‘A Young Virgin of Great Hopes’

Agency, Belonging, and the Display of Deaf Hester Koolaart (1683-1737) and her Speaking in the Republic of Letters and Beyond

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This article seeks to reconstruct the life and agency of prelingually deaf Hester Koolaart (1683-1737) of Haarlem. In the literature, she is chiefly remembered as the star pupil of the early deaf educator Johann Conrad Ammann (1669-1724), leading to her objectification as a destination for scientific tourism. Beyond this, we know little about her life. By reading eyewitness accounts of scientists ‘against the grain’ and examining poems, letters, and archival records, we piece together an understanding of Koolaart’s agency and lived experience as a deaf woman in the early modern Dutch Republic and Hessen-Kassel (in present-day Germany). Koolaart’s lived experience turns out to be influenced heavily by her speaking abilities, but not necessarily in the positive way it is framed in the ‘miraculous healing’ discourse of contemporary scientists and family members. As we argue, it must have been not because of her fame, but rather due to her class, that she had opportunities to feel a sense of belonging within hearing contexts.

Dit artikel beoogt het leven en de *agency* van de Haarlemse doofgeboren Hester Koolaart (1683-1737) te reconstrueren. Ze is vooral bekend als de begaafde leerling van de vroege dovenonderwijzer Johan Conrad Amman (1669-1724), wat leidde tot haar objectivering als wetenschappelijke toeristische attractie. Verder is er weinig bekend over haar leven. Door ooggetuigenverslagen kritisch te lezen en uiteenlopende bronnen te onderzoeken zoals gedichten, brieven en archiefstukken, creëren we inzicht in haar *agency* en ervaringen als dove vrouw in de vroegmoderne Nederlandse Republiek en in Hessen-Kassel (Duitsland). Haar ervaringen blijken sterk beïnvloed door haar spraakvermogen, maar niet noodzakelijkerwijs op de positieve manier die naar voren komt uit het contemporaine discours van wetenschappers en familieleden, die het als een

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> wonderbaarlijke genezing presenteren. Het was veeleer, zo betogen wij, ondanks haar roem en dankzij haar sociale klasse dat ze de mogelijkheid had om zich thuis te voelen in horende contexten.

Introduction[1]

This article strives to reconstruct the life and its representation of prelingual deaf Hester Koolaart (1683-1737) from Haarlem. She featured as a gifted pupil in scholarly publications by the physician Johann Conrad Ammann (1669-1724), who wrote about teaching deaf people to speak, read, and write in *Surdus loquens* (1692) and *Dissertatio de loquela* (1700), works that were widely translated and reprinted, remaining influential for centuries. After receiving training in speech and literacy from Ammann for over a year, Koolaart displayed her newly acquired language skills to academic visitors. Many of these visitors described their visits and Koolaart's skills in letters to other scholars, and Ammann himself rarely failed to mention his star pupil in his correspondence with other scholars on the topic of his teaching method.[2] As such, Hester Koolaart still figures in studies on the history of deafness, but a detailed account of her life does not exist.

The bulk of studies on the history of deafness, deaf people, and deaf education primarily focuses on the period after the institutionalisation of deaf education at the end of the eighteenth century, with a focus on Western countries.[3] Only recently has research begun to study the lives and lived experiences of deaf people, their language use, and their position in society

1 We thank Yann Cantin, Shane Gilchrist, Martine van Elk, Lieke van Deinsen, Feike Dietz, Aron Ouwerkerk, Ruben Verwaal, and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and their feedback to earlier versions of this article. We thank Mechteld Gravendeel for her help accessing the archival sources at Doopsgezind Haarlem. Any errors naturally remain ours. The quote in the title is from Johann Conrad Ammann, *The talking deaf man: or, A method proposed, whereby he who is born deaf, may learn to speak* (London: Tho. Dowkins, 1694) A3v.

2 For example in his letters to Johan Hudde and John Wallis, which are included in the prefaces to various versions of Ammann's books. See, for example, the nineteenth-century edition of the *Dissertatio* in English, Johann Conrad Ammann, *A Dissertation on Speech* (London: Samson Low, 1873) ix-xx.

3 See e.g. John V. Van Cleve (ed.), *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship* (Gallaudet University Press 1993). DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2rh283s; Mark Zaurov and Klaus-B. Günther (eds.), *Overcoming the Past, Determining its Consequences and Finding Solutions for the Present. A Contribution for Deaf Studies and Sign Language Education: Proceedings of the 6th Deaf History International Conference, July 31-August 04, 2006 at the Humboldt University, Berlin* (Signum 2009); Tomas Hedberg, *No History, No Future: Proceedings of the 7th DHI International Conference, Stockholm 2009* (SDHS 2011).

outside the context of institutionalised deaf education.[4] For the early modern Dutch Republic, in most cases, only anecdotal information about the lives of deaf people is available, even in the case of those who were privileged to be both exceptionally talented and born into affluent families. The lives of a few Dutch deaf people have been studied in depth. This is, for example, the case for the famous painter Hendrick Avercamp, as well as for the less famous Johannes Thopas, Maerten Boelema de Stomme, and Jan Jansz. de Stomme: all men, all born into upper-class families, and all painters.[5] We do not dispose of written sources produced by these deaf persons themselves or other sources that show how they experienced their lives.[6] For some of the painters, anecdotal reports of their communicative practices, indicating they were signers, are available. Apart from their signatures, no sources are indicating they were literate. The extent to which they were in regular contact with other signers is unclear.

With the case of Hester Koolaart, this article presents the first in-depth study into the life of a deaf woman from the Dutch Republic who also lived in Hessen, present-day Germany, for part of her life. Although there is no documentation in which Hester herself explicitly reflects on her position as a prelingual deaf person or on how she was represented by others, her life is,

4 See Yann Cantin and Florence Encrevé, 'Perspectives: On the Historicalness of Sign Languages', *Frontiers in Communication* 7 (2022) 801-862. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.801862; Emily Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal* 46:3 (2003) 493-510. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X03003121; Rosamund Oates, 'Speaking in Hands: Early Modern Preaching and Signed Languages for the Deaf', *Past and Present* 256:1 (2022) 49-85. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtab019; Ruben Verwaal, 'De schuchterheid voorbij. Ervaringen van hardhorendheid en hoortoeters', *De Achttiende Eeuw* 55 (2023) 119-136. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5117/DAE2023.007.VERW; Jaipreet Virdi, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History* (University of Chicago Press 2020); Barbara A. Kaminska, 'Mute Painting: Deafness and Speechlessness in the Theory and Historiography of Dutch Art', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 16:1 (2024) 2-32. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2024.16.1.3; and Barbara A. Kaminska, 'Prelingual Deafness and the Manualist/Oralist Controversy in the Dutch Republic: The Case of the Groningen Painter Jan Jansz. de Stomme', *Early Modern Low Countries* 8:1 (2024) 1-24, 7. DOI: https://doi.org/10.51750/emlc15993.

5 Clara J. Welcker, *Hendrick Avercamp, 1585-1634, bijgenaamd 'De Stomme van Campen' en Barent Avercamp, 1612-1679, schilders tot Campen* (Davaco 1979); Rudolf E. Ekkart, *Deaf, Dumb & Brilliant: Johannes Thopas, Master Draughtsman* (Paul Holberton 2014); Kaminska, 'Mute Painting'; idem, 'Prelingual Deafness'; Piet Bakker, *Gezicht op Leeuwarden. Schilders in Friesland en de markt voor schilderijen in de Gouden Eeuw* (Phd thesis; University of Amsterdam 2008); Ben Broos, 'Een vergeten leerling van Rembrandt: Jan Jansz. de Stomme', *Oud Holland* 128 (2015) 125-138, 125-126.

6 See Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf', for a reflection on the (im)possibilities to study experiences from deaf people themselves, especially from various socio-economic backgrounds.

at least, relatively well documented by contemporaries. We have access to a wide range of sources about her life and representation. As Ammann's star pupil, there is a relatively large set of eyewitness accounts of Koolaart's speech and writing performances. As she was part of an intellectually driven elite family that left many written sources, we are also able to study letters and poems about Koolaart, or addressed to her. There is even one poem that was published under her name. The eyewitness reports of scientists (including Ammann's) and the family-based writings (including Koolaart's poem) are in this article jointly analysed with archival records to piece together an understanding of the lived experience of Hester Koolaart as a Dutch deaf woman in the early modern period.

The case of Hester Koolaart not only adds a female account to existing scholarship in the history of deafness, but it also enables us to confront her public image with snippets of her daily and more private life experience as a deaf person in a hearing family. In doing so, we read the so-called recovery narrative of Koolaart 'against the grain': instead of accepting Ammann's training as a story of cure, we foreground Koolaart's own agency, her position and sense of belonging within the social contexts that enabled her development – in other words, the kind of sociocultural perspective that Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff describe as central to the ambition of disability historians.[7] Indeed, we aim to study and understand Koolaart's life through the lenses of deaf studies, sign language studies, and disability studies.[8]

While Koolaart was regarded as disabled from the perspective of early modern 'ability logics' – a term coined by Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood and defined as the 'foundational cultural logics that privileged able-bodiedness'[9] – and while the sources at first sight mainly emphasise her role as a patient-pupil, we will confront the display of her spoken language skills and the ways she was seemingly 'paraded' by scholars and family members with what we were able to find about her agency in daily life as a deaf woman of the higher classes in early modern Europe. We write this article as two hearing, female scholars, one signing, one non-signing. We demonstrate how Koolaart's acquisition of speaking, reading, and writing and the way she and her skills were displayed as a scientific curiosity, is comparable

7 Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff, 'State of the Field: Disability History', *History* 107:377 (2022) 789-811, 790-791. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13315.

8 Harlan Lane, 'Construction of Deafness', in: Lennard J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (Routledge 1997) 153-171; Alice Hall, 'Deafness and Performance', in: idem, *Literature and Disability* (Routledge 2016) 75-89, 77-78. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726595; Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Multilingual Matters 2003); Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (Knopf 1992).

9 Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, 'Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies', in: Clare Barker and Stuart Murray (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion*

to the ways in which other people with infrequent bodily characteristics were the object of empiricists' fascination. In contrast, sources from her family context reveal how she might have experienced agency herself, due to – or despite – her speaking abilities and the public attention they garnered.[10]

In the first two sections of this article, we introduce Koolaart's biography and reflect on the state of the art in deaf history, zooming in on the relationship between early modern developments in science and society and dominant ideas about deafness and on how society dealt with deaf people. In the third section, we examine Koolaart's public image as created by Ammann and other scholars, as well as by her parents, in her early life in Haarlem and later on, followed by an analysis in the fourth section of her position within her family and the possibilities of agency within a smaller circle of friends and family, mostly later in life in Hessen. In the concluding section, a confrontation of how Koolaart was represented in both public and private contexts allows us to reflect on Koolaart's lived experience and how this was influenced by the intersection of her class, gender, and hearing status as part of these representations, and by early modern empiricists' interest in the senses.

