

Geoerdend op voorstelling:

Regisseurs	
mannen	190
beide	11
vrouwen	128
	329
Schrijvers	
mannen	187
beide	17
vrouwen	60
	264
Dramaturgen	
mannen	84
beide	7
vrouwen	101
	192



Green: women

Pink: men

Yellow: mixed

WAITED LONG ENOUGH

By Paulien Geerlings and Nina van Tongeren

Still you can spend years in drama school and only perform plays written by men. Or visit the theater for months on end without hearing female characters say a meaningful word. Theaterkrant and de Toneelmakerij conducted research into the position of women and the prevailing image of women in Dutch theater. The results speak for themselves, especially when it comes to the writers. At the BIS companies twice as many texts written by men are performed as plays written by women.

In her fourth year of the acting school at ArtEZ, Nikki Kuis wrote a letter to the direction of her school. 'In the past years I have been playing scenes and pieces by exclusively male writers in classes and projects. (...) Our entire curriculum (and our entire school) is littered with men. Great men, talented men, admirable men. But men. Where are the women?'

In her thesis called 'Herstory', Kuis examined the criteria that a good female role should meet. This article is a follow-up to the pressing questions she poses in her thesis: why are there so few interesting female characters? Why are all women's roles written by men? Why are men's joys and sorrows always the focus of stage work? Why are women's roles always reduced to stereotypes like the witch, the shrew, the whore, and the holy virgin?

Our research paints a picture of a theatrical landscape in which both female writers and female characters are given less space than male ones. Nor are the stories told about women adequate by any means.

This conclusion stems from a study on the state of affairs regarding female creators and characters at the Basic Infrastructure theater and youth theatre companies. We looked at the total of 350 productions made in the period 2017-2020. In doing so, we used the production database from the theater collection of the Allard Pierson Museum. We conducted research in two parts. In the quantitative part, we look at the composition of the "narrative teams": the authors, adapters,

dramaturgs and directors. In other words, the people who are primarily responsible for the stories that are told. Within these teams, we counted the number of men and women.

In the qualitative part, we randomly analyzed and interpreted a number of stage texts on the quality of women's roles.

The resulting figures are revealing. 57.8 percent of all plays was directed by a man and 38.9 percent by a woman. The remaining 3.3 percent were made by a mixed team, such as Thibaud Delpout and Adelheid Roosen on Homelessness or Marjolijn van Heemstra and Sadettin Kirmiziyüz on Kruisocht.

Even more significant is the difference between male and female writers: over 70 percent of the BIS performances are written by a man. Initially we looked for the cause of this in the canon of drama classics, which is almost entirely written by men. But of the 350, only 39 performances turn out to be written by a deceased writer. If we leave those texts out of consideration, 66 percent of the texts are still written by a man. In other words, these are living, Dutch playwrights we are talking about. To be precise: 50 female playwrights versus 91 male ones.

Sidenote: of those 39 canon performances, only 3 texts are by women. The work of Astrid Lindgren was adapted twice by Tryater and NTJong respectively. In addition, a fragment of Marguerite Duras was used in the collage performance In Europa by Johan Simons at Theater Rotterdam.

'Narrative teams' per play			
	alles	jeugd	toneel
nul vrouwen	138	16	123
meer mannen dan vrouwen	44	10	36
gelijk	40	14	26
meer vrouwen dan mannen	65	30	42
nul mannen	63	32	31
	350	102	258



