

## Jacob Israel de Haan: sexology, poetry, politics

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### Intro

The Dutch poet, novelist, journalist and legal scholar Jacob Israel de Haan (1881-1924) is regrettably little known beyond circles of specialists of Dutch literature or of early-twentieth century Palestinian history. Nevertheless his life is so interesting that it is discussed in several books and novels, Dutch, German and English.<sup>1</sup> There have been one major biography and many articles on him in Dutch<sup>2</sup>, while he has been the subject of several books in Hebrew that I was regrettably not able to read.<sup>3</sup> By far most of his own work is in Dutch: two novels, two volumes of collected poems, two books on legal issues, many smaller pieces for literary and scholarly journals and hundreds of newspaper articles (see [www.dbnl.org](http://www.dbnl.org) under his name for most of his works). Very little of all these publications has been translated into any other language. I want to introduce his life and work as an example of the relation between literature and sexology, of a personal and social struggle between modernism and premodern sentiments. Let me admit that I use both terms in this article in a rather loose way also because I deal with such different modernist and modernizing projects.

De Haan was a prolific writer with a broad interest. He was born in the small village of Smilde in the Northern part of the Netherlands where his father was a gazzan (precentor in synagogue). The family had many children, and next to de Haan, the most known one was his sister Carry van Bruggen who became an important novelist, philosopher and feminist of her own (she is best known under her husband's family name). Most of his youth, the family lived in Zaandam, an industrial town to the north of Amsterdam where his father had become a gazzan. De Haan followed his educational studies in Haarlem, also close to Amsterdam, where he received his qualification as a primary school teacher. After he finished

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<sup>1</sup> Carry van Bruggen, *De verlatene. Een roman uit het Joodse leven* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1910) and *Het huisje aan de sloot* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1921); Arnold Zweig, *De Vriendt kehrt heim* (Berlin: Kippenheuer, 1932); Dutch translation with special afterword by the author, *De Vriendt keert weer* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1933); English translation *De Vriendt Goes Home*, New York: Viking, 1933; Jonathan Wilson, *A Palestine Affair* (New York: Pantheon, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The only general but dated and partisan (zionist) biography is Jaap Meijer, *De zoon van een gazzan. Het leven van Jacob Israël de Haan (1881-1924)* (Amsterdam: Atheneum-Polak & Van Gennep, 1965); a recent overview of the different aspects offers Gert Hekma, Marita Mathijssen and Emile Schrijver (eds), *Een vriend komt thuis. Jacob Israël de Haan*, special issue of *Uitgelezen boeken* 13:2 (sept. 2009); Rob Delvigne & Leo Ross, *Brieven van en aan Jacob Israël de Haan 1899-1908* (Amsterdam: dissertation Free University, 1994) offers the letters from his early period and their *Een uitmuntend letterkundig kunstenaar. Opstellen over Jacob Israël de Haan* (Assen: Servo, 2002) engages with his literary and gay life. His legal papers with a learned introduction are to be found in G.C.J.J. van den Bergh (ed), *De taal zegt meer dan zij verantwoord kan. Een keuze uit de verspreide rechtskundig-signifische geschriften van Mr. Jacob Israël de Haan* (Nijmegen: Ars Aequi Libri, 1994). Ludy Giebels is specialist on the final period. She edited *Jacob Israël de Haan, correspondent in Palestina 1919-1924* (Amsterdam: De Engelbewaarder, 1981) and wrote "Jacob Israël de Haan in Palestina", in: *Studia Rosenthaliana* 14:1 (1980) 44-78; 15:1 (1981) 111-142 en 15:2 (1981) 188-218.

<sup>3</sup> See f.e. Moshe Yehuda Gleicher, *From Amsterdam to Jerusalem*, Brooklyn NY: Empire Press, 1978.

these studies, he took temporary jobs and continued with legal studies. Just before 1900, he began to write and to connect with literary people. His first important relations would be with the writer and doctor Frederik van Eeden and with Arnold Aletrino, a medical doctor specializing in what was then called criminal anthropology, and at the same time a writer of somber novels on the lives of nurses.

The literary and gay careers of de Haan are the subject of my paper and will be discussed at length after this introduction. He joined the modernist literary movement and started to write openly gay novels in the first decade of the twentieth century. Rejecting the orthodoxy of his parents, he became an atheist. He joined the socialist party, wrote for its daily newspaper but was thrown out of both because of his first gay novel. Strong feelings of social justice made him protest against the prison conditions in czarist Russia. After 1910 he returned to Jewish religion, continued with poetry both Jewish and pederast, joined the Zionist movement and became the Jewish poet of The Netherlands. He wrote his dissertation on the terminology of legal responsibility.<sup>4</sup> His final years, he lived in Palestine where he emigrated in 1919. In Jerusalem he met Arab boys and orthodox Jews, and he changed position from Zionism to take the cause of the orthodox-Jewish organization Aguda. As an accomplished writer, he started to send articles to Dutch and English newspapers in which he opposed Zionist claims and began to lobby against their political monopoly in the European press and Palestinian politics. His criticism in English newspapers brought the debate to the colonial capital of Palestine, which the Zionists utterly disliked, and they planned to silence de Haan. In the end, he was murdered in June 1924 by men of the Haganah (the predecessor of the Israeli army), becoming the first Jewish victim of Zionism.