Hester Koolaart: a biographical account

Hester Koolaart was born on 3 February 1683 as the daughter of prominent Haarlem Mennonites: the wealthy textile merchant Pieter Koolaart (1656-1732) and his second wife Susanna van Lansbergen (unknown – between 1690-1693).[11] Van Lansbergen might have been the daughter of Gerrit van Lansbergen, one of the regents of the Mennonite orphanage.[12] Pieter Koolaart was most likely the son of Pieter Jacobsz. Colaert and Hester Pieters Ketelingh. Pieter Koolaart's grandparents from both sides were well-off trustees of the

to Literature and Disability (Cambridge University Press 2017) 32-46. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/97813161043l6.004.

10 For an extensive study of deaf people and other people with infrequent bodily characteristics in Renaissance thinking, see Elizabeth B. Bearden, *Monstrous Kinds: Body, Space, and Narrative in Renaissance Representations of Disability* (University of Michigan Press 2019).

11 Koolaart and Van Lansbergen married on 21 February 1682 (cf. Noord-Hollands Archief (hereafter NHA), Schepentrouwboeken, inv. nr. 3111_916, f. 76). Both were widowed (see NHA inv. 3111_916, f. 44 and 47 for their first marriages). Hester's family name is written in various ways, including Koolaart, Koolaert, Colaert, Collard, Coeland, Colarde.

12 Cf. Hendrik Arend van Gelder, *De weeshuizen der Doopsgezinden te Haarlem 1634-1784* (manuscript, 1895), ed. by Mechteld van Gravendeel and Rineke Verheus-Nieuwstraten (2016) 25, 32, 46. Long after their deaths, Susanna van Lansbergen and her father are mentioned as heirs in an 'Akte van transport' (NHA, inv. nr. 3230_51, 1736; in the inventory, Van Lansbergen is incorrectly referred to as the widow of Koolaart).

Mennonite congregation of the Oude Vlamingen.[13] Pieter Koolaart himself was elected deacon (*voorganger*) in the Mennonite congregation of the Flemish-Waterlanders at the Peuzelaarsteeg.[14]

Several sources state that Hester Koolaart was born deaf.[15] In 1689, her father met Ammann, a young and esteemed doctor who had recently completed his dissertation in Switzerland.[16] In his home country, he had already been involved in teaching deaf children. Pieter Koolaart invited him to Haarlem to teach his daughter. Ammann accepted, and from December 1690 onwards, he taught the then seven-year-old Hester.[17] His training would take one and a half years.[18] This was considerably longer than the two months that Ammann normally needed to teach a deaf person to speak, as he repeatedly stated in his writings.[19] As his method was predominantly based on knowledge of articulatory phonetics, it is safe to assume that those two months were consecrated to learning how to read, write, and pronounce letters and words. The acquisition of a language's complete linguistic system requires significantly more time. Ammann stated that the information included in his first book could be used to maintain and expand Hester's skills after his training.[20]

Born in the upper class, Koolaart led a privileged and luxurious life. She was unmarried and lived with her family throughout her life, alongside

13 Willem Stuve, 'De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem. Personen en hun achtergronden', *Doopsgezinde bijdragen nieuwe reeks* 28 (2002) 11-100, 68-69, 73-75.

14 Archiefbibliotheek Doopsgezind Haarlem (hereafter ADH), inv. nr. 1580, f. 86, dd. 22 December 1681. Some archival sources from 1690 and later, which should be studied in more detail, raise questions about his later reputation within the Mennonite community (ADH, inv. nr. 1680, f. 94, 95, and 96, dd. 11-12 May 1690; NHA, Notariële Archieven, inv. nr. 1617, 36, 441 Hazewindius, f. 308-309, dd. 1 June 1690; ADH, inv. nr. 1581, f. 305, dd. 6 November 1729).

15 These sources include the front matter of Ammann's publication (Johann Conrad Ammann, 'Voorreden aen den leser', in: idem, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge* fol. A3r); a footnote in a marriage poem voor Koolaart and Hoofman, written by Hoofman's teacher and friend of the family Jacob Storm (Jacob Storm, 'Ter bruiloft van de heer Pieter Koolaert en mejuffrouw Elizabeth Hoofman', in: *Op het huuwelyk van de heer Pieter Koolaert en mejuffrouw Elizabeth Hoofman* (Amsterdam: Erfgen. J. Lescailje, 1693) fol. C4r); and a letter by Philippus van Limborch, who wrote to John Locke: 'I have often seen this girl from her earliest infancy, and have found her to be absolutely devoid of hearing' (Letter 1393 (dd. 29 May 1691) in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. de Beer (Oxford University Press 1979) vol. 4, 263-270).

16 M.J.C. Büchli, *De zorg voor de doofstomme* (Van Kampen 1948) 33; Huldrych M. Koelbing, 'Ammann, Johann Konrad', in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS), 10 July 2001. https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/014269/2001-07-10/. Accessed 8 January 2025.

17 Van Limborch, in his letter to Locke, mentions that he started the training on 14 December 1690, five months before he wrote his letter (see Letter 1393 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*).

18 This is what Ammann himself writes in his publication: *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge*, 52-53.

19 See for example Ammann, *A Dissertation*, x; 90.

20 Ammann, *The talking deaf man*, A7r-v.

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Figure 1. The country estate of the Koolaart family in Lisse, as depicted circa ten to fifteen years after they owned it. Print by Daniël Stopendaal, *Berkhout, appartenant a Mons.r Christian de Jonk*, 1729-1732. ©Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, KOG-ZG-1-24-134, borrowed of Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap. Public domain, https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200864415.

her parents, stepmother, half-sister, and her brother-in-law. After the death of her mother her father remarried the poet Elisabeth Hoofman (1664-1736), the daughter of wealthy linen merchant Joost Hoofman and Sara van Amerongen, originating from the same Mennonite elite circles in Haarlem.[21] From the age of ten, Hester lived with her father and stepmother, and later her half-sister, as Hoofman gave birth to a daughter, Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart.[22] When the financial situation of Koolaart's family deteriorated in the 1720s, they left Haarlem, lived in Lisse for a short while, and then moved to Kassel, where her father worked in the service of the Landgrave Charles I of Hessen (Figure 1).[23] Whereas the family in Kassel seemed to have been well off at first, their situation changed when both the landgrave and Pieter Koolaart died in 1730 and 1732, respectively, and Hester Koolaart, her stepmother, and her half-sister only received half of Pieter Koolaart's salary for the rest of her stepmother's life. Hester Koolaart herself received an annual allowance from family members.[24] Once Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart married the Hessen-Kassel court printer George Harmes in 1734, the family's situation improved,

21 Susanna van Lansbergen must have died somewhere between June 1690, when she is mentioned as Koolaart's wife in a notary act (NHA, Notariële Archieven, inv. nr. 1617, 36, 441 Hazewindius, f. 308-309, dd. 1 June 1690), and 1693, the year in which Koolaart remarried. For biographical information about Hoofman, see Lia van Gemert, 'Victim of Distortive Editing: Elisabeth Hoofman, Haarlem 23 February 1664 – Kassel, 4 July 1736', in: Lia van Gemert et al. (eds.), *Women's Writing from the Low Countries 1200-1875: A Bilingual Anthology* (Amsterdam University Press 2010) 344-352; W.R.D. van Oostrum, 'Hoofman, Elisabeth', in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*, http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Hoofman. Accessed 25 January 2025.

22 Van Oostrum, 'Hoofman'. Petronella Elisabeth must have been born between April 1694 and May 1695 because Pieter Rabus writes in a poem dated 16 April 1694 that he hopes Pieter Koolaart and Elisabeth Hoofman will have some offspring, and Theodorus van Almeloveen refers to Petronella in a letter dated 20 May 1695. See Pieter Rabus, *Na-bruilofts-feest, of poëtisch gastmaal, waar mede de heer Pieter Koolaart de digters, die zijn E. huwelijk met jonkvrouwe Elizabet Hoofman hadden geviert, heerlijk onthaalde* (n.p.n.d. [Haarlem 1694]) and Aron Ouwerkerk, *'Decus reipublicae litterariae': Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman and Her Engagement in the Republic of Letters (1695-1705). With an Edition of Her Correspondence* (Master's thesis: Utrecht University, 2022) 15.

23 Hans Philippi, *Landgraf Karl von Hessen-Kassel. Ein Deutscher Fürst der Barockzeit* (Elwert 1976) 672-673. For all details in this paragraph, see Nina Geerdink, 'Possibilities of Patronage: The Dutch Poet Elisabeth Hoofman and Her German Patrons', in: Carme Font Paz and Nina Geerdink (eds.), *Economic Imperatives for Women's Writing in Early Modern Europe* (Brill 2018) 124-146. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004383029_006.

24 Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart wrote about this in a letter (to Jacobus van Zanten, dd. 23 June 1747, Universiteisbibliotheek Leiden, LTK 1004): Hester received 'een jaarlijks legaat voor haar leven van onze Nigt van Haanen, 100 gulden en Nigt van Casele leij haar even zoveel toe'. She thus received 200 guilders every year, which is almost half of a yearly income of a minister or teacher (ca. 500 guilders).

as Hester Koolaart and her stepmother lived together with the newlywed couple. In 1737, Hester Koolaart passed away in Kassel at the age of 53, one year after the death of her stepmother.

Display and deaf learning in the early modern period

Deaf history as a field of study has received a boost from the 1980s onwards, in tandem with deaf emancipation and, more recently, the growth of the fields of deaf studies and disability history.[25] The primary focus of deaf history so far has been the period of institutionalised deaf education, which started from the 1760s onwards. In this period, deaf communities became visible. Indeed, in Corrie Tijsseling's dissertation about the history of deaf institutions in the Netherlands, the starting point is that deaf people's feelings of 'belonging' originated in these educational institutions.[26]

This notion of belonging – that is the social position of deaf and hard-of-hearing people in relation to deaf worlds and hearing worlds – is one of the main themes in deaf studies. Studies on belonging and alienation in deaf schools show that language and access to communication play a crucial role.[27] This process is closely linked to the formation of identity, which in turn is tied to preferences regarding the use of one or more sign languages, spoken languages, and/or hybrid forms. Also relevant is the intersectionality with identities unrelated to hearing status, including class, race, and religion.[28] Studies on home signers who have become part of a deaf community describe how this significantly reshapes their sense of belonging.[29] Studies on deaf home signers who are not in contact with a community of deaf signers mostly focus on linguistic practices, but they increasingly reveal how home signers often form an active part of hearing social signing networks, thereby challenging the assumption that spoken language proficiency is a prerequisite for developing a sense of belonging within hearing communities.[30]

25 Corrie Tijsseling, *'School, waar?' Een onderzoek naar de betekenis van het Nederlandse dovenonderwijs voor de Nederlandse dovengemeenschap, 1790-1990* (PhD thesis: Utrecht University, 2014) 18-19; Blackie and Moncrieff, 'State of the Field'.

