

[0729] **‘ALTITEN UNWENNICH’/ FOREVER HOMESICK:  
YPK FAN DER FEAR AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Hanneke Hoekstra

*Ypk fan der Fear and Frisian literature*

One of the most important post-war Frisian women-writers was L. Post-Beuckens who has left us a considerable oeuvre ranging from novels, short stories, plays and poetry to autobiography. Lipkje Post-Beuckens published her literary work as Ypk fan der Fear, her mother's maiden name. Her poetry was published under the pseudonym of Ella Wassenaer. For years she wrote a column in *Friesch Dagblad* as Frou X and she contributed to *De Stim fan Fryslân* as Beitske Bûterblom. She was born in 1908 in Sondel, Gaasterland, where her parents had a farm. Later, when she was about four years old, the family moved to Heerenveen. Lipkje Beuckens, however, could not forget the beautiful countryside of Gaasterland and she went back every summer to stay with their former neighbors, the Van der Goot family. She was educated as a teacher at the Christian Teacher Training College ('Christelijke Kweekschool') in Leeuwarden. After the war Lipkje Post-Beuckens and her family lived in Veenwouden. She worked as a teacher at the teacher training colleges in Dokkum and Drachten. In an interview with Tiny Mulder in *Hwer hast it wei?* (1971) Ypk fan der Fear comments on her work: 'I stand beside the road and observe how people exist. This I put in writing'. And 'There are a few things which fascinate me: love, the faith of people and their relationship with God'. These themes form the backbone of her oeuvre. Lipkje Post-Beuckens died in 1983.

Her work was a topic of discussion during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in reviews in the Frisian press and in Frisian literary journals *De Tsjerne*, *Trotwaer* and *Hjir*. Her work was generally received as thematically interesting but aesthetically problematical. The critical frame of reference of the prominent Frisian literary critic Anne Wadman in particular was influenced by the formal aesthetics of Ter Braak and Du Perron.<sup>1</sup> No scholarly work has been published on Fan der Fear's oeuvre so far.<sup>2</sup> In general, there is no substantive critical work available on modern Frisian literature, aside from reviews and general histories. The historian of Frisian contemporary literature has to find a viable frame of reference to

<sup>1</sup> J. Piebenga, *Koarte skiednis fan de Fryske skriftekennisse*, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> This article is an edited excerpt from my dissertation on the literary work of L. Post-Beuckens.

describe the particular function and meaning of the author(s), in this instance Ypk fan der Fear. An approach to the literary text as essentially autonomous, which is still a dominant paradigm within literary criticism, would fail to identify many aspects of the work scrutinized, in particular its location in history and tradition.

In this short reflection on Fan der Fear's autobiographical work I have relied on the insights of feminist literary criticism which in my view have added considerably to the understanding of the workings of literature in general and that of the value of women's literature in particular. Using contemporary literary and historical theory I seek to establish a different critical language that is more sensitive to the diverse and complicated aspects of Ypk fan der Fear's literary project. Her novels are interesting in historical and literary terms for their engagement in both the themes and problems of a small literature with a young tradition, and a general literary tradition which has been predominantly male so far. As such my tentative analysis is still concerned with formulating an evaluative stance towards Ypk fan der Fear. However, this evaluation is bound to be more positive than Wadman and his contemporaries would have it at the time.

### *Protestant faith*

An important motif in Ypk fan der Fear's oeuvre is the thematization of the familiar, 'it eigene'. In this respect she continues in the tradition of prewar Frisian pastoral literature.<sup>3</sup> Her work is inspired by a strong 'regional sense' ('regionaal gevoel'). Her novels explore the native ground in the mothertongue along with the protestant faith of her upbringing, which conflicts with her developing female desire. Gaasterland, the landscape of her childhood years, forms the recognizable backdrop of quite a few of her novels.

