

The Library of Gerard Nicholas Heerkens (1726–1801), Dutch physician, traveller, and Latin poet

GIOVANNI TARANTINO*
University of Melbourne

The very extensive library collection of Gerard Nicholas Heerkens (1726–1801), the cosmopolitan Dutch physician and Latin poet,¹ was sold at auction between 23 and 28 September and between 14 and 21 October 1805 at the University of Groningen. The auction was organized by the antiquarian and book dealer Jan Hendrik Bolt (active 1779–1845),² who prepared the catalogue.³ If not the same person, Bolt was possibly a relative of a homonymous member of the radical De Jonge group (named after the proprietor of a cafe in Groningen, where a small group of republicans actively hostile towards King Willem II used to meet in the 1840s). The latter Bolt published the openly subversive and ultraradical democratic journal *De Tolke der Vrijheid* ('The Mouthpiece of Freedom'), run by the maverick republican Eillert Meeter (c.1818–62).

The auction catalogue, published in Groningen in 1805, lists 4,964 titles (547 in folio; 1,061 in quarto; 2,827 in octavo; 529 in duodecimo). Each entry generally includes the author (only the initial of the first name is given), an abbreviated title, the place and year of the edition, the number of volumes (where appropriate), and an acronym that appears to relate to descriptive elements customarily used in Dutch for the format, state of preservation, and binding of works⁴, information clearly useful for fixing the starting price in the auction.

The library catalogue of Heerkens, a Catholic physician who wrote poetry in Latin, contains a choice range of books on a wide variety of subjects: commentaries on the Bible; Catholic and Protestant theology; historical narratives of minority beliefs, practices, and persecution (including Mosheim's *Historia Michaelis Serveti*, nos.

* *Research Fellow in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions at the University of Melbourne*

¹ See Yasmin A. Haskell, *Prescribing Ovid: The Latin Works and Networks of the Enlightened Dr Heerkens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). The present essay will also be made accessible in the website *Mapping the Latin Enlightenment*, a research project funded by the Australian Research Council (2009-2011) and led by Yasmin Haskell, Cassamarca Foundation Professor of Latin Humanism at University of Western Australia. I am grateful to Professor Haskell for encouraging me to explore and appraise Heerkens' library.

² See B. P. M. Dongelmans, *Van Alkmaar tot Zwijndrecht. Alfabet van boekverkopers, drukkers en uitgevers in Noord-Nederland 1801-1850* (Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU, 1988).

³ *Catalogus Bibliothecae, quam reliquit Gerardus Nicolaus Heerkens* (Groningae, Apud Joannem Henricum Bolt, Auctionarium et Bibliopolam, 1805).

⁴ e.g. fr.b.: Franse band, 'French binding'; ing.: ingenaaid, 'sewn'; p.b./pap.b.: papierenband, 'paper binding'; Rusl. b.: rusleren band, 'Russia leather binding'; h.b.: either 'halve band', half (leather, vellum) binding, or 'hoornen band', vellum binding. I am indebted to Erik Geleijns (Collections, Koninklijke Bibliotheek) for providing me with essential information about the abbreviations commonly used in early modern Dutch auction catalogues.

978–79); treatises on medicine, anatomy, surgery, and dentistry; the works of ancient as well as modern poets; treatises on every field of mathematics; natural philosophy; astronomy; magic; natural, literary, and ecclesiastical histories; antiquities; chronology; philology; and books on grammar and lexicography. There is a particularly significant number of Latin classics. Travel literature and early comparative studies of different ancient and contemporary cultures and religions are also well represented. Asia (mostly, the Turks) receives a good deal of attention. There are also many national histories, ‘political treasures’, lives of eminent men, literary correspondences, book catalogues, and illustrious journals of literary criticism (nos. 2877–79, 4355). Other titles concern law, geography, fiction, navigation, the art of war, numismatics, architecture, painting, ornithology, agronomy, botany, gardening, and the culinary arts. The majority of titles are in Latin and French, though there are also many works in Dutch and Italian (the *cinquecentine* include Dante Alighieri’s *Carmina*: no. 459). There are very few titles in English (one is Tindal’s *Christianity as old as the Creation*: no. 527), which Heerkens perhaps never mastered.

