

# Reis door de hel der onschuldigen : de expressieve politiek van de Nederlandse anti-vivisectionisten, 1890-1940

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## Summary

### *Journey through the Hell of the Innocent*

#### *The expressive politics of the Dutch anti-vivisectionists, 1890-1940.*

By the end of the nineteenth century a public controversy about medical experimentation on animals, a practice also known as vivisection, flare up in northern and western Europe. From the 1870's on in England, Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands, societies for the abolition of vivisection were founded. The members of this antivivisection movement declared medical experiments on animals to be morally wrong. A relatively large number of these members were women.

The anti-vivisection movement was opposed to a practice that was almost completely unknown at the time. Only a few people knew what vivisection was and even fewer people had actually seen or performed a vivisection. In other words experiments on animals were no part of daily life. They were not performed in public but performed in private laboratories and lecture-rooms. Therefore, as a member of a Dutch antivivisection society stated at the end of the nineteenth century, nobody knew 'the hidden sins' of the vivisectionists. This view was shared by many opponents of experiments on animals. They considered it to be an important task 'to open the eyes of the public'. 'The evil of vivisection' had to be shown to society. 'The Hell of the innocent' had to be exhibited. In their eagerness to accomplish this, the anti-vivisectionists did publish a lot: novels, articles, poems and pamphlets.

'Journey through the Hell of the Innocent' is a book about the Dutch anti-vivisection movement and its leaders (Felix Ortt, Marie Jungius, Pieter Pijl) in the period 1890-1940. It describes and analyses the way anti-vivisectionists have tried to visualise the vivisection in novels and other writings, and the way their imagination has influenced and shaped the public debate (newspaper articles, pamphlets of medical scientist on vivisection and the discussion on vivisection in parliament) about medical experiments on animals. In this book the various images of vivisection in the public debate will pass in revue like in a sightseeing tour: a journey through the Hell of the Innocent.

The title of this PhD-dissertation also refers to the way the anti-vivisectionists described their task. They considered themselves to be explorers of an unknown, dangerous and mysterious world. They described their endeavours like a heroic saga. In their view the ideal anti-vivisectionist was a man or a woman ready to make great sacrifices. They had to be prepared to battle like a Don Quichote their whole life without any hope for tangible results and with only the mockery of their contemporaries as their reward. In this carefully self-designed profile of ideal warrior against vivisection, one can perceive an ambivalence. On the one hand the anti-vivisectionists considered themselves to be heroes with the right on their side, on the other hand they considered themselves to be not understood by society. In this profile the anti-vivisectionist was winner and loser, hero and victim at the same time. Losing was part of being a winner and a hero.

For the contemporary opponents of the anti-vivisectionists, the movement against medical experiments on animals was a movement of losers and sentimental fools. The anti-vivisectionists didn't succeed in making vivisection disappear. This fact combined with the self-shaped profile and the image shaped by their opponents has influenced the modern historiography of anti-vivisectionism. Historians describe the anti-vivisectionists as anti-modern, anti-scientific, religious and sentimental and as irrational losers in a battle against modernity. The anti-vivisectionists share this fate with other humanitarian movements like those of vegetarians, teetotallers, spiritists and natural curers. Often, in historiography the 'failure' of these movements is contrasted with the success, with the instrumentality and with the so called rationality of the scientific proponents of vivisection, of the socialist movement and of movements like the animal protection movement.

'Journey through the Hell of the Innocent' argues that this static and anachronistic approach of anti-vivisectionist politics is not tenable anymore. In stead of a perspective dominated by the idea

of winning or losing, this study proposes a different approach. In this book the anti-vivisectionist movement is approached as a political movement with, to use a term of Frank Parkin and Richard French, an expressive political style. Anti-vivisectionists have tried to deal with modernity in a complex and often creative way. The same can be said of their opponents. 'Journey through the Hell of the Innocent' argues that the way the expression of a moral way of living and thinking for most anti-vivisectionists was more important than the legal regulation or abolition of vivisection. In other words, this study claims that the ways of thought of anti-vivisectionists about winning and losing, failure and success, politics and engagement diverge from the modern views on these subjects. That quite a number of women (who as such were excluded from public life) joined and shaped the anti-vivisection movement emphasises that the expressive politics of the anti-vivisectionists are indeed more complex than is suggested by the more or less caricatural view of other historians.

In order to do credit to this complexity of the expressive politics and the public debate they shaped and were shaped in, the author of this book has chosen a broader approach of politics as a framework to analyse the vivisection controversy in the Netherlands. This broader approach offers a possibility to analyse and interpret the motives and political style of movements which would otherwise -when viewed within a framework of a more classical approach of political history- be considered irrelevant and marginal. From this broader view on political history 'Journey through the Hell of the Innocent' fits into a lively modern debate on the boundaries of political history, on the cultural context of reform movements in the Dutch fin de siècle and the Interbellum. The book also contributes to the historiography on the two most important Dutch anti-vivisectionist societies: the Nederlandsche Bond tot Bestrijding der Vivisectie (NBBV, Dutch Society for the Abolition of Vivisection, founded in 1890) and the Anti Vivisectie Stichting (AVS, Anti Vivisection society, founded in 1931).