Ypk fan der Fear was taken with the mystical quality of this region in the Southwest of Friesland. She was particularly interested in the great number of folktales which were still told and which she has documented in *Land en volk van Gaast en Klif* (1947), her book on the local folklore of Gaasterland. J. Piebenga in a study on the mentality ('folkskarakter') dominant in the Southwest of Friesland (1953) relates the mystical quality of Gaasterland to its religious history. Since early modern time many Mennonites have found shelter in the Southwestern part of Friesland. They have always had - in the Anabaptist tradition - a very direct ('bevindelijke') experience of God. Later on, the movement we refer to as 'It Fryske Reveil' (1834-1886) found many followers in this region. The calvinist ministers who preached religious 'reveil' did so by emphasizing the individual qualities of the faithful and stimulated a pietist relation to God (Piebenga

---

<sup>3</sup>. See for an analysis of this tradition Trinus Riemersma, *Proza van het platteland*.

1953:49).<sup>4</sup> Piebenga observes that liturgical innovation and the use of formal prayers would not mean a lot to the people; one goes to church to be moved, to be touched in the heart ('Liturgyske fornijing en it brûken fan formuliergebeden sille de minsken net safolle sizze; men komt yn tsjerke dat it hert rekke wurde sil, it moat jin yn it moed taeste') (Piebenga 1953:61).

Ypk fan der Fear grew up in the safe environment of the orthodox-protestant 'pillar' ('protestantse zuil'), where the dogma of unity of Word and deed ensured order and virtue. People represented their experiences and behaviour in accordance with Biblical stories. Life was virtuous but ridden with fear and guilt. Ypk fan der Fear writes about this fear of the imminent coming of Christ (the Day of Judgement) in her childhood recollection *In fatsoenlik famke* (1984).

[...] Bang as in wezeling wie ik, as der oer praat waard. As ik noch by it âlder wurden bûtendoar ris in ûngewoan lûd hearde, miende ik al, dat de bazún klonk en it wie in rêst as dat lûd thúsbrocht wurde koe. Oan hokker kant soe ik ien kear stean? Der soe in stien fan myn hert falle, as Jezus tsjin my sizze soe: 'Kom dû hjir mar by myn skiep.' Mar ik wie sûndich wie my yndruid, as ik gjin gewoane beneambere sûnden dien hie, dan wie der noch de erfsûnde, dêr't ik oan skuldich wie. Dêrom moasten wy nea ferjitte te freegjen om ferjouwing fan skuld en dat fersûme ik dan ek net. Allinnich, fergripen lykas myn frjemde fantasijen, doarst ik net neame, al wist de Alwittende God dêr, sûnder bycht, ek alles wol fan (51).

[I was really frightened when they talked about it. Even when I was older, if I heard a strange sound outside, I thought it was the Trumpet of Doom. It would be a great comfort when I could identify that sound. On which side would I be one day? My heart would be relieved when Jesus would tell me: 'Come to me to my flock of sheep'. But I was a sinner they had told me time and again. Even if I had not committed any ordinary sins, there was original sin I was guilty of. Therefore we should never forget to ask for forgiveness and I would not. Only crimes like my strange fantasies I would not dare to mention, although without my confession God knew anyway.]

In the end one could only be saved by God's grace. Physical experiences were taboo. The body may have been a temple of the Holy Spirit, but one would rather

---

<sup>4</sup>. See also G. A. Wumkes, *It Fryske Reveil yn portretten*.

not enter it.<sup>5</sup> Spiritual experience should be sought to fight the temptation of the flesh. The sensual, poetical, subjective and feminine qualities of life were rejected. In her autobiography *In fatsoenlik famke* (A Decent Girl) as well as in the fictional autobiography *De deade by de libbene* (The dead with the living) this orthodox background is represented as troublesome with respect to issues of sexuality, divorce and female autonomy.

### *On autobiography*

In autobiographies personal histories are written. Some critics like to think of certain famous autobiographies as representative of a whole era such as Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. For women, this notion of the genre poses particular problems as it is usually male life stories that are treated as symbols of biography. Although since early modern times women have represented their life in writing, their experience is usually not granted a 'representative' status either historically or artistically. In general, a growing interest among historians as well as literary critics in ego-documents (a term coined by the Dutch historian J. Presser in the sixties when he was researching the prosecution of the Jews during the Second World War), like memoirs, letters, diaries, etc. can be observed.<sup>6</sup> Ego-documents are valuable as historical sources for their information on 'personal' life, the everyday experience of common people.

