

Performing Debate about Power and Protest at the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre in 1650

Sonja Kleij

Between 1566 and 1648, the country which we now know as the Netherlands, was at war with Habsburg Spain, a conflict best known as the Dutch Revolt or the Eighty Years War. What started as a conflict to stop what many felt was tyrannical political and religious oppression by a foreign power, escalated into a war for independence. Through the Act of Abjuration in 1581 the Seven Provinces officially declared their break with Spain. After a brief search for a new head of state, the State's General was appointed the new sovereign power in the country. From that moment onwards the country became known as the Dutch Republic of the Seven United Provinces. The war would continue until the Peace of Münster (part of the Peace of Westphalia) in 1648, when Spain officially recognised the Republic as an independent country. This made the Dutch Revolt amongst the first successful independence wars in Western history. It should come as no surprise that by the mid-seventeenth century, after such a lengthy conflict, Dutch theatre makers were well-versed in debating politics on stage. The Peace of Münster meant the end of an international war, but the start of an internal conflict, as William II (1626-1650), the Prince of Orange and Stadholder of Holland, sought to renew the war with Spain, which the State of Holland opposed. A disagreement that led to, what Jonathan Israel rightly calls "the most severe crisis of the Dutch state between 1618 and the fall of the De Witt regime in 1672."¹ This meant that interrogations of power, tyranny, political ambition and resistance could not yet retire from the stage. Instead, as this article will explore, the theatre would adapt to discuss the new situation and as William II might be in the audience himself, they also embraced the possibility of addressing their criticism directly to him.

Sonja Kleij is Lecturer in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University, and Lecturer in English Language and Culture at Radboud University. Her research focuses on power relations and performance in the early modern period, with a special interest in gender, trauma, (international) politics, and the ways in which performance can voice public opinion. She has published on English and Dutch theatre and songs.

¹ Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 595.

In order to investigate how the plays at the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre discussed tyranny, ambition, and resistance as well as stage protest, we first need to get a better understanding of how early modern theatre and literature worked in the public sphere.² As Jan Bloemendal and Arjan van Dixhoorn argue:

If an opinion is cast in a literary mould, this affects the manner in which we need to study it. The creation of a literary work requires such mental effort, such skill and such knowledge (of other literary texts, for example) that the opinion or opinions contained in it—in literature various opinions can of course be expressed alongside each other or in combination—are shaped, refined, and altered during the creative process.³

A play is a creative product, which means that opinions are rarely declared directly, but rather contained in the layers of meaning we can assign to the (sub)text of the play. It requires some thinking and analysis on the part of the audience. That is not to say that this is not an effective way to participate in debate as Bloemendal and Dixhoorn continue “[i]n this way, literary texts can open minds to varied possibilities that are closed in reality, to all kinds of openings for change or indeed for stabilization.”⁴ Such openings and freedom of discussion are useful for protest as it allows the audience to argue for change as well as explore ways to achieve it. Moreover, literature “can do this by means of their content, but sometimes the writing and publishing of a literary work is in itself a statement”.⁵ Within the relationship between politics and performance, we can build on this idea to say that the very act of performing a play can be political. But this does mean that studying the way in which theatre participated in political debate and protest is not always a straightforward process as the opinions held are often not immediately obvious to modern readers.

To tackle this problem, I will take a similar approach as the two-part methodology proposed by Ron Gruijters. The first and crucial step is to do a textual, theoretical, and comparative analysis of the plays. This will involve a close reading of the play texts alongside paratextual material where available. The second is to combine these results with a contextual, historical analysis. Gruijters argues that in this kind of analysis it is not the author’s intention that is important, but rather the ways in which the drama could be

² For an elaborate study of how theatre facilitated the emerging of the early public sphere in the long seventeenth century see: Sonja Kleij, *Early Modern Theatre and the Public Sphere: Anglo-Dutch-Spanish Politics, 1585-1702*. (PhD Thesis, Queen’s University Belfast, 2017).

³ Jan Bloemendal and Arjan Dixhoorn, ‘Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Early Modern Low Countries’ in *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650* Eds. Jan Bloemendal, Arjan van Dixhoorn & Elsa Strietman (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 1-35, 34.

⁴ Bloemendal and Dixhoorn, ‘Literary Cultures and Public Opinion’, 34.