Besides a copy of the *Index librorum prohibitorum Clementis X. Pontificis Maximi* (no. 2894), less obvious items reveal a considerable interest on Heerken’s part in exponents of ‘rational theology’ and in anti-curial, unitarian, libertine, sceptical and deistic texts: Jean Barbeyrac (no. 952); Adriaan Beverland (no. 1593); Charles Blount (no. 2947); Jean de La Bruyere (no. 3207); Tommaso Campanella (nos. 110, 534, 756); Gerolamo Cardano (nos. 65, 2073–5, 4167, 4723); Herbert of Cherbury (nos. 1008, 4217); Anthony Collins (no. 2093); Johann Crell (no. 556); Nicolas Fréret (1550); Pietro Giannone (842, 2746); the Baron d’Holbach (1551); Ludvig Holberg (3780); La Mothe le Vayer (nos. 460, 1007); Isaac La Peyrère (4147); Conyers Middleton (2760); Pietro Pomponazzi (no. 4219); Paolo Sarpi (nos. 992, 1721); Fausto Sozzini (no. 529); Matthew Tindal (no. 527); John Toland (nos. 1530, 3738); Giulio Cesare Vanini (nos. 2010, 3010, 3756); Samuel Werenfels (no. 1649); William Wollaston (no. 528).

Also worthy of mention are the treatises on the mortality or immortality of the soul (nos. 2063–66, 4219); Alciato’s *Emblemata* (no. 3508); Jacques Basnage’s *Traité de la conscience* and *L’histoire et la religion des Juifs* (nos. 1621, 1293); two editions of the *Commentaire philosophique* by Pierre Bayle (nos. 1536, 4128), his celebrated *Lettre sur la comète*, his life of Spinoza, *Le Dictionnaire historique et critique* and *Les lettres* (nos. 1914, 3001, 499–500, 3845); Bossuet’s *Histoire universelle* (2241); Burigny’s *Vie d’Erasmus*; Condorcet’s *Vie de Voltaire* (no. 3031); La Créquinière’s *Conformité des coutumes des Indiens orientaux, avec celles des Juifs* (no. 3121);⁵ Estienne’s *Apologie pour Herodote* (no.

⁵ La Créquinière’s work has recently received a substantial amount of scholarly attention also for its being included in Bernard and Picart’s *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, effectively described as ‘the book that changed Europe’. See for example Sunjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Monsieur Picart and the Gentiles of India’, in *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion*, ed. by Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), pp. 197–214 and Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Provincializing the World: Europeans, Indians, Jews (1704)’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 14, 2011, 135–50. It should be noticed that the recurrent attribution to Toland of the English version of la Créquinière’s work does not seem to be well-grounded. Quite significantly

2247); Johann Christoph Gottsched's life of Christian Wolff (no. 3020); the *Malleus maleficarum* (nos. 4844–45); Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs* (2597–98); Reeland's *De religione mohammedica* (no. 1656); Selden's *De Diis Syris* (no. 3072); a copy of the quarto edition of Spinoza's *TTP* fictitiously declaring 'Hamburg' as its place of publication (no. 759).

Other titles: Cyrano de Bergerac (no. 4955); Bodin (nos. 1009, 1720, 2001); Giovanni Alfonso Borelli (no. 743); George Buchanan (nos. 216, 2426, 4488); Buffon (no. 700); Gisbert Cuper (no. 1130); Grotius (nos. 260, 577, 1700, 1710); Erasmus (nos. 10, 467, 479–80, 1513, 1524, 3752, 3767–68, 3866, 3962, 4075, 4123, 4362, 4586); Helvetius (no. 2059); Hobbes (nos. 1118, 4165); Daniel Huet (no. 523–26, 1473, 1533); Hume (no. 2421); Thomas à Kempis (no. 4150); Leibniz (nos. 2062, 3823); Linnaeus (no. 1966); Locke (2100–01); Machiavelli (nos. 580–81, 1713, 1916, 4161, 4760); Montesquieu (nos. 1704–05, 1745, 3697); Montaigne (nos. 758, 2076); Muratori (nos. 2803, 3026); Pascal (no. 4145); De Pauw (nos. 2290–91); Pufendorf (nos. 578, 1702, 2259, 4259–60); Rorarius (no. 2067); Rousseau (nos. 1707, 3855, 3895); Sextus Empiricus (nos. 1279, 3243); Richard Simon (nos. 950, 2762, 4370); Steele's *Spectator* (no. 4809); Thomasius (no. 569); Voltaire (nos. 2408, 3652, 4086).