Literary criticism's renewed interest in non-fictional forms of life-writing has a slightly different background. Autobiography was considered until recently a minor literary genre, precisely for its non-fictional, historical character.<sup>7</sup> In fact there is considerable difficulty in formulating the exact boundaries of autobiography as a literary genre and distinguishing it from 'memoir', letters or novels with a first person narrator. Historians feel uneasy with the artistic character of the writer's autobiography or what they often call 'autobiographical novel'. The term novel indicates that historians regard these writings as essentially 'fictional' and consequently not very useful as a 'factual' source. Ypk fan der Fear's *In fatsoenlik*

---

<sup>5</sup>. See e.g. A. Bouman and Thijs Booy, *Gereformeerden, waarheen? Inleiding tot een gesprek over de koers van het gereformeerde leven* (1951), or *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land*, vol. 10, *Friesland*, (Kampen: Kok, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>. In Friesland this interest was taken up by the historian dr. O. Vries who initiated a project to collect all Frisian 'ego-documents'. This resulted in the publication of *Repertorium fan egodokuminten oangeande Fryslân* (1992) edited by Gosse Blom.

<sup>7</sup>. e.g. James Olney's edited collection *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980). Other much cited works are: William C. Spengeman, *The forms of Autobiography; Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (1980), Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960) and Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie' (1954), translated and reprinted in Olney.

*famke* has been listed in Blom's *Repertorium fan egodokuminten oangeande Fryslân*. However, Blom remarks that only a few 'autobiographical novels' have been included. Still, like other ego-documents the autobiographical novel can be of historical interest precisely because of the mentality and world view which informs the self representation. The genre can be considered as the literary form reflecting an individualistic concept of identity as it came to flourish in the nineteenth century. Karl Weintraub regards the concept of the enlightened individual a historical ideal. According to Weintraub 'the recognition of individualism is the most historicized form of the 'I'. A selfconscious individual can only tell her story in relation to the history of her world. As such the autobiography as historical form fits a historical selfunderstanding (Weintraub 1989). In this vision the autobiography befits the consolidation of a bourgeois culture. As history moves on we can see that different forms of culture and self-understanding develop, of which postmodernism is probably the most extreme 'Weltanschauung.' Various outlooks on life, whether bourgeois, working class, Frisian or female, find form in different narratives with the 'reality' of the inner life as vantage point. Literary critics agree that the representation of the inner life and not so much the 'factuality' of this life is the most distinguished feature of the autobiography. Bernd Neumann defines autobiography as the modern form of the personal life description (as opposed to the premodern 'res gestae' and the one-dimensional listing of public deeds in memoir) (Neumann 1989:29).

In the history of the women's movement the idea that 'the personal is political' did initially inform feminist scholarship as it developed in the seventies at the universities. Feminist literary historians have always been interested in female ego documents for knowledge of the 'female writing life' and 'female identity' postulating of a separate female literary tradition as a working hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> This epistemology was strictly empirical: how is the female experience of exclusion represented in literature and literary criticism? In literary studies the novel has lost its superior status as the genre investigating a developing humanity. A more historical or 'anthropological' approach to literature is advocated by theorists like Wolfgang Iser and may also account for the current interest in non fictional genres.<sup>9</sup> Autobiography has proved to be an excellent genre for the

---

<sup>8</sup>. e.g Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. London: Virago Press, 1978.

<sup>9</sup>. In an article called 'Towards a Literary Anthropology' Wolfgang Iser suggests that the aesthetic ideal that has informed literary criticism should be replaced by an inquiry into the function of literature within a social or historical context. 'No one will deny the indexical value of literature both for history and society, but what emerges almost incidentally from this fact is the question why such a mirror as literature should exist, and how it enables us to find out things. Since literature as medium has been with us more or less since the beginning of recorded time, its

presence must presumably meet certain anthropological needs. What are these needs, and what does this medium reveal to us about our own anthropological make-up' (210). Ultimately a literary anthropology should contribute to a theory of culture (227).

testing of all sorts of theories on identity formation. The private has become public and we seem to live in a 'bekenteniscultuur' (culture of confession). And besides, to speak with Virginia Woolf, 'who can say where life ends and literature begins?' (1925:381) What is the relationship between literature and the 'reality' it refers to? I argue that the representation of the female life in the writing of Ypk fan der Fear is historical and gendered both at a psychological and a formal level. This analysis is not meant as an aesthetic disclaimer. On the contrary, the 'poetics' she develops in her novels discussed hereafter speak for the whole of her oeuvre.