26 Tijsseling, '*School, waar?*'.

27 Paul C. Higgins, 'Outsiders in a Hearing World: The Deaf Community', *Urban Life* 8:1 (1979) 3-22.

28 Elaine R. Smolen and Peter V. Paul, 'Perspectives on Identity and d/Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students', *Education Sciences* 13:8 (2023) 782. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13080782.

29 Cf. Richard J. Senghas, *An "Unspeakable, Unwriteable" Language: Deaf Identity, Language and Personhood among the First Cohorts of Nicaraguan Signers* (University of Rochester 1997); Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway, *Signing and Belonging in Nepal* (Gallaudet University Press 2016).

30 For studies on home signing outside a context of deaf education, see, for example, Victoria Nyst, Kara Sylla, and Moustapha Magassouba, 'Deaf Signers in Douentza, a Rural Area in Mali', *Sign Languages in Village Communities: Anthropological and Linguistic Insights* 4 (2012) 251. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614511496.251; Lynn Hou,

In the early modern period, non-speaking had for centuries been associated with the lack of a capacity for rational thought. Deaf signers, as a consequence, were regarded as incapable of participating in central aspects of Christian theology, including salvation in the afterlife and resurrection at the end of time.[31] The only remedy for a lack of speech due to a lack of hearing was seen to lie in the domain of miracle healings.[32] From the sixteenth century onwards, however, humanist interest in the nature of language and speech led to a strong interest in the 'curability' of deafness by teaching deaf people to speak.[33] With the teachings of Pedro Ponce de León in sixteenth-century Spain, deaf education began to incorporate reading, writing, speaking, lip-reading, and signing.[34]

A central theme in the history of deaf education is the so-called 'war of methods', which originated in this same period.[35] This conflict between the 'French method' and the 'German method' coincided with the institutionalisation of deaf education.[36] The French or manualist method was based on the use of signs modified to reflect the grammar of the spoken language. This method, which also included speech training, was developed by Abbé de l'Épée in Paris, who founded the first deaf school in Europe in 1760. It was also introduced in the first deaf school in the Netherlands in 1790.[37] In contrast, the German deaf educator Samuel Heinicke argued for the superiority of speech and rejected the use of signing, which is why his method became known as the German or oralist method.[38] Ammann's work

'Who signs? Language Ideologies about Deaf and Hearing Child Signers in One Family in Mexico', *Sign Language Studies* 20:4 (2020) 664-690, and Lauren W. Reed, 'Sign Networks: Nucleated Network Sign Languages and Rural Homesign in Papua New Guinea', *Language in Society* 51:4 (2022) 627-661. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404521000798.

31 Irina Metzler, 'Speechless: Speech and Hearing Impairments as Problem of Medieval Normative Texts—Theological, Natural-Philosophical, Legal', in: Sally Crawford and Christina Lee (eds.), *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability* (BAR Publishing 2014) 59-68.

32 For a recent study on 'miracle healings' in the Netherlands from the perspective of art history, see Barbara A. Kaminska, *Images of Miraculous Healing in the Early Modern Netherlands* (Brill 2021).

33 Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden, 'Educating the Deaf in the Netherlands: A Methodological Controversy in Historical Perspective', *History of Education* 32:4 (2003) 402. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760032046146.

34 Susan Plann, *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835* (University of California Press 1997); specifically focusing on the development of deaf education in the Netherlands are Tijsseling, *'School, waar?'* and Rietveld-van Wingerden, 'Educating the deaf'.

35 Tijsseling, *'School, waar?'*, 19.

36 Agnes Elizabeth Jacoba Maria Tellings, *The Two Hundred Years' War in Deaf Education: A Reconstruction of the Methods Controversy* (Mediagroep Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen 1995); Henk Betten, *Deaf Education in Europe – the Early Years* (Maya de Wit 2013).

37 Henk Betten, *Bevrijdend gebaar: het levensverhaal van Henri Daniël Guyot* (Uitgeverij van Wijnen 1984).

38 Sadly, oralist approaches that hinder deaf children's access to and acquisition of sign

is appropriated by oralist educators and his opinions on deaf signing indeed seem to be quite negative, as he exclaims in his *Dissertatio*: 'how inadequate and defective is the language of gestures and signs which they must use!' Ammann also writes derogatorily about deaf people who do not speak: 'How dull are they in general! How little do they differ from animals!'[39] Given the numerous reprints and translations of his work over the centuries, it is difficult to imagine that these negative qualifications did not have a significant impact on the status of deaf people and their sign languages.

As many pioneers in deaf education tutored pupils themselves, it is through their studies that we gain insight into the lives of at least some deaf people from the early modern period. As deaf education was still shrouded in mystery and secrecy, deaf pupils, particularly those who happened to develop the desired way of speaking and lipreading, were put in the spotlight as living proof of the success of their educator's approach. The Spanish educator Manuel Ramírez de Carrión, for example, instructed the sons of De Velasco, the Constable of Castile. The language achievements of one of the sons, Luis de Velasco, were demonstrated to visitors, to their great amazement. Kenelm Digby, accompanying the Prince of Wales, witnessed and described the display of Luis de Velasco's command of speech, and his report inspired the English physician John Bulwer to publish his well-known work on deaf education in 1648.[40] Another English pioneer in deaf education, John Wallis, primarily focused on speech therapy and also 'exhibiting two of his pupils, Alexander Popham and Daniel Whaley, in the presence of King Charles the Second, as early as 1662'.[41] Similarly, the Portuguese-French Jacob Rodrigues Pereira presented his pupil to the Académie Royale des Belles Lettres de Caen in 1746.[42]

language are still common to this day (Tom Humphries et al., 'Ensuring Language Acquisition for Deaf Children: What Linguists Can Do', *Language* 90:2 (2014) e31-e52. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2014.0036).

39 The quotes are from the English translation of the original Latin: Ammann, *A Dissertation*, 2. Harlan Lane, discussing Ammann's work, qualifies this discourse as 'linguistic bigotry'. Lane, *The Mask*, 107.

40 John Bulwer, *Philocophus: or, the deafe and dumbe mans friend* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1648).

41 Edward M. Gallaudet, 'Deaf-Mute Instruction in Great Britain and Ireland', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 20:3 (1875) 154-159. For a detailed overview of the early modern scholars in this field working in Britain in the seventeenth century, including Holder and Dalgarno, see David Cram and Jaap Maat (eds.), *Teaching Language to a Boy Born Deaf: the Popham Notebook and Associated Texts, by John Wallis* (Clarendon Press 2017). Wallis took his two pupils also to the Royal Society to demonstrate their skills. See Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses – A Philosophical History* (Metropolitan Books 1999) 104-120; Peter W. Jackson, *Alexander Popham's Notebook: A 17th-Century Education of a Deaf Boy* (British Deaf History Society Publications 2012) 20.

42 Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (Random House 1984) 67-81.

This way of dealing with deaf people aligns with the growing interest in rare phenomena as part of seventeenth-century empiricism and rationalism.[43] The pursuit of wonders and singular phenomena put observations and eyewitness reports centre stage. In the Republic of Letters, the academically interested elite of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not only exchanged letters but also collected curiosities and discussed exceptional natural events.[44] Hester Koolaart was thus not an isolated case, but part of a broader phenomenon in which individuals with disabilities were exhibited to both scientific and lay audiences. Being presented as star pupils, it is rather that one-sided image of deaf people which has survived. Typically, most of the sources about deaf pupils who learned to speak, such as Koolaart, present them as unidimensional props in the 'miracle story' of the hearing pioneer in deaf education, uncritically copied and repeated by later authors.[45]

We thus do not know much about the lived experiences of early modern deaf people. It is unclear, for example, if deaf communities in this period existed. For the recorded 'star pupils', such as Hester Koolaart, no evidence on this matter has survived. It is therefore an important question whether and in what ways early modern deaf people from the higher social classes felt a sense of belonging in their hearing worlds. The first step in reading the 'miracle story' against the grain and attempting to answer this question is to collect as many sources as possible that refer to Koolaart and analyse how she was represented, both within the Republic of Letters and beyond. In the following sections, we show that her representation was influenced by both scientific tourism and the individual agendas of the actors involved. Additionally, we argue that Koolaart must have had opportunities to develop in her hearing environments, as others from her class did.

43 See, for example, Plann, *A Silent Minority*, 18-19; and more generally on the interest in language, Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press 2004) 15-42. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511617362. On the Scientific Revolution, see Eric Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575-1715* (Brill 2010).

44 See, for example, Claudia Swan, *Rarities of these Lands: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Dutch Republic* (Princeton University Press 2021) 91-117; Hans Bots, *Republiek der Letteren. Ideaal en werkelijkheid* (APA-Universiteitspers 1977); Lorraine Daston, 'The Ideal and Reality of the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment', *Science in Context* 4:2 (1991) 367-386. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889700001010; Anthony Grafton, 'A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters', *Republics of Letters*: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts 1:1 (2009); Dirk van Miert, 'What was the Republic of Letters? A Brief Introduction to a Long History (1417-2008)', *Groniek* 204/205 (2016) 269-287.

45 In some cases, the lives of gifted pupils have been documented to some extent, for instance those of Luis de Velasco and Alexander Popham. See Plann, *A Silent Minority*; Cram and Maat, *Teaching Language*.

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Figure 2. Frontispiece in a Dutch edition of Ammann's *Surdus loquens*, together with a work by Franciscus van Helmont, which shows a man with a pronounced nose (probably representing Van Helmont) seated at his desk, measuring and noting down the size of the mouth of a person on a painting, being watched by another man, probably Ammann. Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont/ Johannes Conradus Ammann, *Een zeer korte afbeelding van het ware natuurlyke Hebreuwse A.B.C., welke te gelyk de wyse vertoont, volgens welke die doof geboren syn, sodanig konnen onderwesen werden, dat sy niet alleenig andere die spreken konnen, verstaan, maar selfs tot het gebruik van spreken komen.* Published by Pieter Rotterdam in 1697. © Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag, sign. KW 662 P 2.

