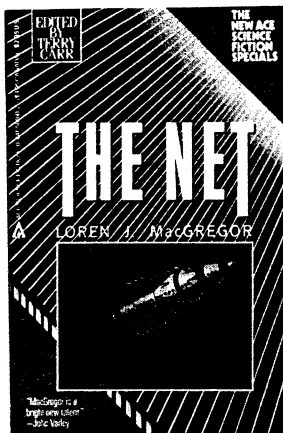


Michael McDowell. *The Elementals*. NY: Avon, 1981.

McDowell again uses his Southern roots as a locale in *The Elementals*. A funeral brings the far-flung members of the McCrays and the Savages, two respected Mobile families, to a summer reunion at the deserted family beachfront property on the Gulf. As the hot summer wears on, the skeletons in the family closet begin literally to haunt the party. This is suspenseful and well-drawn horror fiction, enhanced with significant and positive gay male content.

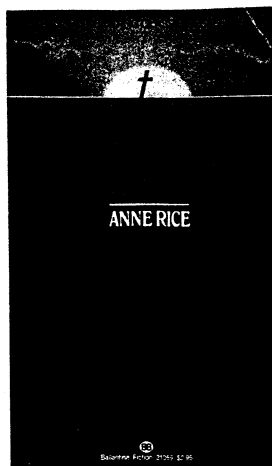


Loren McGregor. *The Net*. NY: Ace, 1987.

*The Net*, by up-and-coming writer Loren McGregor, is a finely wrought visit to a dazzling future where the risks are high and the stakes are great. Wealthy space captain Jason Horiuchi is offered a challenge: to steal a priceless ruby from a well guarded museum. Horiuchi's pride and curiosity are stimulated and she accepts. The ensuing caper is fast and exciting. Horiuchi's future is extremely high tech and body alterations are common. The captain's lesbian lover, for example, has a pelt of fur implanted on her shoulders.

Rice, Anne. *Chronicles of the Vampires: Interview with the Vampire*. NY: Knopf, 1975; *The Vampire Lestat*. NY: Knopf, 1985; *Queen of the Damned*. NY: Knopf, 1988.

It isn't surprising that Anne Rice's vampires leap out of their closet doors.



Her non-vampire fiction, sometimes written under the name A.N. Roquelauire, is rich in eroticism and sensuality. In *Interview with the Vampire*, the earliest volume of Rice's vampire series, the author introduces Louis, a weary vampire living near Castro Street in San Francisco. Louis has been made a vampire by Lestat, a handsome aristocratic Frenchman with whom Louis has fallen in love. So begins a saga that leads from Castro Street, to a southern plantation, 19th century Paris, ancient Egypt, then back to San Francisco. When Akasha, the Queen of the Vampires, is awakened from her eternal slumber—watch out! Great fun to read, *Chronicles of the Vampires* has developed a devoted following.

J.F. Rivkin. *Silverglass*. NY: Ace, 1986; *Web of Wind*. NY: Ace, 1987.

J.F. Rivkin has taken the conventions of the sword and sorcery novels and turned them inside out. Her dashing, lusty mercenary protagonist is a woman. She is as comfortable bedding the serving girl as the stableman. In *Silverglass* she is hired to assassinate the Lady Nystasia, a reputed sorceress, but the Lady proves too beautiful for the mercenary to kill. Instead, the two women flee Nystasia's enemies. *Web of Wind* continues the couple's fast-paced adventures as they search for hidden treasure.

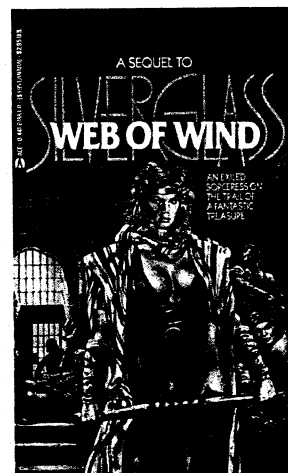
Marty Rubin. *The Boiled Frog Syndrome*. Boston, Alyson, 1987.

Marty Rubin's compelling thriller is more accurately considered a "near future warning" than a science fantasy. Rubin envisions a future United States overrun with religious fascism. The election of right-wing preacher Peter Wicklerly to the presidency has resulted in

mass censorship and concentration camps for lesbians and gay men. Leatherman Stephen Ashcroft escapes the homophobic roundups, but joins the Resistance to free his incarcerated lover.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson. *The Tomoe Gozen Saga*. (Tomoe Gozen. NY: Ace, 1981; *The Golden Naginata*. NY: Ace, 1981; *Thousand Shrine Warrior*. Ace, 1984.)

Jessica Amanda Salmonson, editor of the award-winning *Amazons* anthology, spins a fantasy trilogy revolving around a female Samurai warrior named Tomoe Gozen. Set in an alternative world based on medieval Japan, Tomoe Gozen is forced by fate and duty to lead armies to slaughter demons and sometimes to love beautiful women. The action is swift, but may be a bit bloody for some tastes.



Joan Slonczewski. *A Door into Ocean*. NY: Arbor House, 1986.

Joan Slonczewski, a biology professor, uses her scientific expertise to depict Shora, a planet completely covered by water. The all-female inhabitants of Shora live ecologically balanced lives within enormous floating rafts. When the patriarchal planet of Valedon attacks the watery world, the Shorian women, psychologically and ethically incapable of fighting, must confront the invaders in their own fashion.

## THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN BOY-LOVER: THE POET WILLEM DE MÉRODE

Hans Hafkamp

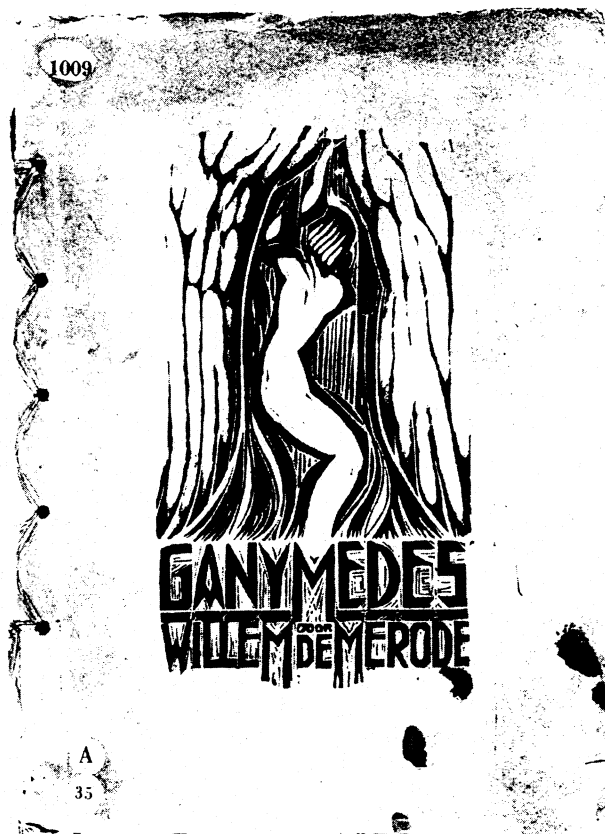
Since the beginning of the gay emancipation movement in the second part of the nineteenth century a whole library has been written in defence of homosexuality. A defence has been made, for example, by pointing out the important contribution to art and literature by 'homosexuals', a considerable section of the library consisting of studies of gay writers and artists, and anthologies of 'gay' literature. Although many of these studies pretend to be international, they are mostly devoted to persons from the country of origin of their authors with token representation of writers from other countries. This means that you hardly ever find Dutch persons mentioned. The only Dutchmen included in Edward Carpenter's 1902 collection *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship* are William of Orange (who was also king of England) and his servant Bentinck.<sup>1</sup> Seventy-five years later A. L. Rowse included in his *Homosexuals in History* only one Dutchman: Erasmus of Rotterdam (who wrote in Latin).<sup>2</sup> Stephen Coote didn't include any Dutch author in his *Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* (1983).<sup>3</sup> It seems, however, that there are changes in the air. David Galloway and Christian Sabisch included two Dutch authors in their *Calamus: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-century Literature: an International Anthology* (1982): Maarten 't Hart and Willem de Mérode.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Reid will present for the first time in translation an overview of the last 100 years of Dutch gay poetry in his forthcoming anthology *The Eternal Flame*.<sup>5</sup>

In anticipation of an article on paedophile aspects of Dutch gay literature which I shall publish in a future issue of this journal, I would like to

sketch here a portrait of Willem de Mérode, author of many boy-love poems. There are some problems when you narrow your subject to paedophile instead of gay literature. The most important is of course how to define "paedophile". I have decided to use this criterion: one partner must be an adult, and one of the partners must be a minor according to legal definitions.

From 1811 the Netherlands didn't have special legislation about same-sex relations. This changed, however, in 1911. A last minute intervention by the Roman Catholic Minister of Justice resulted in the inclusion of Paragraph 248 section 2 in the Penal Code, which made sexual contacts between an adult and a minor of the same sex between 16 and 21 punishable by up to four years imprisonment. (Sexual contacts with children under the age of 16 were illegal for homosexuals as well as heterosexuals under Paragraph 247 of the Penal Code.) From 1911 to 1939 1354 males were prosecuted under this article.<sup>6</sup> One of the 59 defendants of 1924 was W. E. Keuning, better known under his pseudonym Willem de Mérode.<sup>7</sup>

Willem Eduard Keuning was born 2 September 1887, the sixth child of the teacher Jan Keuning (1850-1926)<sup>8</sup> and his wife Elisabeth Wormser (1850-1929). At the moment of Willem's birth his parents lived in Spijk, a rural village in the north of the province of Groningen. Young Willem wasn't very healthy and he had to stay home for long periods. This made him a rather lonely child, who read much. In 1902, at age fifteen, he became acquainted with the poetry of Willem Kloos (1859-1938), one of the leaders of the new literary movement grouped around the magazine *De*



Cover of De Mérode's *Ganymedes*; woodcut by Johan Dijkstra

*Nieuwe Gids*, which was founded in 1885. This literature was at that time only accepted by a small number of connoisseurs; for most people many of their poems were incomprehensible and their prose indecent.<sup>9</sup>

In a letter to Kloos of 20 May 1933, De Mérode described his influence: "At the age of 15 I read for the first time a sonnet of yours... quoted in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, and that started me writing poems. I'll never forget it. At that moment I began to cut out and copy everything I saw of yours."

When he became acquainted with Kloos's poetry De Mérode couldn't have been aware of the

agonies Kloos had gone through in the 1880's and 1890's because of his homosexual feelings and which he had expressed in some of the finest lyric poems of Dutch nineteenth-century literature. In 1879 Kloos had written in German a cycle of nine poems titled *Knabenklagen*.<sup>10</sup> One of these poems was dedicated to August Graf von Platen-Hallermünde, the homosexual German poet. Kloos had discovered in Platen's work many of his own feelings and longings. Around 1909 De Mérode would also recognize in von Platen his own feelings. From Platen's *Tagebücher* he copied: "More and more I longed for a friend; I mean a profound

friend, whom I could love with my whole heart, and who loved me also. O lovely Friendship, how great you must be, when you're true and completely based on the sympathy of two souls." That this passage on Friendship appealed so much to De Mérode was probably based on the fact that he had just met a boy named Reind Kuitert, four years his junior, who attracted him very much and who would become a lifelong friend.

Kuitert wasn't homosexual himself. In later years he confessed that he hadn't realized either the nature of De Mérode's feelings, or that he probably had been the poet's first great love. To him their friendship was mostly literary. De Mérode wrote many poems these years and he showed most of them to Kuitert. Although he wrote in his poems about his feelings towards Kuitert, he did this guardedly and it is not surprising that Kuitert did not realise that most of these poems were addressed to him, or even to a male. De Mérode used the second person very often so he could hide the fact that most of his poems were about people of his own sex.

After the completion of his training in 1910 Kuitert moved to Amsterdam to start work as a teacher. This was the beginning of an extensive correspondence. De Mérode, lonely and isolated, wrote at least once a week, and he was very annoyed when Kuitert did not do the same. In 1906 he had been appointed teacher in Oude Pekela, a small town in the north of the Netherlands. He didn't like this job very much and on 1 May 1907, he moved to Uithuizermeeden, a small village very near his place of birth. Most of the 2000 inhabitants of this village were farmers and workmen and he did not find the intellectual friendships he needed. In a letter of 2 October 1910, he wrote to Kuitert: "You know that I don't really mix with anyone here and I don't have many acquaintances here either. But I prefer *one good friend* above a dozen acquaintances. And you have always been a good reliable friend to me." Kuitert was receiving and keeping all the poems De Mérode wrote and we can now trace how many there were. For example, he sent Kuitert 167 poems in 1911, the year his first poem was published.