⁵ Bloemendal and Dixhoorn, ‘Literary Cultures and Public Opinion’, 34.

interpreted by the audience at that specific time.⁶ Once a play is staged, it is in the public domain and the author no longer has control over its message, and as Gruijters rightfully observes, a play could be interpreted entirely differently even a decade after its first performance if circumstances and audience had changed.⁷ This means that in order to better understand how a play might have been interpreted at the time of performance, one needs to provide historical context to lay bare connections the audience might have made that are not immediately obvious to the modern reader. In addition to this two-part method, I want to add a third step: the analysis of data that might indicate reception. For performances that took place almost 375 years ago direct evidence of its reception can be rare. Censorship, letters, and diaries can be useful sources for such research, but unfortunately these are not always available as is the case for the performances under investigation here. However, as scholars, like Rena Bood, Leonor Álvarez Francés, Kim Jautze and Frans Blom, have shown in their studies of Dutch theatre, we might be able to deduce the popularity of piece by looking at print history as well as theatre records of the dates and revenue earned by these performances.⁸ The timing of a play can tell us more about the intended audience and message, while the revenue gives us a sense of how full the theatre might have been at the time. Frequency of performances, as well as how many prints were made of a play can provide further insight into the public's interest. Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom suitably stated that the frequency of performances is like the modern-day TV ratings.⁹ The records of the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre have survived and were digitalised to form the ONSTAGE database. In this article I will draw extensively from the data available in the theatre records in the analysis of these plays. I will use the historical currency fl. in which the revenues were reported in the theatre record. For the analysis of the revenue, it is important to note that about fl.300 is the maximum amount one single performance could earn, and an earning of fl.200 can be considered a successful performance.¹⁰

Using this methodology, I will first demonstrate in section 1 *that* the Dutch theatre quickly picked up the debate on tyranny and resistance again after the Peace of Münster as the tensions between the States of Holland and

⁶ Ron J. Gruijters, *An eloquent enigma: the dramas of Jacobus Cornelius Lummenaeus à Marca (c. 1580 - c. 1628) and their contexts*, (PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2010), 215.

⁷ Gruijters, *An eloquent enigma*, 214.

⁸ See for examples, Rena Rayka Bood, *Between Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia: The Spanish Fascination in English and Dutch 17th-century Literature* (PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2020); Kim Jautze, Leonor Álvarez Francés en Frans R.E. Blom, 'Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg (1638-1672): Kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve analyse van de creatieve industrie van het vertalen' *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32.1 (2016), 12-39.

⁹ Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom, 'Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', 15.

¹⁰ Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom, 'Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', 22.

the stadholder rose to critical levels. This section will provide crucial historical context to the conflict and will discuss several performances that took place at the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre. In the second and third sections, I will discuss *how* theatre could act as a means to both interrogate power and tyranny, but also act as a means to discuss and even perform protest. The first case study is *De Gestrafte Kroonzuight* (The Punished Crownlust) written by Pietersz Heynch, which was first performed and published when the conflict started to escalate in the spring of 1650.¹¹ In this section I will explore how new shows could be created to voice opinions and concerns during a conflict. The second case study is the performance of P.C. Hooft's *Geeraerd van Velsen* on the day William II was due to visit Amsterdam. The play was originally published in 1613. The timing of this performance in 1650 invites a new interpretation for this play. In this section I will thus explore how a well-timed performance could function as an act of protest, and how the interpretation of a play can change under new circumstances.

Holland versus William II: Tyranny and resistance on the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre 1650

On 5 June 1648 the States General announced the Treaty of Münster (part of the Peace of Westphalia). The peace was celebrated in most parts of the Dutch Republic, and so too in Amsterdam, with performances on the Market (modern Dom Square) and the stage of the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre.¹² But not everyone was happy. Stadholder William II had opposed the peace negotiations and almost immediately after the treaty was agreed, he launched a campaign to declare war against Spain again to liberate the Southern Netherlands (also known as the Spanish Netherlands).¹³ This was not without support. The treaty was only narrowly approved by the States General, which suggests that there were certainly people who wanted to continue the conflict.¹⁴ And the idea of Spain as the main enemy would last for at least two more decades, as indicated by the argument that was frequently made during the first two Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652-1654 and 1665-1667) that instead of fighting 'natural ally' England, the Dutch should instead direct their military attention to Spain.¹⁵ However, the States of Holland, the richest and most powerful of the seven provinces, opposed the prince. Not

¹¹ All translations from Dutch are made the author, unless otherwise stated.