Ammann published his works about deaf learning in various languages. In August 1692, he first published his *Surdus loquens* in Latin.[46] The Dutch version, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge, op wat wijse men doof-geborene sal konnen leeren spreken*, followed a month later.[47] It was reprinted in 1697, 1702, and 1717 (Figure 2). Two years after the first publication, an English translation from Latin was made and published by Daniel Foot under the title *The talking deaf man*.[48] Then Ammann himself published an extended version in Latin of *Surdus loquens* in 1700, entitled *Dissertatio de loquela* and reprinted in Amsterdam in 1702, 1708, 1727, and 1740.[49] A German translation of *Surdus loquens* was published in 1747, a French one in 1779, and another German one in 1828.[50] There were also translations in Hungarian and Italian.[51]

On the title page of the Dutch edition, it is added that *Surdus loquens* presents 'the most mathematical description of the way one can teach [those] born deaf to speak. […] Everything leaning on undisputable grounds and experience'.[52] These additions serve to emphasise the scientific nature of the teaching method. The book consists of three chapters: the first focuses on the voice, the second on the letters, and the third presents concrete ways to apply the insights from the first two chapters to teach deaf youngsters to speak, write, and understand people who speak to them. Koolaart figures in Ammann's works in several places, but it is especially in this third chapter that he frequently refers to his experiences with her as his pupil. For example, he describes how initially she would only be able to pronounce the word *papa* ('daddy'), despite the 'thousands of times' her father tried teaching her how to say *mama* ('mummy'). Ammann recounts how, with his help, Koolaart quickly learned to pronounce *mama*, and after two months of intense training, had learned to speak and lipread. These references to a concrete and successful case serve to convince his readers of the effectiveness of his method, and also to reinforce a sense of amazement.

In the preface to the Dutch version of *Surdus loquens*, Ammann mentions four other pupils from Amsterdam and Schaffhausen (Switzerland).

46 Johann Conrad Ammann, *Surdus loquens seu methodus qua, qui surdus natus est, loqui discere possit* (Amsterdam: Hendrik Wetstein, 1692).

47 Idem, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge*.

48 Idem, *The talking deaf man*.

49 Idem, *Dissertatio de loquela* (Amsterdam: J. Wolters, 1700).

50 See Gallaudet, 'Deaf-Mute Instruction', 154-159. For a recent discussion of Ammann's work and impact, see Rée, *I See*.

51 Kaminska, 'Prelingual Deafness', 7, refers to those, as does Rietveld-van Wingerden, 'Educating the deaf', 403.

52 Original: 'dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge, op wat wijse men doof-geborene sal konnen leeren spreken (…) Alles op onweêrleggelijcke

In the *Dissertatio de loquela*, he states: 'Within the space of two months, I have taught many mutes both to read and to pronounce a great number of words'.[53] Other than Koolaart, his pupils are only discussed in case of a particular characteristic.[54] This is likely related to the fact that Ammann dedicated his book to Pieter Koolaart, who had asked him to publish it and paid for its publication.[55] Hester Koolaart herself is rarely mentioned by name, she is primarily referred to as the gifted daughter of Ammann's friend and patron.[56] In the extensive dedication in the Latin edition, Ammann writes that he received many favours from Pieter Koolaart, who offered him housing during the training.[57] Most of this text is devoted to the amazement Pieter Koolaart felt, just like many others, about the fact that Ammann succeeded in making a deaf person speak. Referring to the father's change of beliefs is a rhetorically effective strategy, as it acknowledges the doubts of unconvinced readers and may lead them to anticipate a surprising perspective. Indeed, staging Hester Koolaart in the book is important for its credibility. At the beginning of the third chapter, Ammann mentions how her miraculous development was already observed by many eyewitnesses, including inhabitants of 'a great part of *Holland*, and universally almost to the whole City of *Harlem*', and readers who still doubt the method are invited to come and see for themselves.[58]

The story of Koolaart's acquisition of speaking skills seems to have been regarded as quite spectacular, and Ammann's invitation to come and see for yourself was followed by many people from the Low Countries and abroad. As was common practice at the time, many scientific visitors recorded their eyewitness accounts either in publications or in letters to other scientists, some of which were later published. All in all, we found approximately ten

Gronden, en d'Ervarentheyt steunende'. Ammann, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge*, title page.

53 Quote from the English translation: Ammann, *A Dissertation*, 90.

54 Ammann mentions, for example, in his later *Dissertatio* that his method had been successful with all of his pupils except one: a Jewish girl described as having a 'dull' mind, whose father he expected to be ungrateful for his teaching efforts. He mentions one other deaf pupil in Haarlem: 'On this system I taught a youth, at Haarlem, of rustic simplicity, in one month to pronounce the letters correctly, and to read and write a little *in one month*.' (Ammann, *A Dissertation*, 109). He also mentions specific pupils when discussing how his method can be helpful to non-deaf learners, for instance, in the case of the daughter of the sheriff of Haarlem, John Veer, whom he cured of 'Hottentottism', a now outdated and racist German term for a severe speech impediment (Ammann, *A Dissertation*, 119).

55 Storm, 'Ter bruiloft', C4r.

56 Only in the Latin and English editions is she referred to by name, as Esther.

57 The front matter of the Latin, Dutch, and English editions differs. The English edition is based on the Latin, which includes a longer dedication than the Dutch edition. The Dutch edition only has a mention of the dedication and a foreword discussing the choice to publish a Dutch translation. It is dated 1 September, a few weeks after the dedication in the Latin edition (10 August).

58 Ammann, *The talking deaf man*, 64; Idem, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge*, A4r.

eyewitness reports, mostly from scholars of varying fame.[59] The latter include, for example, intimates of the family such as the Haarlem physician Antonius van Dale,[60] but also the Russian Tzar Peter the Great, who saw Koolaart in 1697 at Ammann's home in Amsterdam.[61] That these meetings also occurred before the publication of the book is not only stated by Ammann himself, but is also evidenced by a letter from another family friend, Philippus van Limborch. He shared his amazement with John Locke in May 1691 in a letter with an extensive description of Koolaart's case, stating that '(e)veryone is astonished when they see the girl, and many come every day from other towns to this gentleman's house to see her'.[62] Ammann thus did not exaggerate when he stated that many people in Holland had witnessed the success of his method. What his phrasing hides, however, is that the young Koolaart was called on time and again to demonstrate her speaking abilities.

59 The sources mentioning visits to the Koolaart's we found are: Charles Ellis, who sent an eyewitness account to Rev. Edward Tyson of the Royal Society in July 1699 (*Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 23-286 (1703) 1416-1418, 1416); Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, who in his later published travel journal described his wish to visit Koolaart in 1711, but did not find the family at home (Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, *Merkwürdige Reisen durch Niedersachsen, Holland und Engelland* (Ulm: Gaumischen Handlung, 1754), vol. 3, 533; Antonius van Dale (referred to in Scott Mandelbrote, 'Witches and Forgers: Anthonie van Dale on Biblical History and the Authority of the Septuagint', in: Dirk van Miert et al. (eds.), *Scriptural Authority & Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned* (Oxford University Press 2017) 270-306, 283. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198806837.003.0014; Jacob Winslow, who reflects on his visit in his autobiography (Jacob Winslow, *L'autobiographie de J.B. Winslow*, ed. Vilhelm Maar (Octave Doin & fils/Vilhelm Tryde 1912) 36; Franciscus van Helmont, who mentions his visit in the preface to Franciscus van Helmont, *The Spirit of Diseases; or, Diseases from the Spirit* (London: Sarah Howkins, 1694) A7v; Frederik Dekkers, who mentions his visit in the second, enlarged edition of his *Exercitationes practicae circa medendi methodum* (1694), see the Dutch translation: Frederik Dekkers, *Genees-konstige, of werk-stellige oeffeningen* (Leiden: J. Du Vivie, 1717) 119; and Van Limborch in his letter to John Locke: Van Limborch, Letter 1393. Next to these visitor's accounts, some sources mention Koolaart without making clear whether they participated in a demonstration session, such as Balthasar Bekker (see Bart Leeuwenburgh, *De betoverde wereld van Balthasar Bekker* (Boom 2023) 181); and Jacob Storm who mentions Hester's speaking capacities in his marriage poem: Storm, 'Ter bruiloft', C4r; as well as some indirect sources describing visits, such as the visit by Tzar Peter in 1697, together with Nicolaas Witsen and Johan Hudde: Luuc Kooijmans, *De doodskunstenaar. De anatomische lessen van Frederik Ruysch* (Bert Bakker 2004) 243.

60 Mandelbrote, 'Witches and Forgers'.

61 Kooijmans, *De doodskunstenaar*, 243. The date of the demonstration is 27 November 1697. We know that Ammann lived in Amsterdam by then because, between 1696 and 1704, all the baptisms and funerals of Ammann's children are registered in Amsterdam.

62 Van Limborch, Letter 1393. Locke in his reply (letter 1398) mentions a pupil of John Wallis as a similar case from England. This is meaningful, as Ammann opens his book *Dissertatio de loquela* with a letter he received from this same Wallis.

Creating a positive public image of his pupil in the book and in the demonstration sessions was probably not only part of Ammann's own reputation management but also of his patron's. For Pieter Koolaart, the profiling of his daughter as Ammann's successful pupil was advantageous in various ways: he became known as the father of an intellectually gifted child, and as someone who put money and efforts into promoting and sharing important and innovative scientific knowledge. An example of the importance of his daughter's success story to Koolaart's reputation is that in 1695, a family friend, Pieter Rabus, dedicated an issue of his journal *Boekzaal van Europe* to him and his wife, and also, unlike Amman, to 'their very ingenious daughter miss Hester Koolaert'.[63] Rabus shows his wonder over the fact that someone born deaf was able to be such a renowned person in the world of art and learning, and he presents this fact as an argument for a strong belief in the power of the mind: 'art and labour by a healthy intellect can do more than is commonly known in the world'.[64]

Presumably, the organisation of the demonstration sessions in which Koolaart showed her speaking and literacy abilities was a collaborative effort of Ammann and her father. Ammann must have been the one leading the demonstrations when he trained Koolaart and lived in her family's house. For the period thereafter, the demonstrations were likely more of a family affair. The demonstration that was held for Peter the Great, years after Ammann had left Haarlem, was obviously an exceptional event for which the teacher must have gladly stepped back into his old role. It is also the only time it is explicitly mentioned that Koolaart was invited to leave her house and give the demonstration in another place.

