



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E
A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

Laudatio for Katell Lavéant

Delivered by Pierre Brunel during the awards ceremony for the 2018 Descartes-Huygens Prize, Amsterdam

5 February 2019

Mr. President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
Mr. Ambassador of France,
Fellow Academy Members, Dear colleagues,
Madam Laureate,

I am very honored, moved and happy to be welcomed here at the prestigious '*Kunst en Wetenschappen Academy*' and to contribute to the valuable relationship between the Royal Academy of Holland and the Institut de France, more particularly the French Academy, the Academy of Science, and the Academy of Moral and Political Science. My fellow Academy Members and myself were struck by the exceptional quality of Ms. Katell Lavéant's dossier and therefore the jury unanimously awarded her this double Descartes-Huygens 2018 prize.

This prize brings together the names of Descartes and Huygens, the great French philosopher and the great Dutch scientist, both of whom lived in the 17th century. Descartes was born in Touraine in 1596 in a place which, curiously, was called The Hague, and this may seem premonitory of his long stay of 20-years in Holland, particularly in Amsterdam, from 1629 onwards. He was attracted, like Katell Lavéant, to Northern countries. He died in Stockholm in 1650.

He had studied in France with the Jesuits at the '*Collège de la Flèche*' from 1604 to 1612. It so happens that I myself taught for two years, from October 1963 to June 1965, at the '*Prytanée militaire de La Flèche*', and often visited the nearby city of Le Mans, namely to supervise the baccalaureate exams.

It was in this city that many years later Katell Lavéant was born. Brittany is not far from the province of Maine and it is quite naturally, in a way, that, after having completed a valuable course of study at the University of Amsterdam, and starting a magnificent career in 2008 at the University of Utrecht, she now holds the positions of associate professor and deputy director of the French department. She has an intense research activity, and she is reaching out to the University of Rennes II, where she will make long research trips in 2019, hosted by Mrs. Marie-Madeleine de Cevins and Mr. Malcolm Walsby in the Tempora Center, the research center of the history department in this great university.

The '*tempora*' regretted by Cicero in his famous invocation '*O tempora, o mores*', are these past times, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, that it is important today to know better and to revive. Historians, and with them literary historians, apply themselves with science and passion to this task. This is the case of Mrs. Lavéant.

Her project is entirely new: the analysis of dummy collections, which will make it possible to understand how Renaissance women and men understood knowledge and how they tried to make sense of the prodigious amount of information surrounding them. This project is endorsed by the University of Utrecht and the '*Fondation Franco-sciences*' in The Netherlands, by the University of Rennes II and the Descartes-Huygens 2018 award.



I am particularly interested in Kattell Lavéant's publications, and especially by what are deemed her 'five best publications' in her dossier by what concerns the theatre. And even if some of them mainly concern comedic theatre, the French '*sotties*' or even the farce the '*obscene ride of Lyon*', as I will be preparing for a series of conferences on tragedy next year, I will look into what deals with the more noble genre of '*Dramatic theatre and culture in French in the cities of the Southern Netherlands*' (XI-XVIIe centuries) in her doctoral thesis, made under the joint supervision of the University of Amsterdam and the University of Rennes II, and which she presented with great success in 2007 and in her precious 2011 book '*Theater of the Frontiers. Dramatic culture in the northern provinces in the 15th and 16th centuries*'.

This was the time, in particular, when religious tragedies could be invented, Christian tragedies that were perhaps not unrelated to the 'mysteries' of the Middle Ages, and which were sometimes linked to the Reformation.

Katell Lavéant's speciality, Renaissance theatre, is therefore of particular interest to me. I am impressed by the quantity and importance of the work she has already accomplished, by the richness of her projects, and by the central project, by the interuniversity spirit in which she carries them out, and today's ceremony adds the interacademic spirit that is dear to me.

I had already visited Holland several times and, in particular, of course, to visit the museums. As a young man, I had been attracted by Charles Baudelaire's '*Invitation to the Voyage*' and eager to see '*on the canals / those sleeping vessels / their mood adventurous*'. My last trip to Amsterdam, which dates a few years back, was already the result of an invitation to participate in a conference dedicated to a poem that is dear to me and to which I devoted a whole book, '*Le Bateau ivre*' by Arthur Rimbaud. Rimbaud, by the way, travelling through Utrecht, embarked on June 10, 1876 at Den Helder for the Dutch Indies. And this conference, precisely, had been held on a boat, peacefully and in no way drunk.

Today, it is under the banner of literary research, of Franco-Dutch cooperation, inter-university and inter-academic exchanges that I find myself among you, and generously welcomed by you.

Since it is still the season of new years' wishes, I wish Mrs. Katell Lavéant great success in the realization of her magnificent project, as well as to all those who will support her, welcome her and collaborate with her. The academic I still am and who has had the opportunity to collaborate with the University of Leyden expresses the hope that the collaboration between Rennes II and the University of Utrecht, extended to other universities, both Amsterdam and my dear Sorbonne, will be further intensified thanks to her. And I am particularly pleased that this coronation of sorts we are witnessing today is an academic and also interacademic coronation, within the Institut de France, and between the academies of Holland and France.

Pierre BRUNEL
Paris, on 29 January 2019.