¹² See for example: Henk Duits, 'Vondel en de Vrede van Munster: ambivalente gevoelens' in *1648. De Vrede van Munster*, special issue of *De Zeventiende Eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief*, 13, no. 1 (1997) 183-192; Lotte Jensen, *Vieren van Vrijheid: Het ontstaan van de Nederlandse identiteit, 1648-1815*. (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2016); Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, 'De viering van de Vrede van Munster in Amsterdam: de dichters Geeraardt Brandt and Jan Vos bevestigen hun maatschappelijke positie' in *1648. De Vrede van Munster*, special issue of *De Zeventiende Eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief*, 13, no. 1 (1997), 193-200.

¹³ These include large parts of what is modern day Belgium.

¹⁴ Jensen, *Vieren van Vrijheid*, 27.

¹⁵ Kleij, *Early Modern Theatre and the Public Sphere*, 165, 167-170, 185-186.

only did they not want to renew the war, but they also feared that William II wanted to obtain more power and abuse his position as stadholder. Therefore, they wanted to reduce the national army to both save money and limit William II's influence. In particular, the States of Holland wanted to dismiss the foreign soldiers in Dutch service, as they were believed to be more likely to be loyal to the stadholder than soldiers from the Republic who were expected to be loyal to their home province as well. This caused a dispute. As Rowen explains:

Holland asserted that the troops which it paid were subject to its instructions and orders, and that it therefore had the right if it so decided to dismiss them those it did not wish to continue to pay. Contrariwise, William, arguing from the precise juridical status of the army as well as from the practical necessity to maintain its unity, affirmed that only the States General had the right to dismiss troops, as they alone had the right to raise them, and their agents in such operations were only the Council of State ... and himself as a captain-general.¹⁶

In other words, this was a conflict between financing and law. The maintenance of the army was impossible without the financial contribution of Holland, which brought in the most resources to the States General, but they did not legally have the right to dismiss them.¹⁷ What followed were negotiations between the stadholder and the States of Holland, which lasted for two years. In the spring of 1650, it initially seemed like an agreement was close because the difference had been reduced to only a few hundred soldiers.¹⁸ But the negotiations ended in a stalemate, because neither the States of Holland nor the prince, were willing to make that final concession, as this had "become symbolic of political triumph."¹⁹ Along the way, the negotiations had become less about the actual number of soldiers and more about the principals of power and authority. As Israel observes, "the real issue now was not the size of the army, but who controlled the Republic."²⁰ In May 1650, the States of Holland grew tired of waiting for a resolution to the conflict with the stadholder, and voted to dismiss several army companies for which they had provided the financial backing.²¹ Since they were paying for those troops, they felt they had the right to disband them. This move was a direct violation of William II's authority as general of the national army of the Dutch Republic, and the dispute worsened.²²

¹⁶ Herbert H. Rowen, *The princes of Orange: the stadholders in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 84.

¹⁷ Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, translated by Diane Webb. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.

¹⁸ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 603.

¹⁹ Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 85.

²⁰ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 603.

²¹ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 606.

²² Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 88.

Date	Event/Performance
28 March 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
31 March 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
4 April 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
2 May 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
30 May 1650	<i>De Doodt van Julius Caesar</i>
2 June 1650	<i>De Doodt van Julius Caesar</i>
4 June 1650	Vote States General
7 June 1650	<i>De Doodt van Julius Caesar</i>
27 June 1650	William II refused entrance to council meeting <i>Geeraerd van Velsen</i>
29 July 1650 - 30 July 1650	(Attempted) Siege of Amsterdam
12 September 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
23 September 1650	<i>Gijsbreght van Aemstel</i>
13 October 1650	<i>Gestrafte Kroonzught</i>
17 October 1650	<i>Graef Floris en Gerard van Velsen</i>
6 November 1650	William II dies of small pox Start First Stadholderless Period
14 November 1650	William III is born