The March issue of the magazine *Ons Tijdschrift*

contained two of his poems, pseudonymously signed 'K'. He was very secretive about his writing; he did not discuss it with his parents or his brothers (with the exception of Pieter, who had also written some poetry<sup>11</sup>). On one of his walks with Kuitert (who visited him frequently) he saw in a shop-window a picture-postcard of the famous French dancer Cléo de Mérode. He liked the name very much and, aware of the important role the De Mérode family played in Belgian history, he decided to use this name. There was some discussion about using the French form, Guillaume, for his first name, but in the end he kept this Dutch. He might have also had in mind another meaning of 'mérode', that is, 'misery' or 'poverty', also used to describe a monk. He did not mention this meaning to Kuitert, but much later—after his trials—he told a colleague about it. "When I'd asked him once why exactly he had chosen the somewhat odd pen-name De Mérode, he started to laugh. 'Did you ever hear about the poor mérode-monks?' he said. 'I'm a king (=Keuning) who abdicated and became a poor monk (=mérode).'"

It is quite probable that he let his homosexual feelings (and the 'misery' they brought him) take part in his choice of a pseudonym. In 1917 when he published a collection of mystical prosepoems, *Aanroepingen* (Invocations), he used the name Joost van Keppel. Certainly he chose this name because of a certain Arnold Joost van Keppel who was supposed to have been more than just a friend to William III of Orange.<sup>12</sup> In fact De Mérode used pseudonyms for every literary genre he practised. Besides the two already mentioned he wrote stories in the Groningen dialect under the name Jan Bos and children's books as Henri Hooglandt.

As a teacher De Mérode was rather popular with his pupils. In the morning they would accompany him on his way to school and on his birthday they sent him 'a rain of picture-postcards'. Much later one of his pupils remembered that "at Uithuizermeeden the children were very fond of him. For his way of teaching, but especially for his story-telling. When the hour of stories came, we were still as mice."

Although he treated all his pupils well, he favoured the boys. He came early to school to pre-

pare his lessons, and it was always boys who accompanied him inside. In his manuscripts he dedicated many poems to these boys.

In his poetry he also started to portray boys. His second collection of poetry, *De overgave* (The Surrender, 1919), for example, included a fragment from a long portrait of Narcissus, two poems about angels (portrayed as young boys), one about Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*<sup>13</sup>, three so called 'portraits of boys' and two poems about page boys, the second of which, as translated by Reid for *The Eternal Flame*, ends:

This is the hour! Let courage shine!  
 Giving and doing be your drives!  
 Feel in your blood the great design,  
 And do your utmost while he strives.  
 How pure boy's loyalty, how fine!  
 But men play havoc with their lives.

Although *De overgave* even contains a poem called "August von Platen", for many readers the true inspiration for these poems was not clear. The ambivalence sometimes caused trouble. In a letter of 12 April 1919, De Mérode wrote: "A girl, for whom I don't feel anything, imagines that she's the one I've written about and now asks me in a letter to marry. We know each other only very superficially. I find all of this far from pleasant. I did not provoke any of it." Maybe this would not have happened if De Mérode had included some of his more explicit poems. In another poem about von Platen one finds for example lines such as:

You remained, infatuated, for love inflamed,  
 A love most pure, though people cast blame.

But he withheld this poem and the poem published about von Platen is much more covert. In his love-poems he still hid the gender by using the second person. Apart from this it is difficult to judge from our contemporary point of view how clear some of the allusions were to readers of the first decades of the century, when homosexuality was a rather unknown phenomenon, especially in the little-educated, rural area where De Mérode was living. From what we know happened to him in 1924 it is clear what he means when he writes

about "the unblessed trinket of my lust" and "my violated virtue" in his first book *Gestalten en stemmingen* (Portraits and Impressions, 1915). His original readers, mainly rather rigid Christians, could have interpreted these lines as referring to the sinfulness inherent in everyone.

In the course of time De Mérode felt especially attracted to two boys, Jaap Woltjer and Ekko Ubbens. Ekko became his favourite and he wrote many poems about him. In a letter of 25 February 1920, there is this: "Yes, Jaap is a nice, sweet boy. Ever busy and lively. I often call him 'wild crow' because he comes rushing in at me and disappears just as fast. His friend, who also comes here often (his name is Ekko, but Jaap and I say Okke, reversing his name), is much calmer. He is large, and what one calls a beautiful boy. Jaap is very plain. But both are lively and good of heart. We are a real three-some." And on 8 July 1921, he wrote: "The best thing in my life is Okke's friendship. So far it has been very enriching for me."

Curiously enough his biographer Werkman does not report when De Mérode made the acquaintance of these boys and he also does not mention their years of birth. It would seem he became friendly with them around 1915 when they were nine years of age. Already in 1916 he had dedicated a poem to Okke which was set to music by Okke's father, and in De Mérode's children's book *Jaap's portret* (1917) the boys were the originals for the leading characters. In 1922, at the age of 16, both boys went to study at the agricultural school, much to De Mérode's regret. In a letter of 3 November that year he wrote: "And now there is a lonely winter for me in prospect. I was so accustomed to have them come rushing in every moment that it will be very empty now."

In the schoolyard De Mérode sneaked them chocolate bars so often that sometimes the boys would not eat the bars immediately. Once Okke's mother found some of them hidden in a box. Of course she thought there was something suspect about it, and Okke had to confess that they were presents from his teacher. When the boys visited him at his home he gave them books. But it does not seem likely that he made any overt sexual moves toward them, but had to content himself with pampering them. As he wrote in one of his

poems in *Kwattrijnen* (Quatrains, 1923): "Award to me the fullest taste,/To drink love's draught, not sip in haste." Sometimes they were curious about his attentions, as a letter of 1 December 1927 shows: "Okke is the ideal boy to me; sensitive, sharp intelligence, and a beautiful fellow in appearance. But—'normal'. Of course he knew how much I loved him and often asked me why, though I never told him." De Mérode wrote this letter after he had been to jail, so he did not have to hide the true nature of his feelings anymore.