In 1959 Ypk fan der Fear published *De deade by de libbene*, a fictional autobiographical narrative of the life of an ordinary woman during the first half of this century. The narrator, Swopkje Rosier, grows up in the orthodox calvinist milieu of a Frisian farming community. She marries her cousin because her mother, who feels strongly about her family, insists on it, but divorces him shortly after. She escapes her upbringing by eloping with a handsome businessman to New York. However, her severance is not successful. She cannot forget her family and her hometown. In the end she returns to her native village to write her memoirs and to be buried there for she is terminally ill. The novel *De deade by de libbene* was received with both literary acclaim and scorn by Friesland's intellectual community. Despite its potential for 'greatness' the novel was criticised by some for its lack of form, restriction in plot, general inconsistencies and insufficient authorial distance. Anne Wadman declares the novel a failure, smothered in too many thoughts and feelings, motivated by an inexplicable urge to be exhaustive.<sup>10</sup> The idea explored in the novel that one cannot emancipate oneself from one's background, that one is at the same time condemned and saved by it, contradicts the general idea that postwar Frisian literature should free itself from its provincial and ideological origins and become 'mature.'

Ypk fan der Fear's autobiography of her girlhood and adolescence *In fatsoenlik famke* was published posthumously in 1984. It is interesting to note that the book ends with maturity. It is a fascinating history of girlhood in the rural north and forms a good clarification of the recurrent themes in Fan der Fear's oeuvre. As I have emphasized before, the vision that connects both the early novel and the late autobiography is not so much 'immature' or merely indicative of a 'small literature' but is gender inflected. The insights developed by feminist literary critical practice will be especially helpful in discussing the motivation of fan der Fear's *De deade by de libbene* and *In fatsoenlik famke*.

---

<sup>10</sup>. In 'Dr. Anne Wadman bespreekt: *De deade by de libbene* door Ypk fan der Fear'.

*Feminist Criticism*

Feminist critics like Estelle Jelinek, Susan Stanford Friedman and Shari Benstock have argued the critical practice on autobiography so far has not been appreciative of women's autobiographical writing.<sup>11</sup> Many women chose the memoir as a form for their literary expression at a time when it was considered a lesser genre than poetry or fiction. Their 'personal' form ensured their continued marginalization in the literary theatre, but it also ensured their survival as they were not considered a serious threat to the canon of great books. It is in these written 'Lives of the Obscure' that Virginia Woolf locates the very life of literature. 'They are the dressingrooms, the workshops, the wings, the sculleries, the bubbling cauldrons, where life seethes and steams and is forever on the boil' (1925:381/82). Feminist critics propose other venues for interpreting autobiographical writings by women. Feminist critics of the genre seem to agree that male autobiographical writing as well as male theoreticians of the genre valorize an ideology based on the enlightened individualistic ideal of liberal humanist thought. Critics like Friedman, Jelinek or Sidonie Smith find that certain famous, critically acclaimed autobiographies (like Rousseau's *Confessions*) are in fact 'important men stories'; male stories about self achievement. The critic Georges Gusdorf formulates autobiography as 'the literary consequence of the rise of individualism as ideology' consolidated in the nineteenth century (Friedman 1988:35).<sup>12</sup> This historical vision of the genre makes a feminist critique plausible. The 'essence' of the 19th century bourgeois woman was not defined as individualistic. She was represented in the private sphere as the helper of husband and children, as numerous analyses of 19th century bourgeois life have argued. The problem is that literary critics have taken up the 19th century ideal of the genre as a standard for contemporary autobiography as well. A conception of self that problematizes this 19th century vision of man is considered unworthy of the genre. Feminist critics find that this 'autobiographical' model has seriously troubled female autobiographical efforts and has established 'a critical bias that leads to the (mis)reading and marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities'

---

<sup>11</sup>. e.g. Estelle Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography* (1980). The American feminist project to redeem female autobiographical writing has been further sustained by Domna Stanton's edited collection *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography* (1984), Sidonie Smith's book *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (1987), Shari Benstock's collection of essays on women's autobiographical writing *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writing* and Brodzki and Schenck's *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, both published in 1988.