### *Homo/sexual context*

For de Haan, Aletrino was most important as his main guide on becoming homosexual.<sup>5</sup> Aletrino had in 1897 published his first article on “uranism”, a lengthy review of Marc-André Raffalovich’s *Uranisme et unisexualité* (1896). In 1901, his contribution to the 5<sup>th</sup> international conference of criminal anthropology, held in Amsterdam, stirred a scandal. First, because the other conference participants among whom Cesare Lombroso opposed his humane stance on homosexuals, pitying, not condemning them. Second, because Dutch politicians of a Christian background including the prime minister made slurs about the University of Amsterdam as promoting the sins of Sodom. It was at this “neutral” (that is liberal) University that Aletrino was an unpaid guest teacher (privaat-docent) in criminal anthropology, while the Calvinist Protestants were busy establishing their own “Free University” in Amsterdam (free means in this connection free of liberalism) as part of the pillarization of the Netherlands. In this struggle between liberals and Calvinists issues of sexual citizenship had become pre-eminent. Being able to accuse the liberals of promoting homosexuality was a

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<sup>4</sup> *Rechtskundige significa en hare toepassing op de begrippen: “aansprakelijk, verantwoordelijk, toerekeningsvatbaar”* (Amsterdam: Versluys, 1916).

<sup>5</sup> See the biography, Kees Josse, *Arnold Aletrino. Pessimist met perspectief* (Amsterdam: Thomas Rap, 1986)

powerful weapon against people who in most cases would not dare themselves to speak the unspeakable. Indeed, no one would come to Aletrino's defense.

In those hectic times, the two men met and Aletrino informed de Haan on theories on homosexuality, and probably as well on homosexual life. Aletrino had married a second time after his first wife had committed suicide. He may himself have been a bisexual man who moreover had sadistic inclinations. Several authors remarked on his effeminacy, also according to himself a sure sign of homosexual preferences. De Haan would describe him as sadist and bisexual in his novel *Pijpelijntjes* (Pipelines, 1904, the name referring to the Amsterdam neighborhood De Pijp where de Haan actually lived). This novel is a thinly veiled description of the lives of two men who look very much like Aletrino and de Haan and bear their nicknames Sam and Joop. The novel was dedicated to Aletrino and we might see the novel as a sign of gratefulness of de Haan for Aletrino who showed him the way into gay life. This homosexual life that I will discuss later is abundantly depicted in the novel.

The period around 1900 was an interesting time of insecurity or confusion as well as of openness. I already indicated the political turmoil between Christians and liberals, and there were major fights between socialists and trade unions at one side and capitalists and liberals at the other side. The Christian parties would in general side in class conflicts with the liberals, but because of their important workers' constituencies, they often took middle ground between socialists and liberals, and created their own catholic and protestant trade unions. De Haan was member of the socialist party and wrote for its paper *Het Volk* (The People), and Aletrino was close to it. The fight about sexual morality that focused on the regulation of prostitution had ended in 1890 with an armistice. The bordellos would in general be forbidden, its medical regulation that promised but did not offer protection against venereal diseases abandoned but prostitutes continued to be allowed to do their work more hidden. The end of the debate on prostitution paved the way for other sexual debates, i.e. on contraception and abortion, marriage and divorce, pornography, child abuse and sexual variation.

The 1890's witnessed the rise of erotic and explicit sexual literature. The first translated works of sexology came on the market, most often in abridged form, not intended for the serious medical reader, but for the layman who was hungry for sexual knowledge. Some of these books were on homosexuality. Especially the case history, a recent diagnostic tool, will have taken the curious readers by surprise with all their homosexual and masochist details. Some of these books were translations from medical handbooks such as Ambroise Tardieu's *Étude médico-légale* of 1857 or Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* of 1886, but also essays of Edward Carpenter and Magnus Hirschfeld became available for a Dutch public. In the new century, Aletrino wrote two booklets on uranism and his colleague the physician Lucien von Römer some major socio-medical and historical studies. Both doctors supported the Dutch homosexual rights' movement that began in 1912, the first foreign chapter of Hirschfeld's Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee (WHK). Both Aletrino and von Römer visited Hirschfeld in Berlin in the early years of the twentieth century. Von Römer closely cooperated with him, became an "Obmann" of the WHK and contributed to its *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See for this period of Dutch gay history, Gert Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit, een medische reputatie* (Amsterdam: SUA, 1987)

Sexology and a homosexual rights movement came into existence, and had ambiguous results. The doctors sometimes defended homosexuals, as Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis did and Krafft-Ebing to a lesser extent, but other doctors found therapies for aberrant desires or suggested prevention. Sigmund Freud came with his oedipal model that promoted coital, reproductive sex inside marriage.<sup>7</sup> All over Europe new and most often more repressive sex laws were enacted. At the other hand, literature witnessed a homosexual Renaissance all over Europe: with Stefan George and Thomas Mann in Germany, Oscar Wilde and the uranian poets in England, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville in the USA, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, André Gide and Marcel Proust in France, Michael Kuzmin in Russia, Fernando Pessoa in Portugal, the Greek Constantine Cavafy in Egypt and Louis Couperus and de Haan in the Netherlands. And they were only the best known among a much larger crowd of novelists, poets and literateurs.<sup>8</sup>