By now De Mérode had become aware of the homosexual emancipation movement in Germany as well as in the Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> He read the German magazine *Der Eigene*, which was published by Adolf Brand (1874-1945), the founder of the homosexual organisation *Gemeinschaft der Eigene*. It is not surprising that De Mérode felt attracted to this part of the German movement, because the *Gemeinschaft* favoured man-boy love-relations. Or, as one of their leading theorists, Benedict Friedländer (1866-1908), stated in his

*Renaissance des Eros Uranios* (1904): "The positive goal... is the revival of Hellenic chivalry (with the greatest possible avoidance of sexual excess) and its recognition by society. By chivalric love we mean in particular close friendships between youths and even more the bonds between men of unequal ages." They were strongly opposed to the idea of the 'third sex' ('a female mind in a male body', or vice-versa) which was advocated by the other important German emancipation organisation, the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld. De Mérode was, however, familiar with the *Komitee's* *Jahrbücher für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, which was edited by Hirschfeld. In a letter of 17 January 1927, he wrote about the interrogation of his young friends in 1924: "They have asked the lads they interrogated things which the 'Jahrbücher' would consider innocent." De Mérode also read works by John Henry Mackay; he possessed at least his pamphlet *Gehoer. Nur einen Augenblick!*, about which Hubert Kennedy remarked: "In it Mackay tried to bring



Woodcut by Johan Dijkstra, from *Ganymedes*

together all the objections to man/boy love and to give them an answer."<sup>15</sup> De Mérode also kept abreast of Dutch homosexual literature. On 14 February 1924 he wrote a letter to the Dutch poet Jacob Israël de Haan, then living in Palestine, in which he confessed: "I love your boy poems so much. And I am so glad that there are so many in your books."<sup>16</sup>

Apart from mentioning De Mérode's homosexual reading-matter Werkman does not tell us anything about it. He does not name titles and he does not quote any remarks De Mérode made about these books. For example, it would be interesting to know if De Mérode was familiar with the works of Gustav Wyneken, a German pedagogue who stood trial in 1921 because of accusations that he had had sexual relations with his male pupils. He wrote a pamphlet in his own defence called *Eros* (1921) in which he glorified the 'pedagogic eros', but in which he also advocated 'heroic asceticism' in sexual matters. This was exactly the attitude to his own boy-love that De Mérode tried to adopt.<sup>17</sup>

De Mérode also got in touch with the driving force behind the Dutch branch of the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee, J. A. Schorer.<sup>18</sup> It is sad to say, but Schorer destroyed his complete archives with the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940, including the letters of De Mérode. Thus, we know very little about their relation, not even if they actually met. It is known that Schorer took great pleasure in bringing together people who in his view would fit together and he brought De Mérode in contact with Jo Pater (1896-1978). Pater was also a teacher and he lived not far from where De Mérode lived and they met frequently. It was not a sexual relation and Pater later stated that in his opinion De Mérode did not approve of sexually acting out his homosexual feelings.

De Mérode became acquainted with more homosexuals. The binding of his book *De overgave* (1919) had been designed by Jan van der Leeuw, a homosexual artist he kept in touch with for the rest of his life. Van der Leeuw made a series of drawings inspired by the boy-love poems in *Het kostbaar bloed* (The Precious Blood, 1922). These drawings were never published because they made clear what was kept hidden in the poems.

The drawing inspired by the poem 'Venezia', for example, shows a man and a boy in a gondola,<sup>19</sup> while the poem disguises this by using "we".

De Mérode and Van der Leeuw exchanged letters almost every week, but these were destroyed after they were answered. As Van der Leeuw confessed to a mutual friend after De Mérode's death: "I wasn't allowed to preserve any letters—he wanted with all his heart to talk about everything without restriction, from chairs to Henriëtte Roland Holst."

There was another friendship in homosexual circles which would eventually lead to disastrous results. In 1916, when De Mérode was asked by the poet Ernst Groenevelt (1887-1955) to be the editor of *Het Getij*, a new literary journal, he accepted the position. The first issue, in January 1916, opened with a fragment from De Mérode's *Ganymedes*, a lengthy poem of 256 lines. Because of the distance involved De Mérode could only sporadically attend the editorial meetings, which were held in Amsterdam. One year later he was no longer involved with editing the journal but remained a contributor. However, this did not imply that he lost contact with Groenevelt. He visited him several times in Amsterdam, which not only led to new contacts with homosexual poets such as Karel Wasch (1886-1967), but also to an introduction to the homosexual subculture of Amsterdam. Groenevelt was in fact much less inhibited than De Mérode when it came to leading a homosexual life-style.

In 1922 Jaap and Okke left for agricultural school, an event which, as we have mentioned, brought about a great change in De Mérode's life. He did however rather quickly become friends with other boys of about sixteen years of age. One of these boys, Joop (a familiar form of Jacob), seduced him sexually. As De Mérode confessed in a letter of 1 December 1927: "I just couldn't stand it anymore. I was already nervous all the time, it got worse after my illness. And—it went wrong. And perhaps you can imagine it. The worst part of the whole thing for me is that it was so unfair to Okke." He expressed himself even more clearly in a letter of 17 January 1927, to the authoress Wilma: "I never do anything with them. I don't really want it. If only I can pamper a boy a little



Woodcut by Johan Dijkstra, from *Ganymedes*

bit. Jopie (a familiar form of Joop; HH) did want it, and because he had been kind enough to comfort me when Okke left, I said to myself: 'O.K., what's the difference, let it happen.' It was of course incredibly stupid. That I readily admit."

Wilma Vermaat, who published under her first name only, was a very popular writer in Christian circles. In 1923, however, she endangered her popularity by publishing the novel *God's Gevangene* (God's Prisoner), in which a homosexual eventually succeeds in uniting his inclination with his faith, but only with the observance of complete chastity. "Great was the mission and stern the demands. To enter God's sanctuary with his love means to raise his love to its purest heights, to cleanse it of any unholy aspect."<sup>20</sup> This book was hardly received with enthusiasm in Wilma's own literary circles, which were the same as those of De Mérode. In *De Heraut* ("the religious journal of the reformed protestants... Very influential", was De Mérode's comment) the reviewer strongly objected to *God's Gevangene* because "it makes public

that which in my opinion should be discussed as little as possible. There is an evil which ideally one should not hear about, so as not to contaminate the imagination or be allowed a look at the depths of Satan."

Wilma's literary involvement with homosexuality had sensitized her to certain signals in De Mérode's poetry. When *Het Heilig Licht* (The Holy Light) was published in 1922 she contacted the poet. He responded promptly but guardedly. Later, however, she would become one of De Mérode's closest confidantes.