Green: women

Yellow: both

Pink: Men

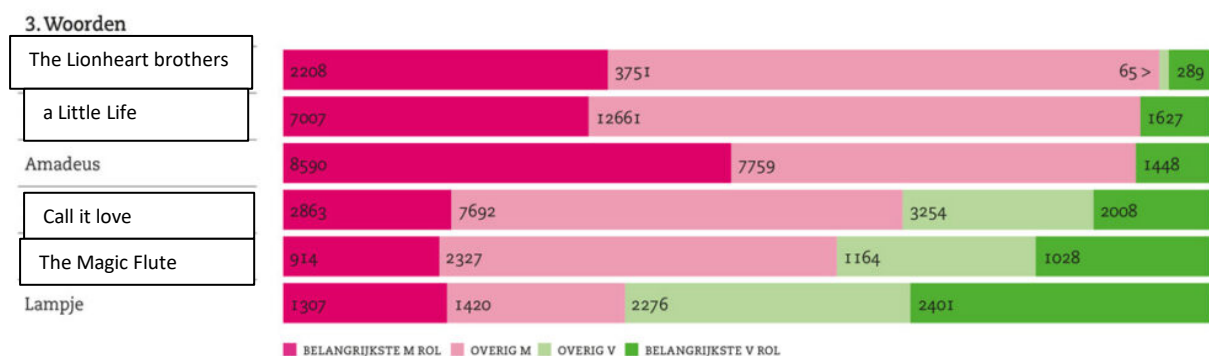
Because theater making is always collaborative, we look beyond the individuals. Therefore, we also examined the male-female ratio within the narrative teams. Together they determine the content and perspective of the performance. We found some remarkable results. Of the 350 teams, 138 consisted entirely of men. Especially among the adult theater companies the predominantly or entirely male teams are in the majority (159 out of 258). Among youth theatre companies, wholly or mostly female teams predominate (62 out of 102).

NUMBER OF WORDS

Counting seems objective and value-free, but of course it is not. We are aware of this. With this counting, we use the boxes we actually want to get rid of. Moreover, the production database does not include gender. So we might have mis-gendered some people. In addition, the male-female counting ignores an intersectional approach: whether someone is of color or not is not tracked, nor is sexual preference or social class. That said, this research does reveal something: women writers are less likely to work for BIS companies than men.

In the qualitative part of our research, we investigated the women's roles themselves. We analyzed six plays, not looking at the staging. We chose the texts of the three best-attended performances of BIS youth and drama companies in the year 2019, the last year before the pandemic. Among the BIS theater companies, these were Amadeus by the Nationale Theater, Call it love by Toneelgroep Maastricht and A little life by ITA. In the youth category, these were Lampje by Maas, The Lionheart Brothers by NTJong and The Magic Flute by the Toneelmakerij.

For the six plays, we first counted the male and female roles in each play. Then we determined the word count of all male roles and the word count of all female roles. Then the number of words of the main male character and the number of words of the main female character. Finally, we looked at the plays for the influence female characters have on the development of the plot and what is said about - and by - female characters.



Dark pink: number of words by the most important male character

Light pink: Number of words by other male characters

Dark Green: Number of words most important female character

Light green: number of words other female characters

The chart above shows that female characters have much less speaking time than male characters, especially in Amadeus, A Little Life, and The Lionheart Brothers. Also, most of the roles are given to male characters. Only The Magic Flute has more female characters than male. In Call it Love, there are an equal number of male and female roles, but the men have almost twice as many lines as the women. Three of the six plays have a female main character, but the count shows that she generally gets much less to say than her male counterpart. This difference is especially large in the "adult" companies.

As we stated, numbers don't say everything. But we do see twice as many performances with a male writer; a majority of male-dominated 'narrative teams'; and much more text for male characters. In the case studies of Amadeus and Just Call It Love, it was noticeable that the plays with the most problematic women's image were made by teams composed solely of men. Conversely, however, it is not the case that predominantly female teams always produce a more diverse female image. This is shown by the analysis of The Lionheart Brothers below.

In the plays examined, the influence of the male gaze is clearly visible. In Amadeus, Constanze is the main female role, but she has no influence on the development of the plot; all her actions are

initiated by the main characters Mozart or Salieri. She acts only as an object of lust for both men, until she is pregnant and thus assigned the role of mother.

The other female character in Amadeus, Katherina Cavalieri, has no speaking part herself and only appears on stage to sing. She is constructed solely as a projection of the men around her. They describe her as "a lavish girl" with "a tasty mouth" that is "insatiable."

In Call it Love, only the female character Cat influences the development of the plot. However, in doing this she is at the service of Mitchel to whom she tells about the past. Her goal in doing so is to satisfy him. The other women in this play are objectified. One of the female characters is a sex robot. The women frequently use their sexuality as a weapon: 'Fuck #metoo! All of a sudden I'm not allowed to fuck my way up the hierarchy? That's the world upside down. Surely I have my rights as a woman too? Or don't you think so?'

In the adaptation of A Little Life, only the female character Ana is part of the male world. She is a ghostly apparition and subservient to the main character Jude: she appears only when he decides he needs her.