1889 saw the publication of a novel on “les amitiés particulières” in the famous catholic boarding school Rolduc, *De kleine republiek* (The little republic) by Lodewijk van Deyszel (pseudonym of K.J.L. Alberdingk Thijm). The book followed closely his own experiences. Van Deyszel was a member of the innovative literary circle of the “Eighties” (Tachtigers) who took the examples of French decadence, naturalism and estheticism. In 1891, the decadent novel *Noodlot* (Destiny) appeared, written by the gay man who would become the Dutch leading novelist of the turn of the century, Louis Couperus. Both novels had clear-cut homosexual content, van Deyszel’s novel of the relation between two pupils who would be sent away from the school because of their affair, Couperus’ novel described how a man destroyed a heterosexual love affair out of jealousy and panicking that the male partner might turn out straight. The two leading young poets of the group of the “Eighties” Willem Kloos and Albert Verwey wrote poems to each other, the younger Verwey naming his cycle of poetry for Kloos “For the love that is named friendship” (voor de liefde die vriendschap heet). Kloos was an unhappy homosexual whose various male love affairs produced his best poetry, while these difficult relations led him to alcoholism and psychic problems. When their German poet-friend Stefan George visited Holland, he was surprised to encounter in Verwey a husband and father of many children - Verwey had become a respectable pater familias and had left the wild days of his youth. Kloos had done the same. Tamed by a probably asexual marriage, he wrote no interesting poetry afterwards any longer. De Haan would twenty years later identify with these men, and write love letters to another leading member of this group, writer and physician Frederik van Eeden who became famous for his novels, his communal living arrangements “Walden” and his pacifism. De Haan’s explicit love letters missed their target who was a straight male.

At the same time, medical doctors started to write in their journals the first articles on homosexuality, and started to use this specific word from 1891 on. In 1897, Aletrino would be the first serious doctor to take the cause of homosexuals. The first major Dutch “case history” was an apologetic letter of an anonymous

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<sup>7</sup> See for overviews Hekma (1987), Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature. Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Volkmar Sigusch, *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See f.e. Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930* (London: Athlone, 1977) and Claude J. Summers (ed), *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

doctor, a self-declared “uranian”, written in 1870 and finally published in 1883. He had written this letter as an answer to a negative review of the work of Ulrichs in a medical journal. This letter appeared as a case history, apparently uncensored. So the first Dutch defense of uranism had a rather benign reception and caused no stir. The first more thoughtful review of a German medical book on homosexuality was written in 1892 by a doctor who cooperated with Van Eeden. The relations between the medical people - at that time still a rather progressive group working at their professionalization - and the new literary movement of the 1880s were strong, and included discussions of homosexuality. One of those discussions was a tribunal they staged in 1891 to decide whether Saar de Swart, a sculptress and a maecenas of artists, was a lesbian after a painter had fallen hopelessly in love with her, and was rejected. The tribunal decided she was not a lesbian although she never lived with male, and always with female companions during her long life (see for an overview of this Dutch gay history, Hekma 1987 & 2004).

### *Pijpelijntjes*

The uncertainty on the direction of society till about 1911, the year of new sex laws, made such new initiatives possible. De Haan knew thanks to Aletrino about the pioneering developments in science and literature. This enabled him to write the openly gay novel *Pijpelijntjes* (1904) without hiding behind a pseudonym.<sup>9</sup> The title is best translated as “scenes from the Pijp”, but *pijpen* is as well a word for oral sex. The book discusses gay topics in the context of a lower-class neighborhood. The two main characters have rooms with a lady whose husband is in prison. Several chapters describe events of this household and vicinity in amusing detail. The gay stories run parallel to the neighborhood stories and rarely interconnect. The gay life of the roommates remains hidden for their neighbors to which the class difference of the students living among working-class people strongly contributes. Of course, this naturalistic novel was not explicit on gay relations and sex as modern ones sometimes are, but the book offers an interesting array of loves and sexual encounters. In the first place, there is the slightly sadomasochist relation between Sam and Joop (as said the nicknames of Aletrino and de Haan in real life). Sam is generally depicted as a cruel person with black humor who likes to abuse Joop verbally and physically - and Joop seems to like this (23).<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless Joop remains the demanding partner. No sex between the partners is described in the novel. Sam is also cruel in daily life, for example when he is requested to kill a chicken for the house-lady. At the end of the novel, Sam has a girl friend that he intends to marry. At that point, he says that, in the past, he thought he was like Joop, that he didn't need “happiness with girls” (*meisjesgeluk*), but now he knows better (207). Next to Sam, Joop has

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<sup>9</sup> In the period until the Second World War, about a dozen openly gay novels were published in Dutch. Half of them popularized sexology in the form of a novel, introducing doctors and their medical theories of homosexuality. One novel had a preface by Magnus Hirschfeld. The other novels were less explicit on explaining same-sex desires or did not have any medical theorizing. The most interesting novelist was Jef Last, best known as one of Gide's companions to the Soviet Union. Several other poets used homosexual themes in their poetry, most important among them P.C. Boutens and Willem de Mérode. The first book with homosexual life stories was published in 1939 by Benno Stokvis, *De homosexueelen*. See for overviews Gert Hekma, “De benoeming van het onnoembare. 'Homoseksueel' proza in het eerste kwart van de twintigste eeuw in Nederland”, in: F.W. Kuyper & B.C. Sliggers (eds.) *Liber amicorum A.G. van der Steur* (Haarlem: Schuyt, 1988), pp. 35-60 and Maurice van Lieshout, “Dutch and Flemish Literature”, in Summers (1995), pp. 211-216.