Table 1: Timeline

During the spring, the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre staged a number of plays which interrogated the concept of tyranny as well as possible resistance (see figure 1 for a timeline of the events). During the Eighty Years War the Dutch had of course become well versed in these debates, but due to this new internal conflict these discussions took a new shape. *Gestrafte Kroonzught* (Punished Crownlust) a play about Nunio, who pretends to be the king in order to exercise his revenge on the man who slept with his wife, premiered in March, and it would be performed several times that year. As the title indicates, the play deals with the desire of monarchical power and its negative consequences. In section two there will be a more detailed analysis of this play. Another new drama was *De Doodt van Julius Caesar* (The Death of Julius Caesar) about Brutus' assassination plot, by Hendrik Verbiest, which premiered on 30 May 1650. The historical Caesar, his rise to power and particularly his death, were popular topics for early modern playwrights throughout Europe. Just a few examples include Jacques Grévin's *La Mort de César* (1561), Orlando Pescetti's *Il Cesare* (1594), William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (1599), the anonymously written *Caesar's Revenge* (1607) and Georges de Scudery's *La Mort de César* (1637). Caesar was a usefully versatile figure to discuss the concepts of tyranny as well as tyrannicide, because "Caesar evoked the full spectrum of opinion and so did

his assassination."²³ In the context of the conflict between Holland and William II, Caesar is also a suitable figure. Brutus accused Caesar of wanting monarchical power and so effectively ending the Roman republic. Officials in Holland accused William II of having similar ambitions.²⁴ Yet Porteman and Smits-Veldt argue that the play condemned Caesar's murder.²⁵ This argument is likely based on the Verbiest's dedication in which he expresses admiration for Caesar and claims to side with Marc Antony.²⁶ However, Verbiest might have taken this stance to please Simon Engelbrecht, the dedicatee. In the dedication, Verbiest calls Simon Engelbrecht a trader on the stock market and he also appears in a list of officers of the city guard. His position as a prominent, likely wealthy citizen of the city, would have made him a compelling choice for a dedication in hopes of future financial support. Considering this was only Verbiest's first time writing a play, it seems unlikely that the piece was commissioned by Engelbrecht and to my knowledge no further record of such a commission survives. However, the actual play text suggests sympathy for Brutus. The action of the drama builds up towards the assassination and Brutus is given ample opportunity to justify killing Caesar. After the murder takes place in great detail at the end of act four, the final act lacks suspense, and the end is rather anti-climactic. There is some discussion of Caesar being elevated to the stars, which Karel Porteman and Mieke Smits-Veldt suggest hints at a future elevation of William III to the position of stadholder. However, the theatre records reveal that the performances had already stopped before William III was even born, which undermines that explanation.²⁷ Moreover, Brutus and his fellow assassins manage to flee Rome unhindered and there is no mention of the historical Liberators' Civil War. The resistance goes unpunished, and for all intents and purposes Brutus and his co-conspirators have succeeded in protecting governmental freedom.

De Doodt van Julius Caesar does not appear to have been very popular. It was only performed three times in 1650. It was briefly revived in 1670 and in the eighteenth century, but it was only staged a total of 7 times in Amsterdam.²⁸ The revenue was not good either, the second performance was especially low, only fl.87.78.²⁹ This might have been due to the quality of the play. Verbiest was a professional actor at the Municipal Theatre, but he was not a seasoned playwright. While this was not usual, there were several actor-

²³ Robert S. Miola, "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 no. 2 (1985) 271-289, 272.

²⁴ Prak, *The Dutch Republic*, 193.

²⁵ Karel Porteman and Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009), 544.