<sup>12</sup>. See Georges Gusdorf (1954), 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' in James Olney ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, pp. 28-48.

(Friedman 1988:34). Modernist/ postmodernist thinking in general has had its counterpart in the modern autobiography. The literary process of 'writing' a self instead of representing a curriculum vitae has become the foremost investment of the genre. Autobiography now has become an existential act. This is reflected in more experimental forms of autobiographical writing like *Les mots* (1964) by Jean Paul Sartre. Women writing themselves and feminist theoretical reflections on the genre can be seen as part of a critique of the historical ideal of the autonomous individual which the genre originally represented. As the work of Fan der Fear shows writing the self can be motivated by the lack of something, a quest for origin perhaps. The modernist consciousness would certainly include a female sense of self that writes itself differently from men, as women can be said to have a different relationship to history from men. However, it remains difficult to identify which aspects of the text are specifically female.

Some feminist critics consider women's autobiographical stance more 'relational' emphasizing the maternal impulse and the relation of self to others, whereas male autobiographies seem to be rather stories of 'selfreliance'. Female autobiographical writings are further characterized as 'different' from male writing in being less linear and chronological but more 'fragmented' and 'disconnected' (Jelinek 1980:17).

### *Homesick for the self*

These characteristics mark Fan der Fear's autobiographical writings as well. *The Dead with the Living* is the first person narrative of the life of Swopkje Rosier, a woman from a Frisian farming community. She considers her life in retrospect; there is no future as she is dying. The written account of her life is confessional in tone and the issue of guilt is an important theme in the novel. She feels particularly guilty over her divorce as well as over her struggle with her calvinist faith. A sense of psychological suffocation permeates the novel as the narrator seems to be haunted by the memories of the members of her strange and overreligious family, who inhabited the village of her childhood and have been dead for a long time. As she remarks while (re)writing her life:

Hwa't lykas ik de rekken fan syn libben opmakket, sil fan somlike dingen to folle, fan oare to min jaen, [...] hwant hy is op syn breklik ûnthâld oanwiisd. [...] Mar de dingen, dy't my as bern yn de nederklits holden hawwe, binne deryn beitele. It docht jin goed, om se ien kear op papier to setten (83).

[She, who like me, writes an account of her life, will emphasize some things too much and others too little, for one depends on one's failing



memory. But the events that prevented me as a child from growing up unencumbered, are chiselled upon me. It feels good once to put them into writing.]

The author's childhood experiences stand out and gain metaphorical meaning in relation to the rest of her life. The same childhood recollections also return in her 1984 autobiography *A Decent Girl*, which narrates her coming of age in a Frisian village at the beginning of this century. The two books are therefore closely interconnected. As a little girl the writer is happy within the safe bosom of her family and her father's farm. Gradually she discovers the wonders of the natural world and she awakens sexually as well. Her parents' calvinist orthodox religion and their frequent conversations about God, sin, grace as well as heaven and hell make her at an early age afraid of death. God and His service were intertwined with death and funerals. Her mother is always in mourning and dressed in black, the family lives next to the graveyard, and the struggle of villagers in the face of death is a popular topic of discussion with her relatives. Her naive discovery of the natural world is troubled by the awareness of death and dying.