<sup>10</sup> References to pages in Jacob Israël de Haan, *Pijpelijntjes* ('s Gravenhage: Kruseman, 1974)

several affairs on the side with working class youth, the youngest being 13 years of age. One of the boys is picked up on Dam Square, the center of Amsterdam, and taken home by Joop who serves him gin before they have sex. No sex is depicted but the disrobing is, until the moment Joop joins the rent boy on his bed (123-8). A boy who is released from prison stays his first night of freedom in Joop's bed, and they confess each other their love - but this affirmation ends before the new day starts as the boy has disappeared without leaving a trace (141-6). A carpenter boy is kept by Joop who pays his rent and salary so the lad's family will not be aware of his new job as a male prostitute (211-2). These sexual situations are not sensationalized and don't offer a climax, but are inserted in a very casual way. There is one scene that gets easily lost in reading when de Haan describes how Joop receives a lady in his bachelor's room who asks for charity. She is with her son whom Joop puts on his lap. What he subsequently describes looks most like a masturbation scene in which Joop gets off thanks to the boy in his lap. After this scene he is annoyed by his visitors and shows them the door, without contributing to the charity (180-2). The novel ends with the death of Sam after he passed his medical exams. Soon after, his girl friend leaves for a house on the Spuistraat - probably meaning she has become a prostitute, earlier hints being that she had already been one, and not having gotten "es", most probably referring to syphilis (195-6). So it is homosexual Joop who stays behind all alone, and not heterosexual Sam while the common ending of gay novels of those days had the gay man dying, by suicide or incident.

The book is unashamed in its representation of what is called "being different from the others" (anders dan de anderen), "strange boy's feeling" (vreemde jongensvoelen), while its opposite gets named "happiness with girls" (meisjesgeluk), the two last words being inventions of de Haan himself (as a sensitivist writer he invented many new expressions). The words homosexual, uranian and sadist never crop up which is remarkable seen that the book is dedicated to Aletrino, the man who was one of the first to use these words in Dutch. In his correspondence on the book, de Haan for sure uses the word homosexuality so he must have intentionally left it out of the novel. All the words he uses are rather descriptive, so when Sam wants to marry his girl friend, Joop suggests he himself should marry his Koos, or another boy (210). The first sex survey in the Netherlands, done by Lucien von Römer, and published the same year 1904, is even mentioned in the novel. Joop reminds the questionnaire and says "we also did one, but totally wrong" and remembers this as great fun. Again, no sexological terms are used (125). It is also interesting that de Haan portrays Aletrino as a bisexual who wants to get married, at the end of his studies when he believes he feels no need any longer for male love or cruelty against humans (biting, slapping). So Aletrino's theory of the born homosexual is inverted in this description of himself as he changes sexual preference after his medical studies. At some point, Sam suggests Joop to stop going after the boys and even begins to control Joop's whereabouts. But when Joop does it once more with a guy, Sam simply admits "But perhaps you are right ... that you do what you think is good .. why shouldn't you do it?" (dots in the original, 203). The book completely refrains from psychological speculation so it looks like a simple decision for the sake of social convenience to leave or not to leave the love of men for that of women. Most remarkable is this small sentence that Joop should do whatever he thinks is fine to do. In real life, Aletrino defended the position that the born homosexual should refrain from homosex, and the doctor's role was to help him living a chaste

life, following the lines set out by Raffalovich. Joop is clearly homosexual and also effeminate, but nowhere his preference is explained or defended that he was born this way. De Haan apparently has no problem in creating a homosexual person in his novel, and neither a character with homosexual and sadist inclinations, but he does not follow the sexological tenets about sexual nature.

This first novel created a small uproar in Dutch society. Aletrino, who always suggested he was a heterosexual, became very angry and upset. He bought all the available copies of the book together with the betrothed of de Haan, Johanna van Maarsseveen, a female doctor whom he married in 1907. The work suggested by the resemblance of Aletrino to the novel's Sam and by the dedication that he was a sadistic bisexual who approved of the book. De Haan who did the children's page of the socialist daily *Het Volk*, lost his work and resigned as member of the socialist party before the party threw him out (the paper had immediately changed addressing him from comrade to mister). He lost as well the teaching job he occupied for the City of Amsterdam. Complaining to his friends of the movement of the Eighties (Van Deysse, Van Eeden, Verwey) delivered no results. A second rewritten version of the novel was published later the same year, without the dedication to Aletrino while the two main figures got other names and characteristics. The book was however no less homosexual. De Haan wrote a pamphlet attacking the socialist party for its stance in his case, but nobody came to his defense. The pioneer was offended, but a fine novelist and a firespitting star was born.

### *Nervous Stories and Pathologies*

De Haan was a stubborn character who did not stop writing gay novels and stories after this first setback. He not only rewrote *Pijpelijntjes*, he worked at a sequel, at a series of stories much later published as *Nerveuze Vertellingen* (Nervous stories) and at a completely new novel *Pathologieën* (1908). One of the nervous stories includes a radical confrontation of Christ and Satan. The story has no title, but later editors called it "The rape of Christ" while they headed it as "On the experiences of Hélénius Marie Golesco" after the name of the main character (1908).<sup>11</sup> This name is a travesty of that of the female French-Rumanian novelist Héléne de Golesco while Hélénius is unknown as a male name in Dutch, but widespread in its female version Heleen or Helena. The story goes as follows. Golesco is requested to come to Paris by Satan who asks him to confront an unknown person who appears to be Christ. First, Golesco is taken by the mediocre humane love of the Savior, but soon enough he feels starker and gets angry about his message of compassion and forgiveness. It ends with violence and rape, Golesco lying on top of Christ. The words that de Haan uses are rather vague, but they all point to brutality and sexuality, and it ends with the tiredness of Golesco from this "wilde, woedende, gemeenschap" (Id: 65; wild, ferocious communion; gemeenschap meaning both coital sex and community, as for example in "de gemeenschap van de gelovigen": the community of believers). The problem of abusing Christ is that he likes it, not only in public on a cross but even in the privacy of this room (Id: 65). After the rape, Golesco falls asleep and when he awakens, Satan has come to his bedside and kisses him, calling him a "lieveling" (beloved; Id: 66). The final scene before the confrontation of Golesco