Because of De Mérode's association with Ernst Groenevelt, who led a rather openly homosexual life, his poems about boys were also seen by others in a certain light. The critic Roel Houwink noted about *Het Heilig Licht* "an unbalanced eroticism, the origins of which seem to lie in a completely derailed sense of sexuality."

The police were also not unaware of the fact that Groenevelt might have violated Paragraph 248 section 2. In order to gather evidence they not

only intercepted his letters, but they also took a number of boys who were regularly in Groenevelt's company to the police station for interrogation. One of them was B., a young man interested in literature, who in 1923 at the age of fifteen had made his literary debut in *Het Getij* with a selection of poetry. Groenevelt had also told him a lot about the literary world. This had fatal consequences for De Mérode, who in a letter of 1 December 1927, reported the following: "Ernst Groenevelt knew a boy from Zeist, B. And even though he knew nothing of me he said to the boy: 'De Mérode also seems to like boys.' This B. then became involved with the police and in answer to the question whether he knew any others such as Groenevelt he rashly mentioned me. I myself have never seen this boy. You understand, now there will be the devil to pay."

The Amsterdam police informed the mayor of the town where De Mérode lived of B.'s confession, whereupon the mayor ordered the town policeman to investigate the matter further. Seemingly incriminating details quickly came to light and De Mérode was arrested on the evening of Tuesday, 26 February 1924. The next day he was incarcerated in the House of Detention in Groningen under the accusation of "Vice". All of this naturally resulted in great consternation in his home village of Uithuizermeeden.

Even before De Mérode appeared in court on 17 April judgement had been passed on him on two occasions. Already on the evening after his arrest the school board held an emergency meeting, since "the Mayor had sent for the Chairman and told him that W. E. Keuning, by order of the Public Prosecutor, had been arrested last night on a charge of indecency with boys. The Board considered this a dreadful case..." according to the minutes. Measures were not immediately taken, but when the Board assembled again on 4 March the decision was made to discharge him on 5 March.

On 3 March the church council discussed the problems which had arisen. The minister announced that he would visit De Mérode in prison "where he has been confined because of terrible sins, and tell him to confess his sins openly and with repentance before the Heavenly and the

earthly judge." Two weeks later he gave a report of this visit: "(He) has spoken with (De Mérode) about his sinful life; Keuning had confessed to having struggled for a long time with this sin, but he cannot break away from it. The chairman is of the opinion that the fallen brother is conscious of his guilt and feels contrition for his sin." The church council decided to apply ecclesiastical disciplinary measures in the first degree, which amounted to excluding him from partaking of Communion: "Not because there is doubt regarding his profession (of guilt and contrition), but because of the scandal of sinning against the seventh commandment and seducing young people into committing this sin." The council heard this judgement from the pulpit and De Mérode himself was informed in a letter dated 31 March 1924.

In the meantime preparations for the trial were in full progress. De Mérode's room was searched, probably by his brothers as well as the police, with the result that important material disappeared. On 25 October 1936, De Mérode wrote to Reind Kuitert: "A great deal has disappeared from my archives because of a lack of understanding or a deliberate unwillingness to understand. Thousands of letters, all my diaries and manuscripts." The loss of his diaries is particularly unfortunate because this is probably the only place where De Mérode expressed himself openly.

Investigations were also held and not only of De Mérode. In a letter of 1 December 1927, he expressed his agitation about the investigation: "The police in Groningen are so small-minded that they are letting all sorts of things go on in town while concentrating their efforts on the case of a Christian teacher. But it's not only that—they are questioning all the boys who have been with me over the last 17 years, even those who are married. It became a dreadful scandal. Okke was visited by a local police inspector. Nothing more was discovered there than that one boy."

This last remark is correct only when seen retrospectively. When De Mérode appeared before the District Court in Groningen on 17 April 1924, he was accused of indecent acts "at various times in the years 1922, 1923 and 1924 with the boys Jakob, of legal age... and Jacob... of the same sex, whose status as being under age he knew." Ac-

cording to the summons the illegal activities consisted of "in each case grasping the exposed member of said boys in a lascivious fashion and pulling on it or taking the member in his mouth and sucking on it."

Not all the charges, however, were considered proven. According to the sentence De Mérode had admitted during the hearings "that he had committed said crimes several times in 1923 and 1924 about once a week; and that in his flat he had taken the exposed member of the boy Jacob, whose status as a minor he was aware of, out of his trousers and pulled on it, and that he did this to satisfy his desires; and that said person was a former student of his."

Jakob's testimony (according to the verdict he was born on 21 October 1907) closely agrees with De Mérode's statement. He testified "that several times in the years 1923 and 1924, usually once a week, the accused, in his flat in Uithuizermeeden, took the witness' exposed member out of his trousers and pulled on it."

This was sufficient for the judge to conclude that "by means of the evidence heard it has been legally proven" that De Mérode had violated Paragraph 248 section 2.<sup>21</sup> On closer examination of the evidence it is striking that the judge convicted only for the indecent acts of 1924, even though the accused as well as the witness had also mentioned 1923. Did the judge not want to make the case more difficult than it already was? If indecent acts had been proven before 21 October 1923, then Paragraph 247 would also have been violated, since Jakob would have been under sixteen. De Mérode was sentenced to a prison term of eight months and suspended for three years from his post as a teacher.

It was not only De Mérode's actions that attracted interest during the trial. At a later date he indicated that the public prosecutor had also introduced his poetry into the case. During the trial he read aloud several poems about boys and said: 'that's the way he writes and that's the way he acts.' This is strongly reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's trial where a hostile atmosphere was also created by accusing Wilde of having appeared in the first issue of *The Chameleon*, where John Francis Bloxam's anonymously published story "The

Priest and the Acolyte" had also appeared. Fortunately the prosecutor did not have at hand De Mérode's most explicitly homoerotic work, the long poem *Ganymedes*, in which Zeus is struck by the beauty of the growing boy:

His beauty had reached its fullest bloom.  
One more day and the timidity of youth  
Would grow into the dark daring of the man,  
His taut limbs on fire with yearning.  
But hot yet: a quivering glow  
Now silver, then a tint of gold,  
Then clear and pure, then deep and purple-red,  
When he turned and walked, or danced or lay,  
Matched the rhythmic quiver of his breathing,  
Flowing softly or drawn in quickened gasps,  
When hot desire with painful throb made audible  
His trembling heart's vibration and with its pulse  
His seething blood was swelled to soothing sleep.  
And all the tenderness of awaking youth,  
Shy and fleeting as the morning dew  
Destroyed by the sun in adoration,  
Shone dazzlingly in Zeus's brilliant light.  
The gods hold dear that class of mortal boys;  
Their splendor loves to pair with such dark  
nakedness.  
So Zeus—He saw the sweet secrecy  
With which the boy each day, body and soul,  
Offered sacrifice, as he swept from his clear brow  
The dark overflow of hair, as his eye  
Lingered dreamily on the sky's blue brightness,  
Or (the evening mist veiling his light limbs)  
He, become flesh, desirous, quite alone,  
Walked through the sadness of a shimmering  
field.