Heit naam my ek wol mei it doarp yn. Ien kear nei de see. Ik klattere efter him oan de seedyk op. Heit stie in skoft stil oer it wetter te stoarjen, miskien hat er weromtocht oan syn farren as skippersfeint. Hy fertelde, dat de wrâld noch folle grutter en wider wie as de see sa fier't wy sjen koene. Dêr bebroep it my fan, it makke my ûnwis, ik woe dêr wei, mar it wie der ek moai. It betsjutte wer in barst yn it dekkor fan myn bestean, dêr't wat langer, wat faker knippen en flânsen yn kamen. Dêr troch te sjen wie net noflik. De rêst kaam pas werom, as de gatten wer ticht sieten. It wiene de gatten fan sykte, dea, begraffenis net allinne, no ek fan it ûnbekende, de fierte, en fan it ernstich praten fan heit en mem oer it leauwe, oer God, Kristus, de ferlosser (22/23).

[Father (Heit) would take me to the village. Once to the sea. [...] He told me that the world was even larger than the sea as far we could see. This frightened me, it made me insecure, I wanted to leave but the sea was also beautiful. It meant another tear in the fabric of my existence that began to show more and more holes. Watching through them was not comfortable. The rest would not come back until the holes had been mended. It were not only the holes of illness, death, funerals, now also of the far and unknown and of the serious conversation of father and mother on faith, and God and Christ the Saviour.]

This calvinist preoccupation with death that threatens the world of the little girl

is more dramatically represented in *The Dead with the Living*. In the light of the generic convention (Bildungsroman), one might expect the 'I' to narrate her successful escape from this suffocating Calvinist, rural milieu by marriage or a career. Yet the narrator returns in the end to her native village to join the dead of her youth. Wadman considered this ending an artistic failure with respect to the theme of emancipation. I would rather suggest that this narrative and its ending is better read as an exploration of gendered identity and the autobiographical act than as a version of a familiar novelistic plot.

The narrator is unable to unchain herself from the memory of her religious mother, who has died long before, and her peculiar sisters. She buys an old coachhouse in her village. At the sight of the leaves of the mulberry trees in front of the house she sighs, 'Ik woe dat ik noch siderûpen yn in doaske hie/' 'I wish I still had silkworms in a box', indicating the wish to recover her childhood, a world that she was able to contain and control like the worms in the box. The life she writes then is the drama of lost girlhood; growing up for the author meant a gradual loss of self, as she distanced herself from her childhood village.

The quest for an 'original' self not yet marked by the sinful world is a common theme within literature among writers and poets, for example in Du Perron's famous poem 'Het kind dat wij waren', and is not necessarily gendered. Within the genre of autobiography childhood and adolescence are central, for they ultimately determine the entrance of the individual into the public world. In this respect autobiographies represent 'rites of passage'. The more 'fictional' form for describing a sentimental education is of course the Bildungsroman. Goethe ends his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* with his departure for Weimar which meant the end of his youth. However, it seems that women more often experience their adult life not as a final formation of identity but as a by loss (of identity).<sup>13</sup> Their autobiographical project is then not inspired by reconstruction but by recovery of that lost self. Patricia Meyer Spacks, writing on women's autobiography, finds that, for girls particularly, childhood is often the happiest time of their lives. She suggests that growing up, getting married or remaining a spinster, means 'relative loss of self'. Little girls are relatively free of the anxieties they are to experience when becoming adult 'independent' women (Spacks 1981:48). Carolyn Heilbrun also notes that in many autobiographies by women the accounts of childhood experiences are often the most vibrant, imaginative sections (Heilbrun 1988:72).

---

<sup>13</sup>. In Ypk fan der Fear's first novel *Ta him dyn bigearte* (1949) the heroine Hylck experiences her marriage to the farmhand Gerke as a farewell to her self: 'It ôfskie fan in ljochte dei is de skimerjoun. Foar har is dit ek in ôfskie, in ôfskie fan harsels, fan har eigen dei' (217). [The farewell of a day of light is the twilight. For her it also means a farewell, a farewell to her self, to her own day].

The 'dead' in the title of the novel by Ypk fan der Fear not only refers to deceased family members still present in the lived experience of the author but it may also refer to her own 'dead' self. This autobiographical narrative is thus not only about the gradual finding of a 'self', however fragmented or contradictory it may be, it is also a documentation of something 'authentic' which is lost forever.