Van Limborch's lengthy eyewitness account of a demonstration session provides a clear picture of the procedure for these sessions. When he and his wife visited the Koolaart family, Hester was brought in and spoke to them, telling them how pleased she was with their visit. Then, Van Limborch wrote his name on a sheet of paper, which she read aloud. She was also given a card containing writing in Italic and Roman script, which she read out loud. She also read Arabic numbers. She recited the Lord's Prayer, and she was able to lipread the words pronounced by her father. Van Limborch wrote: 'if there was anything she did not quite follow, she signed to her father to write it down, and then she read it'.[65] At leave-taking, Hester said goodbye to Van Limborch and his wife, pronouncing their names, 'which had cleaved to her memory after reading them only twice'.[66] Hester's deaf voice and accent were not noted

63 Original: 'derzelver zeer vernuftrijke dogter Juffer Hester Koolaert'. Pieter Rabus, 'Aan de Taal- en konst-lievende Echtgenooten den Heere Pieter Koolaart, en Jonkvrouwe Elizabet Hoofman'. Cited from *De Boekzaal van Europe* January-February (1695), fol. A2r.

64 Original: 'kunst en arbeid door een gezond verstand bet vermogen, dan de gemeene wereld weet'. Rabus, 'Aan de Taal- en konst-lievende Echtgenooten', fol. A2r.

65 Van Limborch, Letter 1393.

66 Ibidem.

by Van Limborch, but they were by Frederick Dekkers, a professor of medicine at Leiden University. Dekkers noted that 'her voice was hoarse and slow, but understandable for everyone'.[67] According to Van Limborch's description, the demonstration had evolved into a routine practice, with recurring elements. The speech skills Koolaart demonstrated were familiar or predictable verbal performances, such as reading or saying out loud the name of the visitor, and citing the Lord's Prayer. Indeed, other visitors mention these elements as well, and it is important to recognise that the demonstrations were well-prepared, staged performances rather than natural communication settings in which Koolaart would arguably have had more agency.

The fact that in 1697 Ammann invited the then fourteen-year-old Koolaart for a demonstration for the Russian tzar, despite a lapse of seven years during which he (according to his own writing) had instructed 'many' other deaf pupils, might be related to her celebrity within the international Republic of Letters. At the same time, it might have also been motivated by the fact that Koolaart had continued to develop her language skills, expanding into other languages as well. Ammann had stated that he wanted her to educate herself further after he finished his training. He wrote, 'that there's good hope that she, once she becomes a young adult, will be able to get along with others just like everyone else.'[68] We do not know if his assumption would materialise, but we do know Koolaart did not stop training her language skills. In the demonstrations, the focus was clearly on speech production, but visitors also positively commented on her reading and writing skills. In 1693, Hoofman's teacher and friend of the family Jacob Storm stated that the then ten-year-old Koolaart knew how to read and write.[69] In 1696, Hoofman wrote to befriended scholar Theodorus van Almeloveen that Koolaart understood simple Latin and would love to learn some new words in Hebrew from him.[70] The Danish medicine student Jacob Winslow, who visited Koolaart in 1698, wrote in his autobiography that she spoke a bit of Latin and French too.[71] As such, the miracle story of the speaking deaf girl was made even more miraculous.

67 Original: 'haar stem was wat heesch en langzaam, maar voor iedereen verstaanbaar… Hetwelk ik alles, als zelfs gesien hebbende met de grootste verwondering, getuige.' Dekkers, *Genees-konstige*, 118-119. About deaf ways of speaking, cf. Tsung-Lun Alan Wan, 'Sociolinguistics of Pathologized Speech: A Case of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Speakers of Taiwan Mandarin', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 25:3 (2021) 438-452. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12466.

68 Original: 'Dat'er goede hope is, datse, op de Jaren van Discretie komende, bequaem sal zijn, om met ieder een gelijck een ander om te gaen'. Ammann, *Surdus loquens, dat is wis-konstige beschryvinge*, (fol A3r).

69 Storm, 'Ter bruiloft', fol. C4r.

70 Cf. Koolaart-Hoofman to Van Almeloveen, 2 February 1696, in: Aron Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence of Elisabeth Hoofman-Koolaart', on *Early Modern Letters Online* [EMLO], eds. Howard Hotson and Miranda Lewis, http://emlo-portal.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/?catalogue=elisabeth-hoofman-koolaart. Accessed 17 July 2024.

71 Winslow, *L'autobiographie*, 36.

Because of her upbringing in an intellectual and higher class family, it is likely these are realistic descriptions of Koolaart's language learning. It is safe to assume that Hoofman, in her role as the mother of the household, was involved in Hester's further training from the moment she married Pieter Koolaart in 1693.[72] This was a year after Ammann's publication, so Hoofman likely continued Koolaart's training after Ammann left. It is also possible that Hoofman had already been involved in Koolaart's education as a friend of the family, since they belonged to the same Mennonite circle, or even that she already knew Ammann through her intellectual network before her marriage. Moreover, Hoofman's learning and interest in the sciences must have made her both capable and motivated to continue Ammann's project.[73] As is evident from her letter to Van Almeloveen, Hoofman took an active interest in expanding Koolaart's linguistic knowledge by sharing her stepdaughter's desire to learn Hebrew.

Moreover, it seemed to be expected of Hoofman to teach Koolaart, as is evidenced by, for example, the poem Hoofman's own teacher, Storm, wrote on the occasion of her marriage with Pieter Koolaart. According to the poem, he would not be surprised if Koolaart would even learn Greek and Latin, now that she would be educated by Hoofman:

> Lightly, we see your beloved Hester flaunting
> Greek and Ausonian languages
> Through Her [Elisabeth Hoofman, VN&NG], who never tired of thirst for learning,
> Tries to immortalise Haarlem's splendour
> And make it a second Athens,
> And a school for practicing wisdom[74]

Storm thus implies that Koolaart participated in her stepmother's intellectual activities. Hoofman herself would later reinforce this picture. Just like her husband, she contributed to the family's continued association with the success story of her stepdaughter.

72 About mothers as educators, see for example: Amanda L. Capern, 'Protestant Theology, Spirituality and Evangelicalism', in: idem (ed.), *The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Routledge 2019) 263-286, 271.

73 About Hoofman in the Republic of Letters see: Aron Ouwerkerk, 'Sieraad der geleerde wereld? De intellectuele correspondentie van Elisabeth Hoofman-Koolaart (1664-1736)', *Historica* 49:1 (2026) 3-8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21827/historica.49.1.3-8; Ouwerkerk, *'Decus reipublicae litterariae'*.

74 Original: 'Licht zien we uw liefste Hester praalen / Met Griekse en Ausoonse taalen / Door Haar, die nooit van leerzucht moê, / Tracht Haarlems luister te verëeuwen, / En stellen' t tot een tweede Atheen, / En oeffenschool van schranderheên'. Storm, 'Ter bruiloft', D2r.

Hoofman demonstrated her admiration for Ammann by composing a lengthy poem filled with praise on the occasion of his birthday in 1694.[75] In this poem, she strongly reinforces the framing of his method as miraculous. She leaves no metaphor untouched to underscore the remarkable fact that he enabled deaf people to speak. Whereas she extensively praises him in general, the last strophe is dedicated to the 'small Hester', his 'big test piece'. She paints the *orgel* ('musical organ') that Ammann had created in Koolaart's *gorgel* ('gorge') as 'the great proof of his art'. She ends the poem by saying that this newly created organ wishes him that his honorable name will come 'humming from the mouths of a thousand mutes', thus giving Koolaart a performative role in the poem as well.

Since no contemporary print publication survives, we do not know whether the anniversary poem was read by anyone other than Ammann himself.[76] We do know this was the case for another poem praising Ammann that was dedicated to the Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel. Koolaart's training turns out to be a set piece in Hoofman's solicitations for patronage at the Hessen-Kassel court.[77] In the first poem Hoofman wrote for her future patron, shortly before she moved to Kassel, she introduces herself and her daughters to the Landgrave (Figure 3).[78] As becomes evident from the poem, it accompanied a gift: Ammann's *Surdus loquens*, the book dedicated to her husband. It is a meaningful present for a ruler characterised in the poem as someone who 'supports and favours science, and all valuable arts, perseveringly'.[79] The introduction of Koolaart is linked directly to the book:

> Receive this work that makes mutes speak,
> by miracle art that replaces the sense of hearing.

75 Elisabeth Koolaart, *Naagelaatene gedichten van Elisabeth Koolaart geboren Hoofman* (Haarlem: Jan Bosch, 1774) 79-82; it is also mentioned in the content's list of the manuscript collection of Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten van Elizabeth Koolaart geboorne Hoofman, benevens een catalogus harer nagelaten poëzie* (Manuscript collection: University Library Leiden, sign. LTK 1042), but did not survive in handwriting in full.

76 The survival of Hoofman's poetry is complex. Some poems are printed seperately, most did only survive in manuscript or are even only mentioned in manuscript: in the contents list of the handwritten collection, Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 120 titles are mentioned, of which only 61 poems are currently in the collection. A selection of Hoofman's poetry was published posthumously by Willem Kops in Koolaart, *Naagelaatene gedichten*.

77 About this relationship of patronage see Geerdink, 'Possibilities of Patronage'.

78 The undated Dutch version is included in the manuscript collection Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*. The Latin version, dated 1721, is only mentioned in the content's list.