(translated by Ross McGregor)

During the first few months of 1924 De Mérode was very involved with this book. On 1 February he signed the contract with De Gulden Ster publishers which contained the clause: "No copies may be sent to the press and the book may not be sold." On 21 January he had already written to an acquaintance: "*Ganymedes* came into being piece by piece from 1914 to 1923. It will be a luxurious edition with woodcuts. It will not be commercially available." The book would appear in an edition of 125 copies; the woodcuts were executed



Woodcut by Johan Dijkstra, from *Ganymedes*

by Johan Dijkstra (1896–1978), a painter whom De Mérode had met around 1922.

On 16 April 1924, the day before the trial, De Mérode wrote to a friend: “Wilma wrote you about *Ganymedes*, didn’t she? It can’t be done the way we thought.” This opinion was also shared by De Mérode’s brother Carel, who wrote to the publisher on 8 May: “May I respectfully urge you to let the matter of the book rest and not to give the book out without consulting me. I know that at this point my brother does not want the production of *Ganymedes* to be sped up. He will also refuse to sign any copies.” Dijkstra also did not think it was opportune to publish the book at that time. He mentioned this in May to Ernst Groenevelt, who was closely associated with the publisher. Dijkstra had “serious reservations... about publishing anything by De Mérode, especially *Ganymedes*, as long as he is in prison. You know just as well as I how at this time such a book would only serve to satisfy the public’s appetite for sensation (especially here!) which I would really dislike. In

any case I don’t want to be involved with it... As soon as he is free again we can tackle the job and it will be ready in no time.”

The publisher, however, wanted to proceed with the book and when he told Dijkstra that it would not be commercially available, he agreed to cooperate. And De Mérode himself agreed to publication, even though his family was against it at that time. The strict prison regulations to which De Mérode was bound were, however, a problem. Although he could not check the proofs, it did prove possible to provide him with the sheets which he had to sign. On 28 June 1924, he signed all of the 125 copies. He had seen neither the final text nor all of the woodcuts. He wrote to a friend that he had only seen two woodcuts and that they were harmless and would probably not cause any further difficulties. From this remark we can conclude that he did not know that the other three woodcuts represented nude figures.

In the end Johan Dijkstra was not terribly pleased with the book. When he made the wood-

cuts he was only concerned with illustrating the text and knew nothing of De Mérode's love for boys. For this reason he did not feel that De Mérode had treated him with complete fairness. When De Mérode visited him after his release from prison he was received rather coolly. Later they hardly had any contact at all with one another.

Since the contract stipulated that no review copies could be distributed, the book received very little attention. Shortly after its publication Ernst Groenevelt (who on 1 August 1924, went to prison himself for violating Paragraph 248 section 2) printed one of the woodcuts, a frontal view of the nude Ganymede.

There was only one review and it was not very positive. According to the reviewer "its beauty... was concealed by an overgrowth of worthless detail." He had much more praise for the woodcuts.

De Mérode had been sentenced to a prison term of eight months. He was, however, not imprisoned immediately because a petition for mercy had been submitted on the grounds of poor health. In any case on 4 June the Minister of Justice requested a medical examination. He received the report nine days later and rejected the petition. A petition to free the poet signed by members of the public was also rejected.

On 24 October 1924, De Mérode was released from prison. Many of his acquaintances as well as some of the boys he had befriended remained faithful to him.

The church council, however, thought that there were still problems which had to be dealt with. Shortly after his release De Mérode was visited by the rector and an elder "to discuss his sins with him." The profession of guilt which De Mérode had signed shortly after his arrest was not considered sufficient. In a letter of 17 January 1927, to Wilma Vermaat De Mérode wrote what the purpose of the church delegation's visit was: "I had to acknowledge to them that a man could not love a boy. And I could not do it. Should I not have been free to love Okke? And because I could not deny it I have become the hardened sinner who wallows in evil."

But this was not the end of the matter. The

church council wanted De Mérode to go to Uithuizermeeden in person to confess his guilt publicly. De Mérode's reaction can be found in the minutes of the church council meeting of 1 December: "in short he did not wish to receive visits from the church council to speak about his sins. He wished to close the matter in writing, he did not wish to profess his guilt personally before the church council since many church members, including his best friends, were willing to forgive him in theory but in practice acted quite differently. For this reason he did not wish to come and even preferred to give up his church membership rather than come."

De Mérode took a rather remarkable position for his time: on the one hand he was willing to confess his guilt as far as the sexual acts were concerned, but on the other hand he refused to deny his love for boys. For the church council, however, this was an incomprehensible distinction. On 16 April 1925, it was announced from the pulpit in Uithuizermeeden—where De Mérode no longer lived after his prison term—that he was no longer a member of the church. This did not mean that De Mérode gave up his faith; religious sentiments also play an important role in the poetry he wrote after his stay in prison.

But the church was not yet through with the poet. On 16 November 1925, he settled in the town of Eerbeek in the province of Gelderland, and it was not long before the rector came to visit. He tried to extract a kind of confession out of the poet which De Mérode refused. After having been sent away he warned people in the vicinity not to allow their boys to visit him. Later the relationship became friendlier and the rector was even given complimentary copies of several of De Mérode's books.

