

Unity in Diversity

Nineteenth-Century Editions of a Seventeenth-Century Comedy

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On the 25th of September 1617, in Amsterdam, the comedy *Warenar* had its premiere. *Warenar* was a reworking of a classical comedy by Plautus, the *Aulularia*, which dated from about 200 B.C. Although *Warenar* was published anonymously, in the nineteenth century it was fairly generally assumed to have been written by Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1581-1647), one of the great authors of the Dutch Renaissance.¹ Hooft did not translate the original play literally, but made far-reaching changes to adapt it to his own time and place: the Amsterdam of the early seventeenth century. In his play, two narrative strands interweave: the story of the miser Warnar, whose miserly behaviour reaps great unhappiness for himself and others, and that of his daughter Claertje, who is pregnant by an unknown man. But... this is a comedy after all, and all's well that ends well. The man who raped Claertje in a fit of drunkenness is filled with remorse and asks her to marry him. And grandfather Warnar recognizes that his wealth has brought him nothing but misery, and gives all his money to the happy couple.

Hooft's topical adaptation of Plautus's play was a great success. His play was performed countless times, and was reprinted at least eighteen times between 1617 and 1729. But that was the end of its popularity. The general explanation for this is that the allusions to existing individuals and circumstances no longer meant anything to audiences, and that the tastes of the theatre-going public had changed.

However, having lain dormant for over a hundred years, *Warenar* suddenly came to the fore again. In the nineteenth century, no less than eight editions of the play were published, as well as a number of fundamental reflections in response to those editions. This is an exceptionally

¹ For the authorship of *Warenar*, see: P.C. Hooft, S. Coster, *Warenar*, ed. Jeroen Jansen (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2004), 94-100.

high number of editions compared with the philological interest in other famous seventeenth-century burlesques such as *Trijntje Cornelis* (1653), by Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), or *Moortje* (1615-1617), by Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero (1585-1618). In the nineteenth century, too, this was seen as remarkable. This is evident, for example, from the irritated comment by a critic when, in 1896, the eighth in this series of editions of *Warenar* came out:

Yet another edition of [...] *Warenar*! Were not the existing ones enough for us, almost all of them complete with an introduction and commentary? Was it really necessary [...] to publish an *eighth* edition? One might perhaps think that there was nothing new to say about this play, and that after all these annotated editions it should be as clear as day.²

How should one explain this flood of editions?

The *Warenar* revival began in 1843, sparked off by the linguist Matthias de Vries (1820-1892) and the historian and man of letters Reinier Cornelis Bakhuizen van den Brink (1810-1865).³ That was the year in which De Vries published an influential, and much talked-about, edition of Hooft's comedy, and Bakhuizen published an equally influential and talked-about review of this edition.⁴ In their wake, almost all the great Dutch philologists of the nineteenth century would concern themselves with this comedy. In their editions and reflections they do not only address themselves to the text; they also respond, either implicitly or explicitly, to the work of their predecessors. In this way they stake out their positions in the great philological debate of their day. One could almost talk about *Warenar* editions as the territorial marker of the nineteenth-century philologist. And this makes the philology around *Warenar* a good case study for examining the themes which played a role in this debate.

² F.A. Stoett, "Een en ander over den *Warenar* van P.C. Hooft en S. Coster, uitgegeven door P. Leendertz, Jr." *Taal en letteren* 7 (1897), 175-198; here p. 175.

³ Willem Bilderdijk's edition of Hooft's *Gedichten* (Leiden: L. Herdingh en zoon, 1823, 3 vols) also includes *Warenar*. However, this edition did not play a role in the discussions of the day.

⁴ P.C. Hooft, *Warenar*, ed. M. de Vries (Leiden: H.W. Hazenberg, 1843). R.C. Bakhuizen van den Brink, "Hooft's *Warenar*, uitgegeven door De Vries," R.C. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Studien en schetsen over vaderlandsche geschiedenis en letteren* III ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1876), 307-339.