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<sup>11</sup> References to pages in Jacob Israël de Haan, *Nerveuze vertellingen*. Introduced by Rob Delvigne & Leo Ross (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1983).

and Christ was Golesco meeting a cute elevator boy that excited him. The various end scenes have again homoerotic, and transgender undertones, both the rape of Christ and the kiss of Satan. This kiss is the apotheosis of a small lecture the Devil delivers why people follow Christ, which is out of mass hysteria, as we would say now. Satan gives the advice to despise “fatherlands” and Christian humanitarianism for the sake of beauty and autonomy (Id: 66). In this text, homosex clearly belongs to the side of pleasure, beauty, cruelty, satanism, self-determination and anti-humanitarianism while Christ stands for ugliness, mediocrity, mass hysteria and compassion for the weak. This dichotomy of God and Devil, of chaste obedience and sexual autonomy will haunt de Haan till the end of his life.

The second novel *Pathologieën* (1908) has a title that makes one think of medicine and sexual science and indeed there is a series references to it. The main story of the book is indicated in the subtitle “The downfalls of Johan van Vere de With” (the plural also sounds queer in Dutch). The name suggests a noble or patrician background. Johan is a young man and secondary school student who lives closely together with father, detached from the people of the small town of Culemborg where their beautiful house stands. The father is a man of independent means who pursues the then new study of criminal anthropology as does Aletrino; the mother, a physician and much older than the father, committed suicide when Johan was still a toddler. The son discovers he has sexual feelings for men, and as well for his father. This acknowledgement ends the relation of trust and love between them as the son refuses to tell about his erotic feelings that very much confuse him. Reading certain books in his father’s library has furthered the realization of his inclinations, but unlike in most other gay and lesbian novels of the period, their titles and authors are not named (19).<sup>12</sup> Again, the words homosexual and uranian don’t pop up. After the son has told the father what his secret is, his father decides that they have to separate. The son moves to Harlem where he will finish his high school. He lives as a boarder in a room with old friends of his parents, a couple of which the husband is blind. They rent out another room to a decadent artist René Richell.

Richell, who is about ten years older than Johan, is starting a successful career in painting. He says the work of Aubrey Beardsley is boy play compared to his (212). He lives in the house where Johan is boarding, has moreover his studio and goes often for longer visits to Paris and London where he hangs out in an unspecified dark and dangerous underworld. René falls immediately in love with the haughty and beautiful Johan. It takes some time before he tells so in a letter from London. After his return, the difficult love affair starts. René is a sadist who is tempted by Johan’s haughtiness and wants to break him down. He does so in a series of declarations of love, which are mixed up with cruel acts, and philosophies that his real love is to humiliate Johan and see him suffer. Good people suffer from bad people, so it is better for him to enjoy a depraved life and abuse the prude ones. At some point he suggests that he made another artist, another Heleen Golesco, commit suicide (115). He follows very literally the quip of Oscar Wilde that “each man kills the thing he loves”. The comparison with Wilde goes further. René paints a picture of Johan which shows him as a beauty like in “The Portrait of Dorian Gray”, but a subsequent painting shows him in his worst state: “He was

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<sup>12</sup> References to pages in Jacob Israël de Haan, *Pathologieën. De ondergangen van Johan van Vere de With*. Met een voorrede van Georges Eekhoud (Den Haag: Kruseman, 1975).

represented as a weakhead. Eyes flabby, toneless mouth trembling, horribly begging. So his face was insane, depraved.”(163) While the painting in Wilde’s work points to a lost past, de Haan’s painting foreshadows the future.

All these discourses and representations are mirrored in real life where René abuses Johan: “He picked Johan up and he threw him on his bed, during an attack of outrageous fury. He kissed Johan wildly, he beat him, he tore his upper and underclothing from his body, he grubbed deep with his fingers in him.”(165) The downfall of Johan takes some time and at several points he resists the love and sexual abuse of René, but the attacks on his body and mind become harsher, and visible wounds on his face impede him to go any longer to school. In the end he uses the venom that his lover prepared for him (217). Johan could never decide, not even consider, to join his beloved in being a bad and depraved person so he suffered the destiny of good people.

The sexological literature is mentioned in general, but never specifically. “From the rich library of his father, Johan looked for the extensive and abundant books on the deviant situation of body and soul that he often definitively recognized as being his own.” So he must clearly know he is a homosexual, but the term itself is never used (19). Again, de Haan gives circumscriptions and some old-fashioned terminology. To his father Johan writes about “his special feeling” (120) but René is much more explicit when he names Johan “een gewoon sodemietersch snolletje, evenals de schandjongens [...]” (170; an ordinary sodomitical whore, like the infamous [rent] boys). The new scholarly terminology is not used, but Johan defends his special feeling in a letter to his father. He does so more in legal-philosophical than in medical terms, more in the terminology of Oscar Wilde than that of Magnus Hirschfeld: “there is no unconditional immorality, but for sure a very conditional one that is not very different from social intolerability.” (120) His father’s answer is harsh. He doesn’t consider Johan’s ideas about his special feeling very important, rather dangerous. He quotes John Ruskin arguing that immoral people engaged in such debates feel always most justified (121). There is again an element of transgenderism as Johan’s nickname is “Hannie”, a feminization of Johan, apparently confirming popular theories of homosexual men being effeminate, “female souls in male bodies”. But René is although clearly a homosexual not such a feminine type of homosexual. The family tree of Johan also seems copied from the popular literature on degeneration and sexual perversion. Johan commits suicide like his insane mother. That his parents showed a big difference in age, the mother being much older than the father, seems to be another explanation for the degeneration the family suffers from.

