexpectedly here. They were close friends, for many years, from their youth, at school.\(^{16}\) They lived in the same Amsterdam district, not far apart. Different prefaces by Vander Plasse to Bredero’s oeuvre under-


\(^{15}\)Cf. Dubois, ‘Recognition and Renown’, p. 44.

line their personal relationship, their being friends, rather than a pure commercial connection.\textsuperscript{17} During almost thirty years, Vander Plasse was committed to publishing Bredero’s writings and he supported the author’s reputation building by quite a number of strategic decisions.

One of them becomes evident immediately after Bredero died in 1618. Vander Plasse arranged a considerable collection of funeral poems. In the next years, as we will discuss below, the efforts of this Amsterdam publisher brought us about half of Bredero’s total oeuvre, including the famous farces and the complete songbook. He safeguarded the literary legacy of his friend, his personal archive, correspondence and yet unfinished plays. Not only did he publish yet unknown work, letters and orations by Bredero but he increased the reputation of the poet by honourable mentions and citations in the introduction of posthumous editions and reprints of Bredero’s oeuvre. As a gatekeeper, Vander Plasse established Bredero’s name so solidly during the first half of the 17th century, that all foundations to become a canonical Dutch author in a later period have been laid: in almost everything we know about and from Bredero nowadays, Vander Plasse has been an intermediary.\textsuperscript{18} He is the one who collected, published and distributed not only the plays by Bredero, his songs and lyrics, but also personal writings like letters and orations; he ensured that a lot of contemporary judgements on the author and his work were published, in laudatory poems.

\textbf{Vander Plasse’s reputation}

Canonization of Dutch literature in the 19th and 20th centuries is often anticipated by, and draws on, the literary practice in the period before 1800, which tended to take place in the social framework of city cultures.\textsuperscript{19} Amsterdam was in the centre of the Low Countries’ book culture: writers, booksellers, and publishers were everywhere in the

\textsuperscript{17} Idem, p. 12-13.
city. The Netherlands consisted of several urban areas, the cities in close proximity to each other, facilitating specialization, differentiation, exchange of know-how and information. Urban networks stimulated collaboration, but they also led to cost reduction, innovation and quality improvement.\textsuperscript{20} Relationships between publishers, printers and engravers, local and inter-local, were important assets for market expansion through product differentiation, which was according to Rasterhoff one of the characteristics of the Golden Age book production in the early years of the 17th century.\textsuperscript{21} Bredero was an Amsterdam icon in his time before he became a national one in the modern period.\textsuperscript{22} His originality, creativity and the literary quality of the innovative songs and plays were no more than passing phenomena to the extent that the songs have been written only to be sung around the Amsterdam canals and the plays to be performed in the local Chamber of rhetoric, a society of art lovers. The fixed and timeless success of this author has been established through the printing process. From the time his works have been printed, from around 1616, everybody in the Netherlands could read and enjoy his texts.\textsuperscript{23}

Bredero and Vander Plasse belonged together: their social and geographical connection made their cooperation to a successful enterprise. Bredero’s living house was located a stone’s throw from the bookshop of Vander Plasse in the Amsterdam centre (fig. 1).\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Rasterhoff, \textit{Painting and Publishing as Cultural Industries}, p. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Cf. idem, p. 57.
\item \textsuperscript{22} See Leerssen, ‘Vondel 1867’, p. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Some elegies (1619) point to this aspect. An anonymous funeral poem reads: ‘His [Bredero’s] name and writings live forever, which are available for everybody across the Netherlands’ (Garmt Stuiveling, \textit{Memoriaal van Bredero}, Culemborg, Tjeenk Willink, 1970, p. 179: ‘zijn naam en schriften eeuwich leven, / Die’t gansche Neerlandt door zijn yeder voor de hant’).
\item \textsuperscript{24} Henk Borst, Cor van der Kogel, Paul Koopman & Piet Verkruysse, ‘Analytische bibliografie en literatuurgeschiedenis Wonen in het Woord - Leven in de letter’, \textit{Literatuur}, 5, 1988, p. 332.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Amsterdam Bourse in the centre of the city. On the corner Cornelis van der Plasse started his bookshop in 1611 and somewhat later his publishing house. Engraving of P.H. Schut, in: Filip von Zesen, Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam [...], Amsterdam, Joachim Nosche, 1664, opposite p. 232. (http://www.bibliopolis.nl/beeldbank)

In his publishing house Vander Plasse maintained intensive contact with writers, engravers, other booksellers, printers, elsewhere in the city. He consistently established himself as the careful publisher of Bredero, who worked on the basis of autograph manuscripts that he collected from everywhere in the city after Bredero’s death.