In both autobiographical writings the figure of the overreligious mother is very powerful. The mother, more than the father, is identified with the native ground, the village of her youth. She is the daughter's 'sanctuary', 'myn taflecht', as Fan der Fear writes in *In fatsoenlik famke*. The mother in her black cloths and guilt-ridden posture also represents the calvinist orthodox faith the author found so repressive and wished to escape.

In *In fatsoenlik famke* the author remarks that her mother's circumscribed life had made her a submissive woman.

Mem, dy't har libben lang yn de âlde kontrei sliten hie, hat miskien wol op 'e knibbels werom wollen [nei Gaasterlân, H.H.], mar datselde fêstleine libben hie fan har in ûnderdienige frou makke. Boppedat wie hja in hearrige frou, dy't har lot yn Gods hannen lei net allinich, mar ek belied, dat wy hjir gjin bliuwende stêd hiene (32).

[Mother, who had worn her life out in the old country may have longed to return even on her knees. But the same circumscribed life had made her a submissive woman. Moreover, she was an obedient woman who had laid her faith in God's hands and testified that we had no eternal city here on earth.]

In Fan der Fear's autobiographical writings an ambivalent relationship toward the mother is conveyed in that the author both wishes to emancipate herself from her mother's religious submissiveness and to retain her identity as her mother's daughter. This dual positioning is caught in the image of the little girl walking on the road between the village and the world, 'it lytse famke op wei tusken it doarp en de wrâld' evoked in *De deade by de libbene*. In general, a double posture is often observed in women's writing indicating their conflicting stance towards rather traditional and more 'feminist' roles.

Susan Stanford Friedman in an article called 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice' has pointed to the strong 'maternal' impulse in autobiographical writings by women. The maternal is represented in the relational definition of a female self Friedman discerns in women's autobiographical writings. The 'maternal' can also be interpreted in terms of the writing process. 'Writing the female' is then partly a quest for the mother and the maternal bond. I would suggest that Ypk fan der Fear's writing is also motivated by the ambivalent memory of her mother. Seen in this light, the fictional ending of *De deade*

*by de libbene*, which the critic Anne Wadman found weak and implausible in terms of narrative development, becomes 'logical' and even beautiful when read as a tale of a struggle with female identity, or rather the gradual loss of it. 'The 'return of the native', the lost daughter to the village of her birth, signals the wish of the author to be reunited with her deceased husband and her mother. 'Dêr hy is, wol ik ek wêze, dêr is mem ek' (314). (Where he is, I wish to be as well, there is mother too). In expressing her longing to be reunited with her mother after her death like before birth, the narrator offers a version of autobiography that is not only about finding a self but also about loss of self when growing up. However, as the genre 'prescribes' a certain progression towards discovery and realization of self, the narrator meets with difficulty on the level of the text to represent her story of loss, to contain her life in writing within the autobiographical form.

The writing of *In fatsoenlik famke* much later also symbolically represents the return of the author to her girlhood and her native village. Her final (re) presentation of her girlhood serves as final 'location' of her self of growing up 'absurd' in that village in Gaasterland. She died shortly after completing her autobiography. Ypk fan der Fear's preoccupation with her personal past is not representative of the Frisian postwar literature nor does it echo the themes of postwar Dutch novelists such as Hermans or Reve; it rather illustrates her literary relatedness to postwar British women writers like Margaret Drabble or the Irish author Edna O'Brien. Their heroines usually also have their roots in the countryside and come from provincial lower middleclass families, and they write about people's relations with places from the past. Lorna Sage comments that the heroines, like Caithleen in *The Country Girls*, are always getting away but 'remain haunted and contained by their origins'. 'Home, the past, mother are indwelling presences that hold the whole together'.<sup>14</sup> In suggesting that there is no such thing as severance, that connections endure, Fan der Fear defies Fedde Schurer's postwar editorial outcry 'De bining forbritsen' (The Tie Severed) which called for a radical departure of postwar Frisian literature from the provincial, the local, the Frisian. A more 'universal' literature should be written.<sup>15</sup> Ypk fan der Fear would not sever her ties. In the end she locates part of her 'self' firmly in the calvinist rural community of Friesland of her past. Her novels are in part sites of memory. Her notion of female identity as conveyed in her autobiographical writings is entwined with a recollection of her youth: 'home' and 'mother' in particular. Ypk fan der Fear's 'life lines' are firmly anchored in the past. However, the

<sup>14</sup>. See for a discussion of these authors Lorna Sage's *Women in the House of Fiction: Postwar Women Novelists*, esp. chapter three, 'The Middle Ground'.