While the novel only vaguely refers to the sexological literature and does not mention the new terminology of the Fin-de-Siècle, Georges Eekhoud (1854-1927) does so in his foreword (vii-xi; written in French, translated by de Haan). This Belgian novelist who is most famous because of his chaste gay novel *Escal-Vigor* (1899) and the legal proceedings against it, was a friend of De Haan.<sup>13</sup> He says that the topic of the book is “uranism” and describes the relation of two

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<sup>13</sup> Eekhoud was a Flemish writer who wrote in French, as was common in those days for Flemish authors. His work is modern – he befriended writers such as Emile Zola, Paul Verlaine and Georges Rodenbach. His work is mainly about lower-class men and has socialist and anarchist tendencies. His book was seized by the police because it should be immoral. There were two court cases and in both cases Eekhoud was acquitted. He received strong support from his colleagues. Because of his fame as a ‘homosexual’ author, de Haan contacted him and they became friends. Eekhoud was married but seems to have had strong homosexual interests. See Mirande Lucien, *Eekhoud le rauque* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Septentrion, 1999).

“homosexuals”. Johan comes according to Eekhoud close to being a “superior uranist”: delicate and artful, whose intimate relations always remain pure. Richell is in contrast the “pure devil” and a sadist. Such people are also to be found among those whose love life is different. He refers to the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll and quotes the first at length. The psychiatrist tells the reader that this variant sentiment is not perversity, but perversion. It needs a certain predisposition and must in most cases be seen as a kind of disease. The sufferer should not be condemned, but pitied. It is a strange humane message that most of de Haan’s work in fact rejects. The author himself seems to identify more with Joop in *Pijpelijntjes*, with Golesco in “The Rape of Christ” and with René in *Pathologieën*: with the evil and decadent characters.

This novel did not create much scandal. Of course, the reviewers would condemn the decadent topic, but at the same time some would praise the literary mastery of de Haan, as did Eekhoud in his foreword. The City of Amsterdam decided to remove him from the list of potential primary school teachers because of this novel. Van Eeden, who would remain his best literary friend, wrote he could not finish reading the novel because of its horrible topic. De Haan who had promised his wife to never write again a homosexual novel, had not been able to stop writing such literature. Like the marquis de Sade, forces beyond his will made him create such work. After *Pathologieën*, only the form changed. He now devoted himself to poetry instead of novels. The poems may have not been as radical as the books in their contents, they remained pederastic and continued to express his decadent and pervert perspectives.

The modernism of sexology is not embraced by de Haan in this novel. He felt more for decadent theories following Oscar Wilde. His skepticism regarding sexological modernity may as well have been influenced by his pederast and masochist preferences. Boy lovers had little to expect from a modernity that started to discuss ages of consent that always ran upwards (in the Netherlands up from 16 for all sexual contacts to 21 years for homosexual ones in 1911). The modernism of socialism had neither been very gentle or welcoming to him. Coming from a traditional Jewish family gave him a strong social and emotional background in premodernism. So his Johan feels sympathy for the housekeeper of the father. She is a good old Calvinist lady who regrets that God does not illuminate the home and the lives of the family. Johan is both seduced by her premodern religious goodness and by the modern more distant and rational righteousness of his father. This conflict between various forms of modernism and premodernism will intensify in the work and life of de Haan.

### *Poetry, journalism and legal studies*

De Haan’s later work consisted of legal studies, journalism and poetry. His journalism had started in the socialist daily *Het Volk* and continued with his *feuilletons* from Palestine from 1919 on. Just after 1910 he wrote on the miserable situation of Russian prisoners. His socialist inclinations, subdued since he left the socialist party, found a new aim in protests raised against the czarist prison system. He went to Russia to visit the penal institutions and its inhabitants. His passion for the inmates was stimulated by his love for a young prisoner whose destiny was the object of another series of poems. This activism resulted in a small book protesting

the inhuman prison conditions that included the love poetry (Haan 1913).<sup>14</sup> Politics was never far from passion in de Haan.

As a student of law de Haan prepared other students for examinations and he turned out to be a good teacher. His dissertation (1916) was on the legal terminology of responsible and accountable, an interesting point in forensic discussions of perversion. The only scholarly movement he got involved in and that offered the theory of his law dissertation was *significs*, one could say in postmodern parlance terminological and discursive analysis. The mathematician L.E.J Brouwer whose theory has been coined “rubber” or flexible started this movement. Even here, he remained on his own because the other members worked in different disciplines. He managed to get an unpaid teaching position at the University of Amsterdam, “privaat-docent”, as Aletrino had been in criminology. In 1917, he hoped to get the chair for penal law in his faculty, and lobbied for it, but was not appointed. The disappointment in his legal career certainly stimulated him to leave for Palestina where he hoped to get a similar post at the Hebrew University that the Zionists wanted to establish in Jerusalem. There, he became a teacher at the legal school while he presumed to be a full professor.