79 Original: 'wetenschap, en alle nutte konst / Trou en standvastig bied u hulp en gonst'. Elisabeth Hoofman, 'Aan sijn doorluchtigste Hoogheyd, Karel de Eerste, Landgraaf van

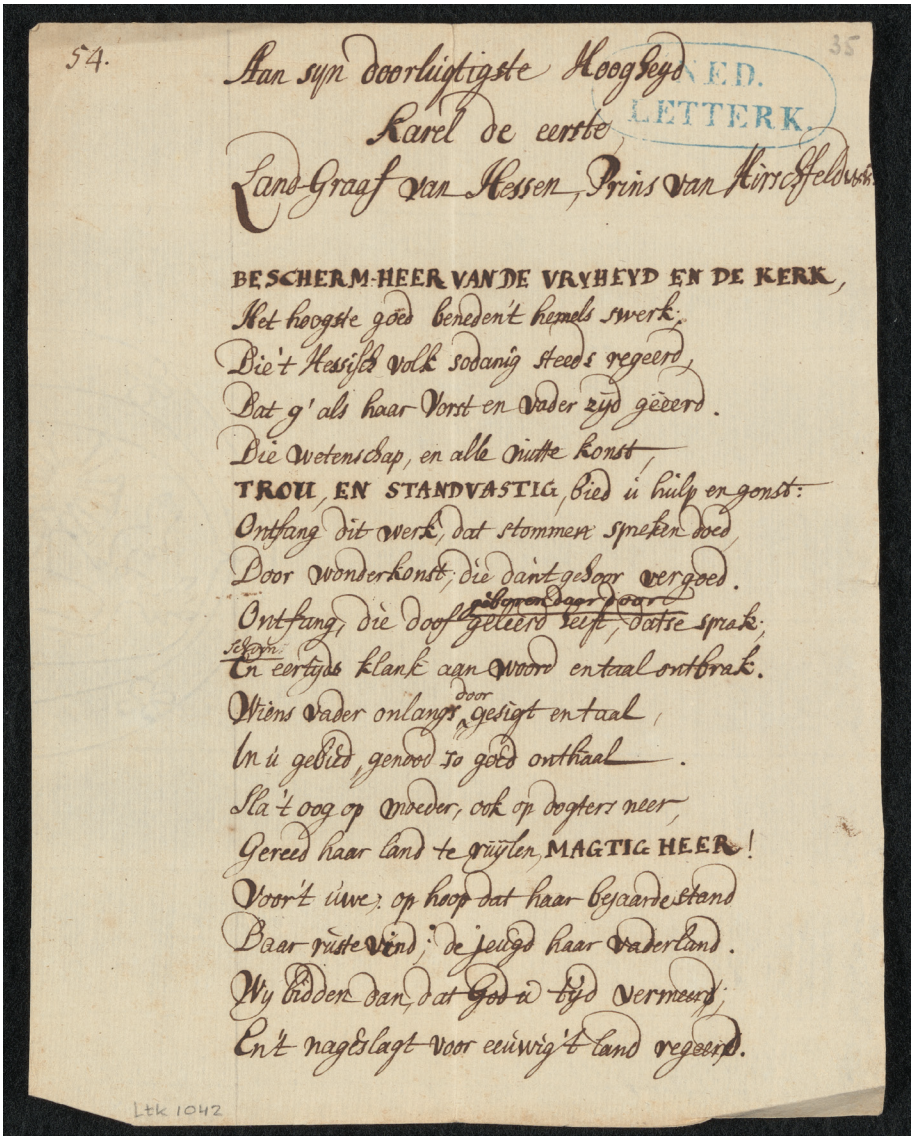

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Figure 3. Poem by Elisabeth Hoofman for landgrave Karel I on the occasion of the move of the Koolaart-Hoofman family to Kassel (1721). The poem accompanied Ammann's book *Surdus loquens* as a gift for the landgrave. The poem is included in the manuscript collection of Hoofman's poetry: Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederlandsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, 35. LTK 1042.

Receive the one who, born deaf, speaks because of this,
Though previously, sound was lacking in her words and language.[80]

Hoofman recommends her family to the Landgrave, as lovers of science and the arts. The association with Ammann and his method substantiates this, even more than twenty years after his training of Koolaart. Hoofman's choice of this book as her first gift to the Landgrave underscores the importance of Koolaart's story in shaping how Hoofman presented herself and her family to the outside world.

Koolaart as a family member: deaf agency

From the sources discussed so far, we can infer that Koolaart was of considerable importance to both Ammann and her parents in their public image building and networking activities. In this public image, Hester is presented as a gifted pupil who is grateful for the fact that she has been taught to speak, lipread, read, and write. Still, we know nothing about her own experiences and daily life, except that she must have been quite busy giving demonstrations. From the (international) visitors' accounts, we know Koolaart met many visitors. Most probably, Ammann and/or her father were always with her to discuss her performance with the guests. We know very little about her direct interactions with the audience, except, for example, that she handed Ammann's book to a visitor.[81]

It is hard to say how she experienced all this. Did she like the attention, or did she feel uncomfortable? Was she proud of herself? To what extent was she consulted when people came to see her? Was she able and allowed to interact spontaneously with visitors? Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient sources to answer these questions with certainty. Still, we do have some sources that shed light on her life within the family circle: letters written by her half-sister long after her death, in 1747, letters and poems written by her stepmother during her life, and one poem published under her name, but originally written by Joost van den Vondel. All these sources portray her as an agentive figure within the household and beyond, actively participating in housework and intellectual activities. Moreover, the previously discussed sources, especially the eyewitness reports of the demonstrations, show how Koolaart took agency over her own means of communication.

Hessen, Prins van Hirschfeld, etc.', in: Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 54.

80 Original: 'Ontfang dit werk, dat stommen spreken doed / Door wonderkonst, die dan't gehoor vergoed. / Ontfang, die doofgeboren, daardoor sprak / Schoon eertijds klank aan woord en taal ontbrak'. Hoofman, 'Aan sijn doorluchtigste Hoogheyd'.

81 Winslow, *L'autobiographie*, 36.

In the letters written after Koolaart's death, her half-sister Petronella Elisabeth mentions Koolaart's annual allowance of 200 guilders.[82] This amount of money was not significant, but in times of financial uncertainty, especially after Pieter Koolaart died in 1732, it must have been a welcome fixed income for the family. Also, on a personal level, Koolaart is presented as being important to her half-sister and her stepmother. In a letter sent to their former pastor in Haarlem, the doctor and poet Jacobus van Zanten, Petronella Elisabeth tells him how their lives unfolded in Kassel:[83] 'We kept my sister with us, until god took her away, too, [in] 1737, at the age of 53 years. Again, a lot of help and company was lost, as I was often ailing.'[84] The phrasing, 'we kept my sister with us', does not imply much agency on the part of Koolaart. The last sentence, however, suggests that the situation may have been different in at least some ways, as Koolaart helped the sickly Petronella Elisabeth.

In Hoofman's correspondence with the aforementioned Van Almeloveen, it appears that Koolaart was also regarded as agentive by people outside the household.[85] He included Koolaart in conventional phrases, such as a request to Hoofman to greet both her parents and her daughters on behalf of him. In some letters from 1701, Hoofman kept Van Almeloveen updated about the illness and recovery of her mother, her husband, and her stepdaughter.[86] It also appears from this correspondence that Koolaart herself communicated with Van Almeloveen and other learned men on various occasions. For example, she was said to be looking forward to seeing Van Almeloveen again. After a visit, Hoofman promised him that Koolaart would quickly return a small basket he had brought them earlier.[87] There is also a letter in which Hoofman told Van Almeloveen how unfortunate it was that she was not at home herself when the scholar Henricus Christianus Henninius from Duisburg visited the family. Luckily, she stated, her husband and daughter had been home and able to receive him.[88] As Petronella Elisabeth

82 Koolaart-Harmes to Van Zanten, dd. 23 June 1747.

83 idem.

84 Original: 'Wij behielden mijn zuster bij ons, tot haar god ook weg nam 1737, oud 53 jaaren. Hier verloor weder veel hulp en geselschap, dewijl ik altijd veel sukkelde.' Koolaart-Harmes to Van Zanten, 23 June 1747.

85 For the correspondence, see Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence'; about Van Almoloveen: Saskia Stegeman, *Patronage and Services in the Republic of Letters: The Network of Theodorus Janssonius van Almeloveen (1657-1712)* (APA-Universiteitspers 2005), about the correspondence between Van Almeloveen and Hoofman specifically, see Ouwerkerk, 'Sieraad der geleerde wereld?'; Ouwerkerk, '*Decus reipublicae litterariae*'.

86 See Van Almeloveen to Koolaart-Hoofman, 14 May 1695, in: Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence', 13; Hoofman to Van Almeloveen, 15 March 1701 and 16 May 1701, in: idem, 52, 54.

87 Hoofman to Van Almeloveen, 2 February 1696 and 13 December 1696, in: Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence', 19, 30. About the basket, see Ouwerkerk, '*Decus reipublicae*', 38.

88 Hoofman to Van Almeloveen, 18 November 1698, in: Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence', 44.

was only three or four at the time, this daughter must have been the fifteen-year-old Hester.

Apart from these letters, there are also poems in which Koolaart is mentioned. This suggests she was involved in one of the everyday pastime activities for women of her class and, in particular, her stepmother – reading and writing poetry.[89] Hoofman wrote two birthday poems for her, both in 1716 and in 1724, and she wrote a birthday poem for her mother-in-law on behalf of Hester and Petronella Elisabeth in 1704.[90] Both poems for Koolaart, written on the occasion of her 33rd and 41st birthdays, are short and conventional, congratulating her and wishing that God will allow her to live in virtue and peace, fresh, healthy and full of cheerfulness (Figure 4). The 1724 poem describes how Koolaart has invited many friends to eat cake. The party is presented as more than a family occasion, and Koolaart is the one who takes the lead. Hoofman's perspective is that of a guest at the party. Although Koolaart was still living with her family, this is precisely what one would expect on the occasion of a 41st birthday.

In 1716, Hoofman also wrote a birthday poem for her biological daughter Petronella Elisabeth.[91] It is much longer and less conventional than the poems for Koolaart. Could this difference in length and tone be related to Koolaart's deafness? We do not know, but it is most probable that it was not the only reason. Although Hoofman did refer to Koolaart as her daughter, in the opening lines of the poem for Petronella Elisabeth, Hoofman writes that the latter is her 'sole pledge', which signifies a difference between her relationship with her stepdaughter, on the one hand, and that with her daugher, on the other.[92] Another meaningful difference is age. The poem for Petronella Elisabeth was evidently part of her (religious) education, as it also contains several lessons considered important for a young maiden who would later marry and, as such, be responsible for the continuation of the family line. Petronella turned 20, whereas Koolaart turned 33 in the same year. The fact that Hoofman apparently did not think it was necessary to similarly educate Koolaart in her birthday poem of that same year can be explained by this difference in age, even though 33 was, in principle, not too old to get married.

89 Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2010); Martine van Elk, 'Female Glass Engravers in the Early Modern Dutch Republic', *Renaissance Quarterly* 73:1 (2020) 165-211. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2019.492.

90 The 1716 poem survived in the manuscript collection Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 31. The 1724 poem is mentioned in the manuscript collection's contents list, but did not survive. It was included in *Naagelaatene gedichten*, 92-94. As the 1716 poem is dated and mentions Hester's age, it informs us of the otherwise undocumented date of birth of Hester.

91 'Aan mijn Dogter Hester Koolaart', Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 31.