Since I know, my dear art-loving and lust-loving Reader, that you are very devoted to the lessons and poems of the honourable, very famous and deceased Poet, Gerbrant Adriaensz. Bredero, all the personally written works of whom I have collected, not without great pain and high costs, I have pulled his writings from the hands of everyone amongst whom I found his writings, in order to dedicate them as gracefully as possible, according to their value, to you, kind-hearted Reader.  

26 C.L. van der Plasse, ‘Den drucker tot den leser’, in: Bredero, Kluchten (1619),
The reputation of Vander Plasse as a caretaking, committed publisher was repeatedly advocated by his preliminary remarks, in which he stated that he had made agreements with the author and that the published text was connected as closely as possible to the intention of his deceased friend. In one preface he emphasizes that his version of the text did justice to the original idea and spirit of the author’s language, since he used Bredero’s autographs.27

**Five decisive moments**

Vander Plasse proved to be not only a commercial but also a dedicated editor. When we have a closer look at some crucial moments in their interrelation we can distinguish the following five stages in a chronological line:

1. The recognition and admittance of Bredero’s success at an early stage. Already in 1612, when scarcely any of Bredero’s verses has been printed, Vander Plasse qualifies Bredero as: `my very good friend and excellent Poet’.28 The same year Vander Plasse started his publishing house and bookshop close to the Amsterdam Stock Exchange near the Dam Square. At the same moment, he began to publish Bredero.29

2. In 1617 Vander Plasse published a compilation of all plays by Bredero performed until that moment (De Spelen). This was a very unusual step in this early period, as this collection was published during

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27 Idem, fol. E2recto.
Bredero’s lifetime. The most striking, however, is that the publisher asked the famous Amsterdam playwright Samuel Coster to write a lofty dedication to this volume. In this dedication, directed to the Amsterdam burgomasters and magistrates, Coster announces the establishment of a new Amsterdam theater. It was opened a few months later, a wonderful building on a beautiful spot at the Keizersgracht among the huge canal-side houses of rich merchants and entrepreneurs.\(^\text{30}\) The dedication is carefully structured. First Coster discusses the excellence of poetry in Antiquity, and the valuation of it by rulers, emperors, princes and kings. Then he underlines the stunning success of Bredero’s play’s at the Amsterdam Chamber of rhetoric, followed by the wish that the magistrate will appreciate poetry in these ‘happy and fruitful time of poets’.\(^\text{31}\) In other words, the plays by Bredero are worthy of a new theater.

3. After Bredero had suddenly died in August 1618, Vander Plasse must have asked for elegies in the circle of Amsterdam poets and colleagues. He has gathered a huge amount of funeral poems and published almost thirty of them a few months later (fig. 2).\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^{30}\) G.A. Bredero, *De Spelen*. Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1617, fol. (†)3 recto (dedication); see about this new theatre: M.B. Smits-Veldt: ‘De “Nederduytsche Academie” van Samuel Coster: de eerste Nederlandse volksuniversiteit (1617-1622)’, in: *Literatuur*, 1, 1984, p. 58-64.

\(^{31}\) Samuel Coster, Dedication to the burgomasters of Amsterdam, in: Bredero, *De Spelen*.

The Case of Gerbrand Bredero

The elegies were published by Cornelis vander Plasse in the first edition of Bredero’s play Stommen ridder (1619), after this separate titlepage. Here the portrait of Bredero is shown for the first time; above his head his life motto: ‘t kan verkeeren’ (‘All is changeable’). Under the portrait a text in which the date of his birth and death are indicated.

This edition of Elegies (Lijck-dichten) shows clearly the status of Bredero as a local celebrity at that very moment. Such a publication was unprecedented, and it demonstrates how popular the poet was among his fellow citizens. They all strongly and intensely experienced the loss. The elegies were written by different poets, including famous Dutch authors like Samuel Coster, Petrus Scriverius and Joost van den Vondel. It marks Bredero’s decease as a moment at which Amsterdam authors sing the praises of their popular and much-loved former colleague.