De Haan’s poems moved between Jewish and pederast themes running around the themes of God, boys and whine. His work often refers to specific situations and places. Thematically his work is close to that of medieval Arab poets. Various quatrains from the period that he lived in Jerusalem (1919-1924) discuss why he goes to the Wailing Wall, to summarize the various references: for you, my God, or for the Arab boys? Other poems tell how he is torn apart between Amsterdam and Jerusalem and how he desires to be in the one city while he is in the other. A series of poems is a rewriting of a novel of Georges Eekhoud, his Flemish gay literary icon whose novel *Une nouvelle Carthage* (1888), a kind of social history of Antwerp, is poetized in a rather gay book of poems *Een nieuw Carthago* (1919). Once in London de Haan visited Wilde’s prison and devoted some poems to Wilde and his own sentiments on that location. His best poetry is situationist work that is inspired by specific circumstances, by landscapes, by young men, by religious feelings, when he faces the pleasures of life or the dangers of death.

In his poetry, boy love is self-evident and does not need any explanation. He moved in his poems even more radically away from science and sexology to literature, from elaborate decadent novels to compact poetry, from dogma to ambivalence. It is this hesitation between pleasure and sin, between hedonism and religious taboo that informs his work, also his Jewish poetry. De Haan may be seen as the Jewish poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meanwhile many Jews rejected and reject him because he never chose without hesitation for God. In his quatrains he affirms he hates God (“Despair”, 307)<sup>15</sup>, he serves both God and Satan “with one lust and one pleasure” (306, “Good and evil”), and says “God knows us and will pardon us” (353, “Vain escape”). “All in God” (364) says “There is no love outside God. And outside God there is no guilt.” “The sins of God” (360) runs as follows:

My sins are sins of God in me.

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<sup>14</sup> Jacob Israël de Haan, *In Russische gevangnissen* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1913).

<sup>15</sup> Page numbers refer to the second volume of de Haan’s *Verzamelde gedichten* (1952); titles to the specific quatrain.

The whine, the roses, are pleasures of God.  
Enjoy freely your pleasures and sins.  
It is all one destiny

I could go on and on to illustrate this ambivalence which in the end leads to the unity of sin and faith. In “All from God” (339), De Haan writes:

Men separated lust and pain.  
But God keeps them together as day and night.  
I know lust. I know intense suffering.  
I praise the one Name of God.

And finally “God’s gifts” (339)

My most pious songs I wrote,  
When I got up from my sinful bed.  
God has given me a treasure of sins,  
And only God has saved me from my sins.

The lack of remorse or feelings of guilt after sinning and enjoying pleasure, the endorsing of a philosophy of “carpe diem”, and suggesting that God will forgive these sins as He Himself created them, make de Haan a controversial figure to this day. He was a frontrunner who failed. His biography can be said to be a second murder on his person. Author Jaap Meijer (1965) shows more understanding for the murderer than his victim and reproaches de Haan that he never became a faithful believer in God and never abdicated the boys. He could have better said there are different ways to serve God, and asked how his religious ambivalence connects to his boy love and sadomasochistic inclinations. The unity of pain and lust neatly parallels the unity of sin and pleasure, of Devil and God. Humiliating oneself is at once a religious and masochistic service to the masters of one’s universe. In the story “The rape of Christ” he played with this theme of the Son of God’s pleasure in pain.

In his weekly “feuilletons” from Jerusalem for the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* the same issues return, plus the political situation in Palestine. He went to Jerusalem as a Zionist, but one could make the argument that his orthodox friends and the Arab boys turned him from a Zionist into an anti-Zionist. His most stable beloved and closest companion in Jerusalem would be Adil Effendi Aweidah (ca. 1900 - ca. 1963) who figures in many of de Haan’s love poems, but there are other Arab names as well. In an early feuilleton (February 22, 1920) he gave the arguments of the Palestinian Arabs against Jewish migration to the country. This exposé is based on an interview with one of the Palestinian leaders, Aref Pasha El Dajani. De Haan’s attitude to the Arabs was double. He loved the boys, and enjoyed their culture. He described the Arabs as not-goal-directed, innocent, easy living, irreligious, while he himself was suffering from his Calvinist work-oriented attitude, his loss of innocence, his belief. He envied their laziness and hedonism. He also praised the Arab leaders for their cultured and civilized behavior. He was certainly fitting the image of an orientalist, even occasionally dressing as an Arab. One wonders whether he should have gone native with the Arabs when he should have lived on. His position in the Jewish community had become impossible at the

time of his death, and he knew so. Going back to the Netherlands would have been seen as a defeat that he would not have been able to face. And his sexual preference was more fitting Arab than Jewish or Dutch culture.

