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Roemer Visscher, ed. *Brabbeling (1614): Een Bloemlezing*
Brabbeling (1614): Een Bloemlezing by Roemer Visscher
Review by: Peter Boot

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Brabbeling (1614): Een Bloemlezing. Roemer Visscher.
Ed. Anneke Fleurkens. Hilversum: Verloren, 2013. 318 pp. €29.

The Amsterdam merchant Roemer Visscher (1547–1620) was a transitional figure in Dutch literary history. He read classical and modern poets and followed their example, and was highly regarded among the humanists at the newly established university of Leiden. He was a prominent member of the Amsterdam Chamber of Rhetoric, De Eglantier. While he used modern forms, such as the sonnet, his poems were metrically traditional. He is probably best known for his emblem book *Sinnepoppen* (1614). Though most of his work should probably be dated between 1570 and 1590, the first (anonymous and partial) printing was in 1599. The first complete and signed publication appeared in 1614, exactly 400 years ago, with Willem Jansz, and was titled *Brabbeling* (Poppycock). The title accords well with the witty and clever nature of Visscher's work, abounding in double entendre and paradox. Still, Visscher saw his work as serving the cause of truth, exposing hypocrisy and greed (Karel Porteman and Mieke Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen* [2008], 146).

The book reviewed here is the first substantial publication of Roemer Visscher's poetry since Van der Laan's two-volume collection (1918–23), and therefore long overdue. The book has a long history. Fleurkens received the assignment for the creation of a complete edition of *Brabbeling* in 1996–97. She worked on the edition first at what is now the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands, and later as an

independent scholar. Originally, the edition was planned to appear in book form. With the changing technological and publishing environment, a complete printed edition was no longer feasible, and it was decided to publish the full scholarly edition online; the present book is a selection from that complete edition. The electronic edition (http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/viss004brab02_01/) is published on the DBNL platform, the most important online source for anyone with an interest in Dutch culture or literature, known mostly for its digitization of earlier printed volumes. While in terms of functionality and design the electronic edition is basic, it is rich in content: an introduction, the text, very rich annotations, a variant apparatus, texts of Visscher's sources where his poems are based on foreign originals, and a number of appendixes. The most important thing that is missing is a complete facsimile. The selection contains a downsized introduction and a substantial choice from Visscher's poems, including explanatory annotation and some additional word-level annotations, but excluding the variants or source texts.

In her preface, Fleurkens mentions that, while the electronic edition is mostly meant for research purposes, the selection should facilitate browsing by "a wider audience" (8). It is debatable, however, how wide the audience for this book will be. Visscher's book contains 577 poems, of which Fleurkens publishes 176, about 30 percent. The result is a work of more than 300 pages where three layers of annotation (poem-level introduction, line-level comments, and notes to the comments), together usually three or four times the size of the poem, put the mostly short poems somewhat out of sight. To reach beyond the specialized audience, a much smaller selection would have been appropriate. And as witticisms tend to get lost in dense layers of annotation, maybe the annotations could have been replaced by a translation into modern Dutch.

The book as we have it, however, made other, very defensible, choices. It gives a sizable and representative selection from Visscher's work and Fleurkens left no stone unturned in seeking to clarify the poems and their relation to the cultural, political, and biographical context. She pays especially close attention to the way Visscher handles his sources (Martialis, Ronsard, and others). One unfortunate omission is perhaps the poem "T'lof van Rethorica" (Praise of rhetoric), because of its relevance to Visscher's views on poetry. Still, the book provides an essential introduction to Visscher's poetry and should be required reading for any student of Dutch Renaissance literature. The book is also, it should be noted, beautifully designed.

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