The poems predominantly breathe the usual funeral topics of praise, grief and consolation. But the very first of all these poems, a lengthy ‘Epitaph, or elegy on the death of the significant poet G.A. Bredero’ (‘Epitaphium. Oft Graf-dicht Op ’t overlyden vanden sinrijcken Poeet G.A. Brederood’), tells its readers how Bredero died:

Figure 2 – Titlepage of the Elegies (Lijck-dichten) for the death of Gerbrand Bredero. The elegies were published by Cornelis vander Plasse in the first edition of Bredero’s play Stommen ridder (1619), after this separate titlepage. Here the portrait of Bredero is shown for the first time; above his head his life motto: ‘t kan verkeeren’ (‘All is changeable’). Under the portrait a text in which the date of his birth and death are indicated.
We are told that Atropos has cut the thread of Bredero’s life,
And the inanimate trunk has crashed to earth.
The bitter Death, who doesn’t want to spare anybody,
Has hit him as well, with regard to veins, nerves and muscles.\textsuperscript{33}

It seems to have been a sudden death. Bredero has dropped down death on the spot. The remark gives us an indication of the cause of death, probably heart failure.\textsuperscript{34} It is not unlikely that this epitaph was recited at the occasion of the funeral ceremony.

Both, the separate edition of funeral poems and the posthumous portrait of Bredero on its title page, are notable phenomena in this period.\textsuperscript{35} The portrait, an engraving by Hessel Gerritsz., is also included in subsequent editions of Bredero, like that of the cheap small-format (9.5 x 7 cm) songbook of 1621. It repeatedly shows the poet in a laurel wreath and his personal motto ‘All is changeable’ (‘t kan verkeren). A few years later, in the expensive edition of Bredero’s songbook (1622) the portrait of Bredero has been flanked by a few of these elegies, written by the most famous of them: Joost van den Vondel, Petrus Scriverius, and Samuel Coster (fig. 3). The book is characterized by balanced pages, different fonts, ornate and decorative letters, and many book illustrations (engravings) by Pieter Serwouters and Jan van de Velde (after David Vinckboons), especially made for this edition.

\textsuperscript{33} Lijck-dichten, fol. A1recto: ‘Men zeyt dat Atrop heeft Breed’roo zijn draat ghekort, / En de zieloose romp ter aarden is ghestort./ De felle Doodt, die doch niemanden niet wil vieren, / Deez’ heeft hem oock ghetreft, voor ad’ren, ze’en en spieren’. See also Stuiveling, Memoriaal, p. 176-178. The author of this ‘Epitaphium’ is unknown, as he shields himself behind a motto (‘Roemt u leven allen aan’). Probably, he was a member of the Amsterdam Chamber of rhetoric. See Jeroen Jansen, ‘Het raadsel van Bredero’s dood’, \textit{VakTaal}, 31, 2018, 3, p. 10-13.

\textsuperscript{34} Other scholars have concluded, on the basis of different textual evidence, that it might have been suicide. Fons Gommers, ‘De romantische Bredero, fabuleren of interpreteren’, in \textit{VakTaal}, 24, 2011, 4, p. 15; Van Stipriaan, \textit{De hartenjager}, p. 128.

\textsuperscript{35} According to Jan Te Winkel, ‘Den Nederduytschen Helicon van 1610’, \textit{Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde}, 18, 1899, p. 255, in the preceding period only two literary writers, Matthijs de Castelein and Karel van Mander, were honoured with one or more elegies.
4. After the death of Bredero, the role and value of paratextual material became still more important. Like other publishers, Vander Plasse used them as a personalized promotional marketing program. Apart from the front matter: title page, cover, frontispiece, dedicatory letters, etc., especially the prefaces point out the commercial, artistic, and informative value of the publication. The publisher recognizes his duty to manage Bredero’s literary inheritance, establishing the completion and publication of yet unpublished and incomplete work and of Bredero’s personal archive (1618-1638), and a lot of reprints.