After he moved to Eerbeek De Mérode's life became more settled. He was now a private citizen supported by his brother. He read and wrote a great deal and despite his poor health he travelled and made new young friends. However, he apparently stopped having sexual relations with boys. In any case he warned a few boys he had befriended about the "bad intentions" of his friend Jo Pater, who later fell out with him because of this. At a much later date one of the boys de-

scribed the situation: "Mr. Wieger (=Pater) often received young men in my presence, members of his youth club. Even during these visits I could not imagine that there was anything unusual going on between him and me. It was different when his famous friend came to stay. This friend, an older, semi-invalid man, was a very renowned poet in Christian circles. I immediately realized that he was of the same sort as Mr. Wieger and I also realized that he exercised a certain authority over him. Based on a short argument between them, of which I only caught a few words, and the fact that one of the young men stopped visiting, I concluded that the poet had his way whenever he thought that Mr. Wieger should be put on the right track."

Every year De Mérode published at least one collection of poems, often two or three. He was especially honored in Christian circles as one of their most important poets.<sup>22</sup> In 1936, when he celebrated his 25th anniversary as a poet, he was nominated for royal honors. On 30 August 1936, he received the Oranje-Nassau order of knighthood. It was of course unusual for someone who

only twelve years earlier had been imprisoned for indecency with a young boy to receive a royal decoration, and De Mérode was very pleased. It meant that the blot on his past had been removed.

He was not able to enjoy these honors for long, however. Less than three years later, on 22 May 1939, Willem Eduard Keuning, better known by his pseudonym Willem De Mérode, died at the age of fifty-one.<sup>23</sup>

#### Editor's Note:

Hans Hafkamp is the editor of the following books: *Naar vriendschap zulk een mateloos verlangen*, an anthology of Dutch homosexual poetry from 1880-1980 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1979-80); *Hoeveel vrienden heb ik gevonden*, a collection of new Dutch gay fiction (Amsterdam: De Woelrat, 1987); and together with Maurice van Lieshout, *De Leeslijst*, a bibliography of homosexuality (Amsterdam: De Woelrat, 1986), and Pijlen van naamloze leifde, a collection of biographical essays about pioneers of gay emancipation (Amsterdam: Tabula, 1987). We would like to thank Eric Wulfert for his assistance with the English translation of this article.

#### NOTES

1. Edward Carpenter (ed.), *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1929), p. 145-146.

2. A. L. Rowse, *Homosexuals in History: A Study of Ambivalence in Society, Literature and the Arts* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), p. 6-10.

3. Stephen Coote (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* (London: Allen Lane, 1983).

4. David Galloway and Christian Sabisch (ed.), *Calamus: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-century Literature: An International Anthology* (New York: Morrow, 1982). De Mérode is represented with the first part of his

long poem *Ganymedes* on p. 119-120 and Maarten 't Hart with a part from his novel *Ik had een wapenbroeder* (I had a Brother-in-arms) on p. 420-431. Biographical notes about each are respectively on p. 498-9 and 492.

5. Anthony Reid (ed.), *The Eternal Flame: A World Anthology of Homosexual Verse (2000 B.C.-2000 A.D.)* is scheduled for publication in 1988; Reid also translated the poems. His selection of Dutch poetry is mainly based on *Naar vriendschap zulk een mateloos verlangen. Bloemlezing uit de Nederlandse homo-erotische poëzie 1880-nu*, ed. H. Hafkamp, (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1979). See also Hans Hafkamp, "Homoseksualiteit in de Neder-

landse literatuur", *Spiegel Historisch*, vol. 17, nr. 11, november 1982, p. 584-593, and Ron Mooser (ed.), *Het huis dat vriendschap heet. Mannelijke homoseksualiteit in de twintigste-eeuwse Nederlandse literatuur* (Amsterdam: Manteau, 1985).

6. This number is based on Pieter Koenders, *Homoseksualiteit in bezet Nederland. Verzwegen hoofdstuk* (Amsterdam: SUA/-De Woelrat, 1983), p. 24. The occupation of the Netherlands by the Germans in 1940 was followed by a tightening of the morals laws.

7. Most of the present article is based on the biography *De wereld van Willem de Mérode* (The World of Willem de Mérode)

by Hans Werkman (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1983), a revised edition of the earlier *Het leven van Willem de Mérode* (The Life of Willem de Mérode) (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1971). All quotes are from the revised edition, unless otherwise noted. A problem with this biography is that its author is a member of a rather rigid branch of the Protestant Church which condemns all homosexual acts. He attributes a very negative attitude to De Mérode about his homosexuality. Because De Mérode was rather rigid in his Christianity it is possible that this portrait is correct, but some critics of Werkman believe that he shaped it too much to his beliefs. Poet and critic Boudewijn Büch, for example, wrote in *Vrij Nederland* (21 June 1979): "Thanks to the friendliness of Prof. Mr. Barend de Goede... who as a boy was a friend of De Mérode—I was allowed to read the letters of the poet which he had sent to little Barend... Werkman hardly used these. From this correspondence arises a completely different De Mérode than the pious bungler who is presented to us by the biographer." And later: "The prude, Werkman, keeps hiding and twisting De Mérode." In 1986 Werkman was awarded the Dutch Henriëtte de Beauford Prize for biography. This was protested against in an open letter by a society for the study of gay literature. According to this letter Werkman makes clear in his biography his belief "that ho-

mosexuality is a disease, formed by motherly pamperings, and at any rate a punishment by God... a perverted and effeminate personality structure is the result." Werkman indeed pays a lot of attention to the relation between De Mérode and his mother, but he denies of course the more serious accusations of his critics. To find the truth it would be necessary to do the research all over again (which is impossible, of course) or to have access to a complete edition of De Mérode's letters (which isn't even considered). A very curious fact concerning Werkman's attitude towards homosexuality can be found (or more precisely, not be found) in the bibliography of his book: he lists his own publications about De Mérode, but he doesn't include an article on 'The Trials against Willem de Mérode in 1924/1925', which he published in the historical magazine *Groniek*, nr. 66, January 1980, an issue entirely devoted to homosexuality.

8. The biography of De Mérode's father (and brothers) has also been written by Werkman: *Kroniek van Meester Keuning: Het leven van de vader van Willem de Mérode* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1982).