His relation with Jewish religion was conflicted. In The Netherlands, de Haan first rejected from 1898 on the religion of his parents and returned to it around 1912. He became an orthodox Jew, as far as that is possible for a practicing pederast. In Jerusalem he lived in the old city, among orthodox Jews, renting a garden house from Adil's family, and was close to the Ashkenazi-Jewish community that had continued to live there in the Ottoman days. He found his friends and allies among the orthodox Jews. This community was critical of the secular position of Zionism that supported the separation of church and state, and saw the Jewish community not as the religious community that took first place for the Ashkenazi. They had created their own organization Aguda in reaction to Zionism. Because of their differences of opinion on state and religion they did not want to be subsumed under the Zionist organizations that suggested to represent all the Jews, and were seen by the British colonial rulers as the sole representatives of the Jewish population of Palestine. As a translator, journalist and legal advisor de Haan would soon start to defend the orthodox cause against the Zionists, also in Holland and England. He made clear there were more orthodox than Zionist Jews in Palestine and the rest of the world. At this point in time, the last thing the Zionists could deal with for the public eye in London was internal division. De Haan who hoped to bring together orthodox and Zionist Jews and create bridges towards the Arab population, was instead being regarded by the Zionists as a traitor of their cause. This aggravated when he met with and defended the orthodox position before the Hashemite king Hussein bin Ali and right-wing press-moguls from London such as Northcliffe and Beaverbrook. He also started to write for their newspapers. In 1922, the anger of the Zionists reached such proportions that Jews would spit on him in the streets, and worse, would threaten to murder him. He was finally killed on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1924 by Awraham Tehomi (1903-1991), an immigrant from Russia. The Zionists attributed the killing to the Arabs because of a boy-love affair, but only in 1985 the murderer came forward and told to have committed this crime for the Haganah with the approval of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, its leader and later president of Israel. This political murder, the first by the Zionists of a Jew, did not bring a solution to the question of state and religion in the Jewish community and of relations between Arabs and Jews, in fact only aggravated the problems that continue to this day. And even today, orthodox Jews celebrate de Haan as one of their forerunners.<sup>16</sup>

### *The return to the premodern*

The work of de Haan shows a move we see repeated in this time all over the world, among Muslims, Christians and Jews. The confrontation with modern, secular states and cultures is utterly confusing to many people and instead of progressing to postmodern positions, they return to premodern ones while rejecting modern culture because it should be immoral, secular, decadent, or whatever. Religion offers a perspective modern culture is not able to offer them, but old solutions don't answer new questions. One of the saddest parts of the return from modern to premodern and to orthodox positions is the dogmatic and restrictive sexual morality of the monotheist religions, although they may have offered the pederast

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<sup>16</sup> For his Palestinian years, see Meijer 1965, and Giebels 1980-1 and 1981.

de Haan some more space, like boy-loving imams and pedophile priests. The legal theory de Haan developed with its linguistic turn brought him close to postmodern positions, but his world was a developing modern(ist) world where a broad postmodernism had still to be developed.

In this period of turmoil around 1900 the young de Haan gets immersed in various modernist projects: sexology, socialism, zionism and its nationalism, masculinity and exclusivity. He joined these movements but was, or felt, rejected by them. He would always be more thankful to the poets and novelists of the Eighties who introduced him to modern literary movements of naturalism, decadence, sensitivism and so on. These literary movements were perhaps ambivalent but much more open-minded on sexual issues than their political and scholarly counterparts although his beloved Dutch forerunners would never endorse his same-sexual literature openly. They would support his Jewish poetry. These literary movements gave more space to de Haan's contradictory passions for boys and for the Jewish God than sciences and ideologies did. But literature offered less the social influence de Haan liked to enjoy.

The isolation of de Haan in all the movements he joined, can of course be attributed to his stubborn character. He was for sure a difficult person to deal with. To say that he was a troublemaker or even an insane person as has been said does not take sufficiently into account that he defended the causes of the major losers of the twentieth century: perverts and pederasts, prisoners and Palestinians. This promoted his marginalization.

The rejection of him by the modernist movements brought him back to premodern positions. He rejected in his novels the tenets of sexology, and showed no belief in "born uranians", fixed identities and for sure not in a homosexual who renounced boys, homosex or anal sex and sadism as Raffalovich, Aletrino or Von Römer would have it. He was thrown out of the socialist party, but continued to believe in social justice, and protested the horrible fate of Russian prisoners. It comes as no surprise that he took to the work of Oscar Wilde and wrote various poems in his honor. He dedicated another poem to prince Philip zu Eulenburg, advisor to the German emperor and key figure in the biggest homosexual scandal in the new century (1907/8). This typical conservative married man had sex with lower-class male servants while remaining a good friend of and important advisor to the German emperor William II - until the scandal. Eulenburg is another representative of a premodern homosocial world that rejected democracy, socialism and sexology, and celebrated friendship and culture rather than homo- or heterosexuality and medical sciences.<sup>17</sup>

The most radical turn de Haan made was in Palestine when he changed color from zionist to orthodox Jew. What he rejected in zionism was its nationalism and disregard of all other interests. The male macho attitudes and heterosexual demands of zionists must have been anathema to him. The orthodox did not pursue a Jewish state in the modern sense, a geographical area with boundaries and an army, for them the Jews were in the first place a religious community, a brotherhood instead of a nation of citizens. According to de Haan the zionists should not follow the examples of other nationalisms that were exclusive and possessive and always negated, even destroyed the other. Apparently the orthodox Jews were in those times less judgmental on his affairs with Arab boys than the

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Jungblut, *Famose Kerle. Eulenburg. Eine Wilhelminische Affäre* (Hamburg: MännerschwarmSkript Verlag, 2003)

zionists as long as he kept them secret. They had lived for ages in Jerusalem among Muslim Arabs and Turks and orthodox Greeks who had probably fewer qualms about boy love and sexual affairs based in inequality. This neglect of his pederasty was made easier because de Haan expressed his love for Arab boys in poems and articles in Dutch that were published in Holland - far away from the hotbed of Jerusalem.

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