The publisher knew that performances of Bredero’s farces were extremely successful and he must have expected a favorable reception of the publication. The same goes for 200 songs in the Large Song Book.
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(1622), which he gathered, so he says, ‘with unbelievable great efforts’.36

5. Bredero’s large popularity among Amsterdam citizens will have been a reason for Vander Plasse to secure his publishing rights. The first edition of Bredero’s songbook (1616), for example, was so popular that the author himself didn’t get a copy of it. Some of Vander Plasse’s Bredero-editions were reprinted by rival publishers.37 In April 1622 Vander Plasse obtained a patent ‘to print, publish and sell the works by Bredero (plays, poems, emblems and other poetry) in the United Provinces of the Netherlands during six years’.38 Finally, he made an effort to further disseminate Bredero’s name as an Amsterdam author of high quality, talent and originality. He included laudatory remarks and recommendations in prefaces, during more than 20 years, in this way securing the memory of Bredero for a complete new generation readers.39 In almost every edition in which Vander Plasse addresses his readers in an introduction, we hear the same story. He praises Bredero’s work for its quality and for bringing learning and pleasure to its readers, then he lashes out at other publishers about the quality of their editions, underlining the importance of the edition at issue, and finally he emphasizes the trouble and expensae of collecting the material: wherever he could find something written by Bredero, it had to be published however small it was.40

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Bredero as a public individual

Authorship in the 17th century diverges from modern authorship. Still there seem to be enough indications to describe the image that Vander Plasse has created of Bredero as a public individual, in the way Gaston Franssen has discussed modern authorship in his article about ‘Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship’ (2010).\textsuperscript{41} The relationship between Bredero and Vander Plasse shows how literary writing has been regarded as a form of commercial production, in which the literary work was promoted by the publisher, adapted to the needs of the market.\textsuperscript{42} Vander Plasse proved not only to have a great flair for regularly bombarding his readers with advertising announcements (about published or to be published books), but he also had a talent for recognizing various publics, i.e. readers with different financial strength. Thus, he brought out the cheap small-format songbook next to a luxury edition.\textsuperscript{43} He published personal letters and the portrait time and again, blurring the boundaries between Bredero’s personal identity and his fictional persona in his songs and drama.\textsuperscript{44} The portrait of Bredero in the song book shows his face, while the letters and orations Vander Plasse published in Bredero’s collected works give a personal picture of the author, in which his personal identity and his fictional persona overlap.\textsuperscript{45} As a consequence, the poetry was interpreted as a testimony about his real live for centuries.\textsuperscript{46}

In one of his prefaces, Bredero admits that he had only knowledge of ‘just a little school-kid French’, but of no Latin.\textsuperscript{47} By characterizing the spe-

\textsuperscript{42} Idem, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{44} Franssen, ‘Literary celebrity’, p. 94: ‘the discourse on literary authorship consists of anti-economic logic, scepticism about the figure of the individual author, and the pursuit of innovation. Components of the discourse on celebrity, on the other hand, include the logic of profitability, the foregrounding of personal and private issues, and the necessity of repetition.’
\textsuperscript{45} Idem, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{46} See Van Stipriaan, \textit{De hartenjager}, p. 144-166.
\textsuperscript{47} Bredero, \textit{Proza}, p. 200.
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cial talent of Bredero as something given by nature, Vander Plasse changes a possible weakness into strength, diverting the reader’s attention from *ars* to *natura*, from art and scholarship to talent, which causes the image to deviate from a high early modern conception of authorship and the requirement of art and literary giftedness both. The same idea we come across in a laudatory sonnet by Joachim Scheepmaker, in 1619: ‘There are many ways to become famous (immortal),’ he argues, ‘but Bredero has achieved it by what he has got from nature, by the nature of his poetry’.48

Conclusion

According to Dubois, reputation structures the cultural marketplace by differentiating the two ideal type moments, recognition and renown.49 As we have seen, the relationship between the Amsterdam publisher and bookseller Cornelis vander Plasse and Gerbrand Bredero offered both of them, the recognition of an extraordinary literary talent at a young age, renown as a consequence of thirty years promotion. The publisher supported the literary career of his friend in different ways. Not only did he publish yet unknown work, letters and orations by Bredero, but through laudatory and funeral poems he increased the latter’s literary reputation by honourable mentions and citations, in the introduction of posthumous editions and reissues of Bredero’s oeuvre. Vander Plasse was an intermediary in almost all publications. Therefore, he is involved in almost all we know about Gerbrand Bredero nowadays. His efforts emphasize the popularity of Bredero, his uniqueness and qualities. Both Bredero’s creative talent and the way in which Vander Plasse made it possible that Bredero reached the hearts and minds of his audience, are a perfect example of the impact on the celebrification of a living and deceased author in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. As subsequent editions of Bredero’s work are based on the editions by Vander Plasse, this Amsterdam publisher has laid the foundation on which Bredero’s celebrity is based, in his own time and up to the present.

49Dubois, ‘Recognition and Renown’, p. 44.