9. The most important critic of *De Nieuwe Gids*, Lodewijk van Deyssel (1864-1952) published in 1888 his second novel: *De Kleine Republiek* (The Little Republic). This was a fictionalised account of his own stay at the boarding-school of Rolduc, and included a description of a 'special friendship' he had had

there. This theme in the novel became of course a prime target for his critics. They didn't like passages such as the following: "I love him very much, but you'll understand, I wouldn't do any indecency with him...I mean, I would not touch him below, not put my hand in his trousers... you have to stay decent of course...I only want a special friendship with him." Willem [the leading character] spoke quickly, and again he felt angry that he did not know what they meant by indecency. Even if he wanted to commit indecency, he did not know what it meant! But it didn't matter, he would have Scholten, although it would be for kissing only." Kissing is the only thing that happens between the two boys, but for most critics that was more indecency than they could accept. 10. This cycle has recently been reprinted in a separate volume: Willem Kloos, *Knabenklagen* (Boy Laments) (Amsterdam: Sub Signo Libelli, 1981). The reprint was edited by Harry G. M. Prick and published in an edition of 75 copies.

11. Pieter Keuning (1882-1962) became a publisher and in the 1930's he issued some of his brother's books, although their personal relation was bad after De Mérode's trial of 1924. The nature of their business relationship became clear after the discovery in 1986 of thirteen letters of De Mérode to Pieter and his company, dating from 20 November 1936, to 11 April 1938. More details about these letters are to be found in 'Keun-

ing en Keuning' by Hans Werkman, published in *Juffrouw Ida*, vol. 12, nr. 3, December 1986, p. 15-19.

12. In connection with the dissertation of H. E. Heimans, *Het karakter van Willem III Koning-Stadhouder* the pioneer of Dutch gay emancipation Jhr. Mr. J. A. Schorer wrote in a letter of 5 June 1933, to Jaap van Leeuwen: "[Heimans] cites a lot of material which certainly pleads for Willem's homosexuality, especially his fixation on the young Keppel, for whom he would do literally anything."

13. The German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld wrote in his *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (Berlin: Louis Marcus Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1914): "there are the same works of art that we come across time and again in the houses of homosexuals... as far as paintings are concerned: ...the 'Blue Boy' of Gainsborough..." (p. 66).

14. A good introduction to the situation in Germany can be found in *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* by James D. Steakley (New York: Arno Press, 1975). A history of the Dutch gay movement has been written by Rob Tielman, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland. Geschiedenis van een emancipatiebeweging* (Meppel/Amsterdam: Boom, 1982).

15. Hubert Kennedy, *Anarchist of Love: The Secret Life of John Henry Mackay* (New York: Mackay Society, 1983), p. 8. Werkman mentions only *Gehoor*. Mackay wrote it *Gehoor*, not *Gehör*, and because 'hoer'

means 'hooker' in Dutch, it led to a remark by De Mérode's landlady about his strange reading-matter.

16. Jacob Israël de Haan (1881-1924) published two homosexual novels: *Pijpelijntjes* (1904) and *Pathologieën. De ondergangen van Johan van Vere de Wiith* (1908). The first one brought him much trouble, among other things the loss of his job as a teacher. After these two novels De Haan mainly wrote poetry. In 1919 he immigrated to Palestine, from which he contributed articles to a Dutch newspaper. He also wrote a considerable amount of autobiographical poetry in which he sang the beauty of Arab boys. A selection of these quatrains will be included in Anthony Reid's *The Eternal Flame*. De Haan was murdered in Jerusalem on 30 June 1924. In 1932 the German author Arnold Zweig published a novel based on De Haan's life and death, *De Vriendt kehrt heim*, which was translated into English the following year as *De Vriendt Goes Home* (New York: Viking, 1933).

17. De Mérode is the only important twentieth century Dutch Protestant poet. Immediately after his death he was claimed by the Protestant literary establishment as their own poet. In 1980, when the (Protestant) Free University of Amsterdam devoted an exhibition to De Mérode's library it did not include one example of his homosexual reading matter. See the catalogue in C. Rijnsdorp and others, *Op reis met Willem de Mérode* (Delft: W. D.

Meinema, 1980), p. 51-60.

18. Regarding Schorer see Hans van Weel and Paul Snijders, 'Levenslang strijden voor rechtsgelijkheid. Jhr. mr. dr. J. A. Schorer (1866-1957)' in *Pijlen van naamloze liefde. Pioniers van de homo-emancipatie*, edited by Hans Hafkamp and Maurice van Lieshout (Amsterdam: Tabula, 1987).

19. This drawing has been reproduced in *Willem de Mérode* ('s-Gravenhage: Nederlands Letterkundig Museum en Documentatiecentrum, 1973) *Schrijversprentenboek* 18, p. 60.

20. Wilma, *God's gebangene* (Amsterdam: Uitg. mij. Holland, 1923), p. 133.

21. Hans Werkman did not use the verdict in his biography. He only wrote: "Not everything Keuning had been accused of was considered proven. The accusations concerned lascivious actions with two boys in the years 1922-1924. The court judged them proven with regard to one boy in the first two months of 1924. From the rest he was acquitted for lack of evidence." The verdict, including the descriptions of the 'lascivious actions', was only very recently made public by Boudevijn Büch in his article 'Bibliopolis 1' in *Maatstaf*, vol. 35, nr. 2, February 1987, p. 66-76. Büch also writes that "the things not considered proven were admitted by De Mérode in later years in (informal) writings". He does not elaborate on this, but he promises "more about De Mérode" in a following issue, so it seems he can make his earlier accusations of Werkman

"hiding and twisting De Mérode" (see note 7) true.

22. A bibliography of De Mérode's work is included in Werkman's biography. Most of his books contain poems about boys, but the most important in this respect is of course *Ganymedes*. De Mérode's collected poems were published in three volumes in 1952. A new edition of his collected poems, edited by Hans Werkman, will be published on the occasion of the poet's hundredth anniversary, 2 September 1987, in two volumes. Besides the 1130 poems published in his books, this edi-

tion will also contain 410 poems which were so far unpublished or only published in magazines.

23. That De Mérode's royal decoration was indeed a very special honor is shown by the fact that only six years earlier, in 1930, the Dutch poet P. C. Boutens on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday had been nominated for a knighthood. However, he did not receive it, mainly because of rumours concerning his homosexuality. An official of the Department of Arts and Science wrote in this respect to the Minister: "The mayor [of Boutens' home city,

The Hague] informed me that Boutens is indeed known as a homosexual. He will inform the chief commissioner if this is only a strong suspicion or if he has got into trouble with the police." And although the police did not have anything against Boutens, he was not knighted, and later correspondence shows that his homosexuality had influenced this decision very much. Further information about this affair is given in Evert Paul Velkamp, 'Een decoratie voor Boutens', *Optima*, vol. 4, nr. 4, winter 1986, p. 457-465.