92 Original: 'eenig pand', 'Aan mijn Dogter Hester Koolaart'. Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 31.

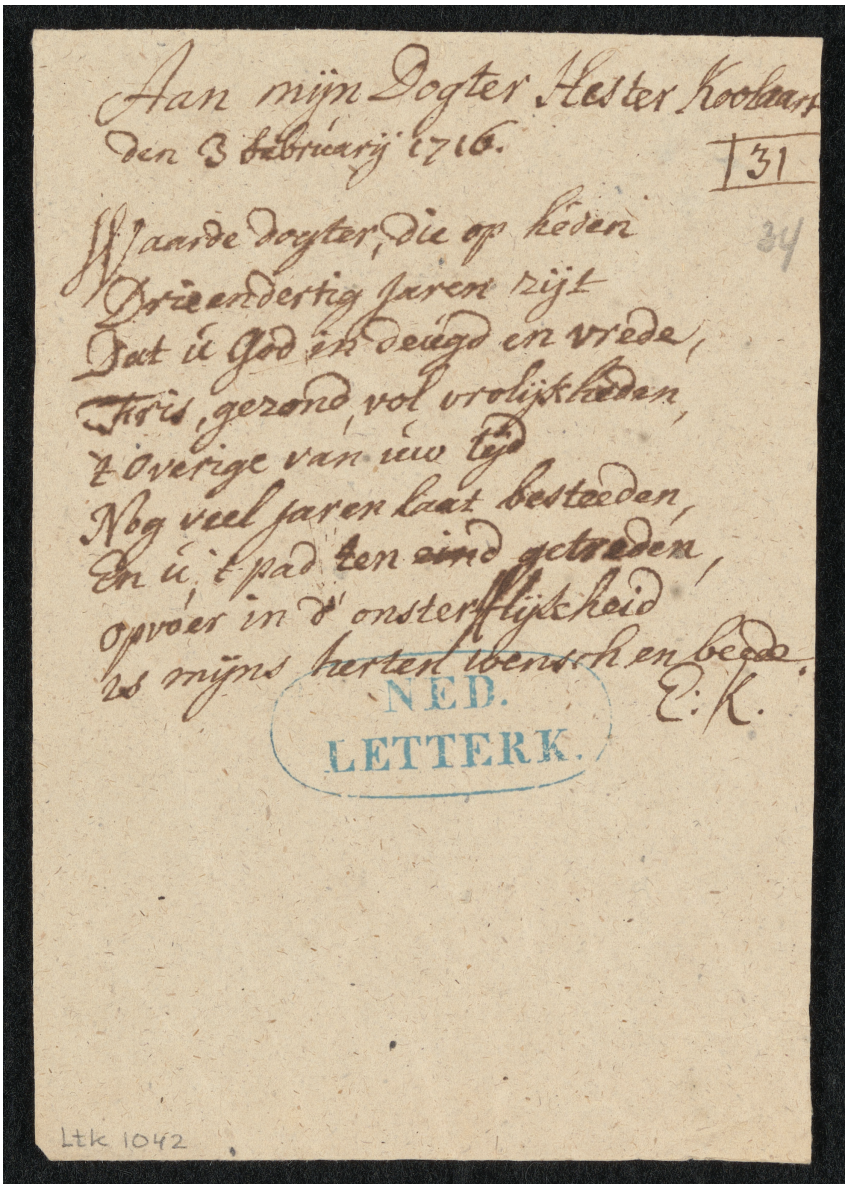

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Figure 4. Birthday poem for Hester Koolaart, written by her stepmother Elisabeth Hoofman on the occasion of her 33rd birthday. Included in the manuscript collection of Hoofman's poetry: Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 34. Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, LTK 1042.

It is therefore also possible that she expected Koolaart not to marry, but to stay within the household for the rest of her life.

Notwithstanding these observations, the two birthday poems also show Hoofman presented Koolaart as one of her daughters. They celebrated her birthday together, as appears from the last lines of the 1724 poem, where all family members are encouraged to sing Koolaart a birthday song, apparently without adapting this family tradition to her deafness. Hoofman's 1704 poem for her daughters' grandmother presents Koolaart as an equal to her sister Petronella Elisabeth, as both are mentioned in its title as the granddaughters on behalf of whom the poem is written.[93] As the poem was written in 1704, Petronella Elisabeth must have been 9 or 10 years old, while Hester was aged 21. For both of them, participating in the creation of the poem must have been possible; however, the title suggests that Hoofman wrote the poem for them. The poem is written in first-person plural and addresses the grandmother in the polite form of the second-person singular. It is written from the family's country home in Lisse, seemingly to apologise for their absence in Haarlem on that festive day. At the end, it mentions how, 'happily chattering, with countless echoes, they will thank God's goodness' and 'shout; may grandma live a long life!'[94] It is a conventional ending, but meaningful given Koolaart's deafness. Hoofman here presents Koolaart's participation in something as shouting birthday wishes as a natural matter of fact. As was the case in mentioning the singing of a birthday song for Koolaart, she was presented as fully participating in family life. We can, of course, only speculate whether she really did, and we do not know whether Hoofman discussed the poem with her daughters or if they even wrote it together. Still, the poem must have been regarded by contemporaries as the result of a family activity in which Koolaart and her much younger stepsister both had some form of agency.

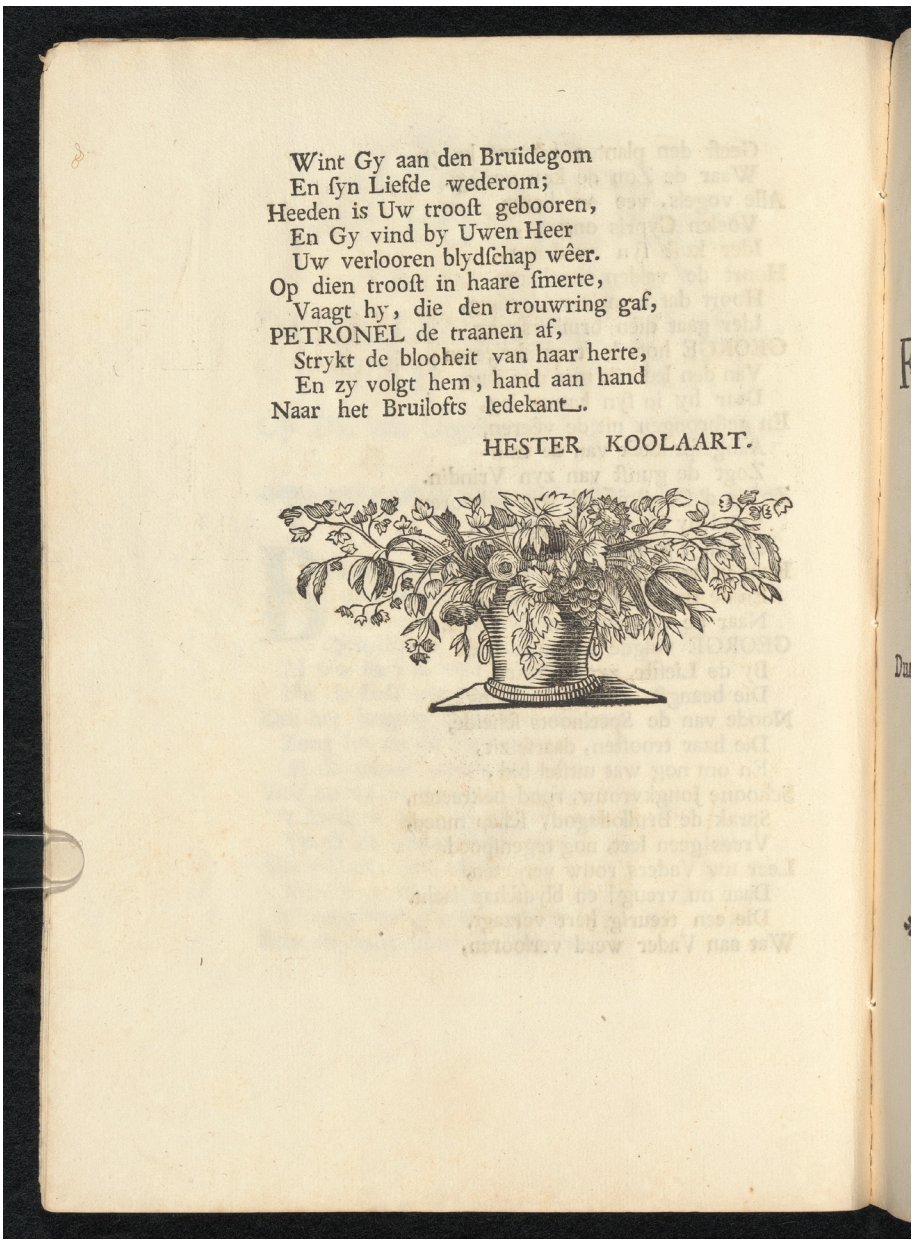
The most intriguing example of Koolaart's presentation as an agentive family member is a poem with her name in the collection of wedding poems published on the occasion of her sister's wedding in 1734. It is a small collection, including poems by Elisabeth Hoofman and friends and colleagues of the groom, the Kassel court printer.[95] The second poem in the collection is presented as written by Hester Koolaart (Figure 5).[96] Surprisingly, however, this text was in fact written by Joost van den Vondel, the most renowned

93 'Voor Hester en Elisabeth Koolaart op de 72ste verjaardag van haar grootmoeder HESTER KOOLAART', in: Koolaart-Hoofman, *Nederduitsche en Latijnsche gedichten*, 81. Petronella is referred to by her second name, Elisabeth, which appears to have been a common practice, as evidenced by a letter Hoofman wrote to Van Almeloveen on 7 November 1702. Cf. Ouwerkerk (ed.), 'The Correspondence', 84.

94 Original: 'Onder' t vrolijk nagebaauw, van ontelbre wederklanken, zullen God's goedheid danken' and 'roepen, lang moet grootmoêr leeven!', 'Voor Hester en Elisabeth Koolaart'.

95 *Hoog- en Nederduitse huwelykszangen voor de heer George Harmes, en juffrouw Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart* (Kassel: s.p., 1734).

96 Hester Koolaart, 'Ter bruiloft van de heer bruidegom George Harmes, en de juffrouw



Wint Gy aan den Bruidegom
En ſyn Liefde wederom;
Heeden is Uw trooſt gebooren,
En Gy vind by Uwen Heer
Uw verlooren blydſchap wêer.
Op dien trooſt in haare ſmerte,
Vaagt hy, die den trouwring gaf,
PETRONEL de traanen af,
Strykt de blooheit van haar herte,
En zy volgt hem, hand aan hand
Naar het Bruilofts ledekant.

HESTER KOOLAART.

▲

Figure 5. This is the end of the wedding poem signed by Hester Koolaart, as published in the booklet *Hoog- en Nederduitse huwelykszangen voor de heer George Harmes, en juffrouw Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart, by haarlieder wettelyke vereeniging, in Cassel den 12. van Oogstmaand 1734* (s.l., s.n.). Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, PORTEF qu 6: 12.