<sup>15</sup>. See Fedde Schurer, 'De bining forbritsen', *De Tsjerne*, January 1946. See also Teake Oppewal's 'The Literary Climate in Friesland after the Second World War'.

times of her childhood are long gone. In the end there is no place like home anymore and the author is doomed to be forever 'homesick' for a sense of self that was lost on the road to adulthood. Thus her imaginary revisiting of her origins remains an impossible return.

*Rijksuniversiteit Groningen*

*Frysk Ynstitút*

## REFERENCES

- Blom, Gosse ed. *Repertoarium fan egodokuminten oangeande Fryslân*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy, 1992.
- Bouman, A. and Thijs Booij. *Gereformeerden waarheen? Inleiding tot een gesprek over de koers van het gereformeerde leven*. Kampen: Kok, 1951.
- Fear, Ypk fan der. *Ta him dyn bigearte*. Drachten: Laverman, 1949.
- Fear, Ypk fan der. *De deade by de libbene*. Drachten: Laverman, 1959.
- Fear, Ypk fan der. *In fatsoenlik famke*. Leeuwarden/Ljouwert: Friese Pers Boekerij bv, 1984.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice' in: Shari Benstock ed. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. London: Routledge, 1988, 33-62.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. 'Non-Autobiographies of "Privileged Women": England and America' in: Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck ed. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 62-76.
- Iser, Wolfgang. 'Towards A Literary Anthropology' in: Ralph Cohen ed. *The Future of Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989, 208-228.
- Jelinek, Estelle C. ed. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Mulder, Tiny. *Hwer hast it wei?* Drachten: Laverman, 1971.
- Neumann, Bernd. 'De autobiografie als literair genre' in: Els Jongeneel red. *Over de Autobiografie*. Utrecht: Hes, 1989, 27-40.
- Olney, James ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Oppewal, Teake. 'The Literary Climate in Friesland after the Second World War' in: *Dutch Crossing: A Journal of Low Country Studies*, vol. 18 no. 2 (winter 1994), 100-121.

- Piebenga, J. *It eigen aerd fan de Súdwesthoeke*. Snits: Brandenburgh & Co., 1953.
- Piebenga, J. *Koarte skiednis fan de Fryske skriftekennisse*. Drachten: Laverman, 1957.
- Post-Beuckens, L. *Land en mens van Gaast en Klif*. Ljouwert/Leeuwarden: De Tille, 1980 (original edition: 1947).
- Riemersma, Trinus. *Proza van het platteland: Een onderzoek naar normen en waarden in het grotere Friese proza van 1855-1945*. Boalsert: Koperative Utjouwerij, 1984.
- Sage, Lorna. *Women in the House of Fiction: Postwar Women Novelists*, London: Macmillan, 1992.
- Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representaton*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. 'Selves in Hiding' in: Estelle C. Jelinek ed. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, 112-132.
- Wadman, Anne. 'Dr. Anne Wadman bespreekt: *De deade by de libbene* door Ypk fan der Fear'. *Literair Leven*. Radio Broadcast, Stichting Nederlandse Radio Unie, Regionale Omroep Noord en Oost, Groningen, September 16, 1959.
- Weintraub, Karl. 'De ontwikkeling van de autobiografie als vorm van zelfbewustwording' in: Els Jongeneel red. *Over de autobiografie*. Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1989, 9-26.
- Woolf, Virginia. 'The Lives of the Obscure'. *Dial*, May 1925, 381-82.
- Wumkes, G.A. *It Fryske Reveil yn portretten*. Boalsert: A.J. Osinga, 1938.