It is worth noting that the library collection of Heerkens (like Erasmus, a native speaker of a limited-size European language) testifies to the continuing vitality of Latin, still in the late eighteenth century, as the transnational language of the erudite (*lingua eruditorum vernacula*),⁶ of science, diplomacy, law and theology, despite the generally hostile attitude of reformers and of many Enlightenment figures (though, it must be said, this was marked by a certain ambivalence: in fact, the demand for greater accessibility to knowledge and a more widespread critical awareness, satisfied by the vernacular languages, was accompanied by an enduring need for international visibility and intelligibility that only Latin was still able to offer in Western Europe and in the intellectual enclaves and literary circles of its colonies).

The somehow puzzling importance of early modern translations from the vernacular languages of Europe to Latin has also been convincingly demonstrated: one needs only recall the extraordinary efforts made by the German scholar Johann Georg Graevius, professor at Utrecht, and his former student Pieter Burmann the Elder, professor at Leiden, to translate dozens of antiquarian studies (*Thesaurus antiquitatum Italiae*) from Italian into Latin (and to publish them in Leiden in the

Anthony Collins, Toland's friend and the collector of one of the largest private libraries of his time, only mentioned the French version in his catalogue. See Cambridge, King's College Library, Keynes Mss 217, 'Bibliotheca Collinsiana, p. 539. On the disputed attribution, see F. H. Heinemann, 'Prolegomena to a Toland Bibliography', *Notes and Queries* (25 September 1943), pp. 182–86; 184; Giancarlo Carabelli, *Tolandiana: Materiali bibliografici per lo studio dell'opera e della fortuna di John Toland (1670-1722)* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1975), pp. 114–15; Pierre Lurbe's review of John Toland and De La Créquinière, *The Agreement of the Customs of the East-Indians with Those of the Jews* (1705) together with Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Literature* (1726), with an introduction by Joel Reed (The Augustan Reprints, nos. 271–76: New York: AMS Press, 1999), *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 14 (1999), pp. 133–35.

⁶ See Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 53.

1720s).⁷ Significantly, the Catholic censors displayed an ambivalent stance towards the circulation in Latin of works considered to be heterodox. Sometimes they were more relaxed towards Latin texts destined for a transnational but nonetheless circumscribed (indeed, a cultural minority) readership, and inaccessible to the illiterate majority (i.e. ignorant of Latin); on other occasions, they were more severe, including in particular the French or Latin versions of the works of the English deists in the List of Prohibited Books, on the grounds that these would be more accessible to a wider readership. An emblematic case in point is that *Christianity not Mysterious* was not on the List, and, of Toland's works, only the *Adeisidaemon* was included.⁸ Quite revealingly, Heerkens owned a copy (no. 1530) of Holbach's French translation of Toland's *Nazarenus* (1718) published in 1777 and promptly included among the banned book in France.⁹

⁷ See Id., 'Translations into Latin in Early Modern Europe', in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter Burke and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 65–80.

⁸ See Giovanni Tarantino, 'Deismo', in *Dizionario Storico dell'Inquisizione*, ed. by Adriano Prosperi, with the assistance of Vincenio Lavenia and John Tedeschi, (Pisa: Edizioni Scuola Normale, 2010) 4 vols, I, pp. 452-454.

⁹ See the Appendix to Robert Dawson, *Confiscations at Customs: Banned Books and the French Booktrade during the Last Years of the Ancien régime* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2006).