Among the youth theater texts, the character Sofia from The Lionheart Brothers is notable. A significant portion of her clauses begin by addressing the male characters around her, such as Jonathan and Charles. She is also seen in the story world as a kind of holy grail for which to go to war. It is unclear what she herself contributes on the battlefield. Sofia is portrayed in an almost mythical light: "There is something special about Sofia, the way she looks, but what is it?" She is like a muse for the male characters who admire and idealize her; through her they rise above themselves. She does not undergo any development herself and has no influence on the plot.

In the adaptation of The Magic Flute, Pamina is made the main character. She has a definite influence on the development of the plot. However, Pamina still needs to be saved by Tamino. She may come up with her own rescue plan but the very idea that she needs rescue is a patronizing cliché. The question is to what extent you can avoid this in adaptations of classics - and whether those originally problematic stories still deserve our attention.

Only in Lampje is there no gender inequality. This is because gender does not actually play a role in this story. There is a female main character, Lampje, and a male main character, Edward. They both have the goal of learning to accept themselves. Their gender makes no difference in how they approach that goal or how they look at each other. What is striking about this is that Lampje is the only one of the six pieces analyzed that was developed by a team of only women.

EXPANDING THE CANON

This study shows that the position of women within the Dutch theater, especially that of the female playwright, is not in great health. It also shows once again that the BIS theater companies lag behind youth theater in this aspect. The adult theater, which has more money, puts on more performances, reaches a larger audience and still has more prestige, should take this matter seriously.

The study also confirms that we are all part of a patriarchal system that is validated over and over again by the stories we tell each other. Nigerian writer and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie introduced the term 'single story' to describe this phenomenon. A single story is a one-sided narrative about a marginalized group that is repeated and confirmed over and over again. This reduces the group in question to that one narrative. There are a handful of single stories about women in which they are repeatedly characterized as subordinate to men.

Single stories are not only boring because they tell nothing new, but also dangerous because they have a great influence on what people think they can become. If you, as a girl or woman, learn that you are dependent, it becomes difficult to take on a leadership role. If you see in movies, series and plays that women are constantly being silenced, then it's hard for a girl or woman to use her own voice. And when girls and women are constantly told that their sexuality is not theirs but that of the men around them, it becomes difficult to exist outside of that male gaze. In short, stories are not innocent. They directly affect our daughters, mothers, sisters, girlfriends. They affect ourselves.

Yet we are cautiously optimistic. We are seeing more influential female directors and writers - including at BIS companies - openly pursuing a feminist agenda, with the caveat that improvement is mainly visible for white women. The initiatives of actress Jacqueline Blom are also inspiring: her podcast *The Bitch and the Whore* shook up much of the industry. And with her platform *Point of View*, an equal representation of women and the female perspective in Dutch art and culture is pursued. Utrecht University also launched a large-scale study, called *Better is not yet good*, into the representation of women in the Dutch film and television sector. Nikki Kuis' letter led to the Arnhem Theatre School working for a year only with texts written by women. The Dutch Council for Culture also published a critical report in which the Council establishes a link between prejudice and stereotyping - in other words: single stories - and unsafety on the workfloor. For this reason, the Council makes a strong recommendation to broaden the canon, which we wholeheartedly endorse.

This research also makes clear how much we do not yet know. Are the companies that are subsidized by the Performing Arts Fund doing better? What about the male-female ratio among the students of dramaschools? And among all employees in the theater sector? We will certainly keep track ourselves of how the figures develop in recent and upcoming seasons. Then we will see whether our optimism is justified.

MORE RESEARCH

Furthermore, large-scale research is needed into the (under)representation of all groups that fall under the umbrella term 'diversity'. This includes not only gender and color but also issues such as social class, neurodiversity and people with disabilities. With great interest, we are awaiting research that ACT Actors' Interests and the Dutch Academy for Film are commissioning on diversity in film and television. The quality of representation also requires in-depth research. What to do with the Western canon? What single stories do we tell and how do we dismantle them? How do we de-colonize our language and our stories?

These last questions in particular belong first and foremost to artistic research. But factual numbers provide insights that go beyond assumptions. They support or contradict assumptions and feed policy. Once again, we see that the sector lacks an authoritative institute that can draw up and implement a research agenda around these kinds of urgent topics.

But waiting for that takes too long. We would therefore like to make a head start: we need radical new repertoire, more female writers and consistently diverse teams. Let's get started on that now.