Dutch poet of the seventeenth century. Vondel, who died long before, had written the poem on the occasion of a 1658 wedding in Hoorn, and it was published that same year in a popular poetry collection called *Apollos harp*.[97] Of course, we do not know whether Koolaart had selected and adapted the poem herself or in collaboration, or that Hoofman did it for her, but it was presented as Koolaart's own work.

The poem adheres to the conventions of the genre, which originate in the classical tradition.[98] Moreover, as the 1658 wedding for which Vondel composed the poem was celebrated shortly after the death of one of the couple's parents, it perfectly fitted in with the occasion of Petronella Elisabeth's marriage. The conventional element of the bride's reluctance to marry in this poem is connected to her grief over the loss of her father (in Vondel's original poem the mother) and in the end, the wedding is presented as a consolation: 'What was lost with Father, / you win with the groom'.[99] In this way, the poem echoes Hoofman's poem, which also refers to the death of Pieter Koolaart. As the poem fitted the occasion so well, the only changes made were replacements of names, places, and dates, which sometimes, because of rhyme, led to another choice of words, but the meaning stayed the same.[100]

The poem elaborates extensively on imagery drawn from nature. It is striking that in these metaphors, sound plays an important role. For example, this is how the poem starts:

> Wedding, wedding. Follow the God Hymen
> Now the lark in its flight,
> From a gentle sky,
> Twitters, and necessitates rhyming
> All that lives in fields and woods.[101]

bruid Petronella Elisabeth Koolaart, op den XII. van Oogstmaand MDCCXXXIV', in: *Hoog- en Nederduitse huwelykszangen*.

97 Joost van den Vondel, 'Ter Bruilofte van den E.E. Heere Ventidius Riccen, Kastelein en hooftofficier der stede Purmerent, Baljuw van de Beemster en Wormer, &c. en de E.E. Jongkvrouwe Haesje Augustyns', in: *Apollos harp bestaande in Nederduytsche mengelrymen van byzondere stoffen* (Amsterdam: Jan Hendricksz. en Jan Rieuwertsz, 1658) 284-286.

98 For an introduction to the genre and its conventions, see Nina Geerdink, 'The Appropriation of the Genre of Nuptial Poetry by Katharina Lescailje (1649-1711)', in: Anke Gilleir, Alicia C. Montoya, and Suzan van Dijk (eds.), *Women Writing Back / Writing Women Back: Transnational Perspectives from the Late Middle Ages to the Dawn of the Modern Era* (Brill 2010) 163-200, 166-168. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004184633.i-384.48.

99 Original: 'Wat aan Vader werd verlooren, / Wint Gy aan den Bruidegom'. Koolaart, 'Ter bruiloft'.

100 See, for example, Vondel's lines 5 and 6, in which he refers to spring and the home towns of bride and groom, Hoorn and Purmerend: 'Al wat lucht schept, daer de lent / Horen trouwt aen Purmerent' (Vondel, 'Ter Bruilofte'). In Koolaart's version, this is 'Al wat leefd in veld en woud / Nu de Fuld' aan' t Spaaren trouwt' (Koolaart, 'Ter bruiloft').

101 Original: 'Bruiloft bruiloft. Volgd God Hymen, / Nu de leeurik in zyn vlugt / Uit een liefelyker lugt,

In describing how the skylark's chirping makes every living creature rhyme, Koolaart implies she herself is encouraged to write this poem by the skylark's singing as well. Further on, the poem inspires the audience to listen carefully in order to observe how all animals mate at this time of year. In the description of the groom's 'conquest' of the bride, the skylark retakes the lead: it is its chirping that encourages the groom to go and see Petronella Elisabeth. The inclusion of this poem presents Hester Koolaart – whether through her own agency or that of her stepmother – not only as participating in intellectual activities within the extended circle of family and friends, but also, emphatically, as being part of the world of the hearing.

Since it was an occasional publication intended for the German guests at the Kassel wedding, the likelihood that anyone would notice the poem's indebtedness to Vondel's original was small; however, it is also possible that it was commonly acknowledged that Koolaart had not written the poem herself. However it may be, the inclusion of Koolaart in the collection of poetry on the occasion of her sister's wedding is a case in point for her agency in an intellectually oriented family and the larger, upper-class circles to which they belonged. If we were to be more skeptical, we could also regard the poem as part of her stepmother's ongoing project of presenting her as such, since Hoofman, as the mother of the bride and the first author of the collection, must have had a say in the inclusion of Koolaart's poem. In this case, however, it is impossible to pinpoint the precise balance between the agency Koolaart might have perceived and the representation of said agency.

Nevertheless, the eyewitness reports of the demonstrations of her skills clearly show that Koolaart was agentive in her means of communication. Van Limborch's description, for example, not only shows how the demonstration was a well-prepared performance, but also enables us to distill some understanding of Koolaart's language practices before and after Ammann's instruction, including her signing. Deaf people growing up and living with their hearing family members outside a context of deaf education commonly use a form of home signing.[102] Living in a stable communicative environment throughout a deaf person's life may lead to considerable lexical expansion and complexification of home signing. This was likely to be the case for Koolaart too, who spent her entire life in the same household. Indeed, Van Limborch, who had known Koolaart from early infancy, notes that 'she understood and expressed herself entirely by nods and gestures, and in this she showed considerable adroitness.'[103] Moreover, the use of home signs did not end with

/ Quinkeleert, en noopt tot rymen / Al wat leefd in veld en woud.' Koolaart, 'Ter bruiloft'.

102 Shun-chiu Yau, 'Création de langues gestuelles chez des sourds isolés', *Cahiers de Linguistique-Asie Orientale* 17:1 (1988) 151-154; Reed, 'Sign Networks', 627-661; Jill Jepson, 'Two Sign Languages in a Single Village in India', *Sign Language Studies* 70:1 (1991) 47-59. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sls.1991.0016.

103 Van Limborch, Letter 1393.

Ammann's training. Koolaart and her father appear to have maintained at least some form of manual communication. Van Limborch describes how, during a demonstration, Koolaart was cued by 'a certain sign from her father, which she understood', upon which she uttered 'I am deaf, but I am not dumb'.[104]

Van Limborch furthermore notes Koolaart's lipreading skills: 'She made out words from the movement of her father's mouth.'[105] Also, Van Dale, who retained an interest in Koolaart's 'case' and frequently corresponded with their shared acquaintance Van Almeloveen about the Koolaart family, mentions her lipreading abilities in an exaggerated account of her skills, stating that she could lipread even in the dark.[106] In a footnote to his 1693 wedding poem, Storm mentions that deaf-born Koolaart, through Ammann's training, 'already contrives sufficiently by means of speech'.[107] This phrasing suggests that she did not rely on speaking exclusively, or even predominantly, and that she continued to sign alongside speaking. Indeed, there are indications that other deaf people who learned to speak through formal training did not rely on speaking in their adult lives. For example, Alexander Popham, a student of John Wallis, was referred to as non-speaking in a document made later in his life.[108] Similarly, D'Azy d'Etavigny, a pupil of Jacob Rodrigues Pereira in France, stopped using speech later in life, relying on signing and writing.[109] Whereas Koolaart became famous as a 'speaking deaf' and Ammann's star pupil, she had developed an effective form of signing, both before and during her training, which she continued to use after she had learnt to speak.

Conclusions

As a deaf woman at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, Hester Koolaart lived a rather eventful life. As a deaf signer who learned to speak, read, and write through Ammann's training, she became an object of international scientific curiosity, showcasing her various language skills in staged performances. From an empiricist's viewpoint, she was the living refutation of the medieval understanding that muteness in deaf people could only be cured by godly intervention. The connections that her parents had in the Republic of Letters probably contributed to this effect, as did her father's

104 Van Limborch, Letter 1393. This strikingly contrasts with one of the key phrases Alexander Popham, John Wallis' pupil, had learned, which was: 'I can not hear or talk', as cited in Oates, 'Speaking in Hands'.

105 Van Limborch, Letter 1393.

106 Mandelbrote, 'Witches and Forgers', 283.

107 'zich reeds in het noodige met spreeken behelpt', Storm, 'Ter bruiloft', C4r.

108 Cram and Maat, *Teaching Language*.

109 Yann Cantin and Angélique Cantin, *Dictionnaire biographique des grands sourds en France. Les Silencieux de France (1450-1920)* (Archives & Culture 2017).

financial support to publish Ammann's book. Hoofman further fostered the success story of her stepdaughter's developing literacy by involving her in her writings and presenting her as a (co-)author on festive family occasions. After the family moved to Kassel, Hoofman strategically used Koolaart's story in her solicitation of patronage.

In this article, we have analysed the ways Hester Koolaart was paraded to interested scholarly audiences, and have contrasted the somewhat passive image of her that arises from these practices with sources revealing glimpses of her agency in everyday life. Studies on deaf people involved in early deaf education suggest that the displaying of Koolaart and her skills was not unique, as appears from various examples we mentioned. In her case, however, we can bring together sources that document her presence in the Republic of Letters with sources related to her position within the family and household. Some of the sources discussed here have been newly discovered by us, but most were already known. Up until now, however, they had only appeared in scattered studies touching on topics as diverse as the Republic of Letters, deaf education, or Dutch poetry. Koolaart has never been the focus of these studies. Examining cases such as Koolaart's in detail is necessary, given the lack of awareness and documentation of deaf people during the period before the institutionalisation of deaf education.

Having done so for Hester Koolaart, we can now attempt to understand what our findings imply about her social position and her sense of belonging, as a deaf person in a largely hearing context. Similar to probably all of the deaf painters introduced earlier, Koolaart grew up as a signer and continued to sign throughout her life. Like for most deaf artists, there is no direct evidence that she was in regular contact with other deaf signers. Johannes Thopas was active in Haarlem for a short time, but given his advanced age and their difference in religion, it is unlikely that they knew each other. In assessing the likelihood of Koolaart having had contact with other deaf signers, it is essential to recognise that she led an economically privileged yet sheltered life, living in the household of her parents and sister and being financially supported by her cousins throughout her life. For Koolaart, being literate and able to speak seems to have contributed to her status as an academic curiosity rather than to the increase of her social mobility. She was regarded as exceptional, not because she was deaf, but mostly because she had learnt to speak. It must have been *despite* her fame that she had opportunities to feel a sense of belonging within the context of her hearing family.

The life trajectories of deaf individuals in the Dutch Republic varied significantly, depending on local laws, their gender, class, socio-economic position, and capacities, as well as on their contacts with other deaf people and their exposure to signing and speaking. Hopefully, the current trend among historians to study deaf people and deafness, including those from the period before the institutionalisation of deaf education, will make more biographies available, enabling us to broaden our understanding of deaf networks and

contacts, as well as the agency and senses of belonging of deaf people in early modern Europe.

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