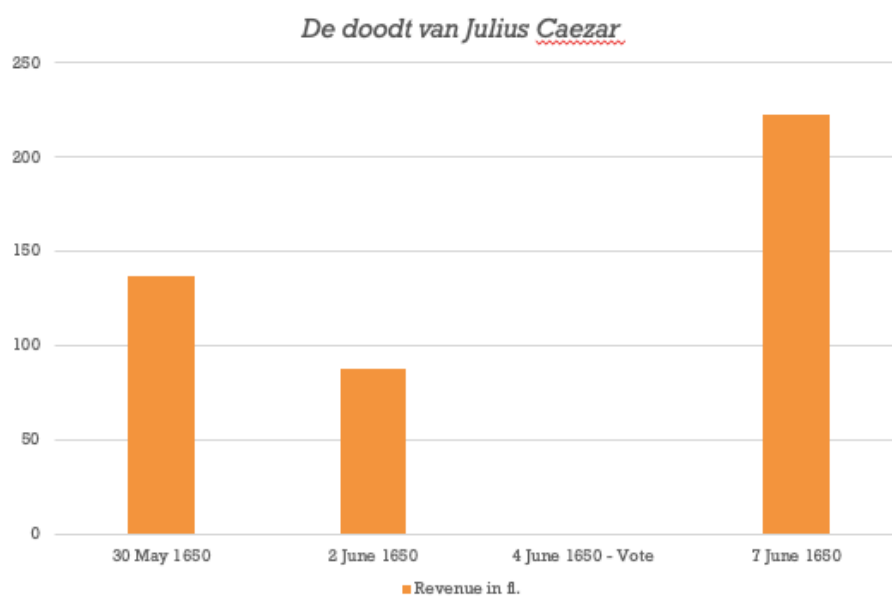
²⁶ Hendrik Verbiest, *De Doodt van Julius Caesar* (Amsterdam, 1650).

²⁷ Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, 544.

²⁸ ONSTAGE "De doodt van Julius Caesar" <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/plays/328> Date of access: 10 December 2018.

²⁹ All the revenue data in this article was taken from the ONSTAGE: Online Data-system of Theatre in Amsterdam from the Golden Age to the present <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/>

playwrights active at the Municipal Theatre, *De Doodt van Julius Caezar* was the first of only two plays that he wrote during his theatre career.³⁰ However, it is noteworthy that, based on the revenue the third performance on 7 June 1650 saw a sudden jump in attendance (see graph 1). It earned fl.222.55, which was considered a successful performance and would mean that the theatre was about 2/3 full.



*Graph 1: Revenue of the performance of *Julius Caesar* at the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre*

This was only three days after the stadholder managed to obtain a majority vote in the States General in which they officially instructed him to resolve the issue. The States of Holland had objected to this decision because they felt it would give him too much power.³¹ News of this vote would have reached Amsterdam quite quickly. Though we cannot say with certainty what the opinion of the audience was on the 7th of June, this sudden tripling in revenue does suggest that this vote might have motivated more people to take interest in the debate on ambition, tyranny, and resistance.

Shortly after the vote it turned out that the concerns of the States of Holland were justified. The stadholder informed the States General that he

³⁰ P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok eds. *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, Volume 4, (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1918) 1375-1376; Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom, 'Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', 23.

³¹ Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 88.

was taking this opportunity to form a delegation on their behalf, led by himself. His plan was to visit the cities that opposed him with the aim of persuading their municipalities to change their minds and vote in his favour.³² This move violated established law and practice. While as Stadholder of Holland William II certainly had the right to visit the province and its cities, he now presumed to represent the States General, and therein lay the problem, as it was a confirmed constitutional principle that the States General treated the separated provinces as unitary entities. As such, the nobility and the eighteen voting cities in Holland were out of the legal reach of the States General. By visiting these cities, supposedly on behalf of the States General, the prince violated the sovereignty of the province.³³ For this reason, several towns refused to even admit the delegation to the city unless William II entered by himself and in his role as Stadholder of the Holland, not as representative of the States of General.³⁴ This situation was not helped by the way William II started to distance himself from his title. He started to sign his letter with 'His Highness' and the term 'stadholder' was now only used to refer to Count William Frederick, the Stadholder of Friesland (another province of the Dutch Republic). These developments were perceived as signs of William II having monarchical ambitions.³⁵

As Amsterdam held an important vote, it was a key stop on William II's route. His arrival was announced via letter and the city replied twice to advise to the prince not to come. When William II visited the city anyway on 27 June 1650, he was denied access to the city council meeting, which angered him greatly.³⁶ On that day, the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre staged P.C. Hoof's *Geeraert van Velsen*. The play tells the story of the historical plot led by Van Velsen to capture Floris V, the Count of Holland, after he raped Machteld, Van Velsen's wife. The conspirators end up killing the count. The play is commonly interpreted as a debate about to what extent resistance can be permitted. This play was originally published in 1613 and had been performed at least once a year since the Municipal Theatre had opened in 1638. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the company was able to stage it at relatively short notice and that this particular performance was probably put on in response to William II's visit. In section 3, I will analyse this performance and its timing in more detail. Considering the response of these cities to the visits, it should come as no surprise that no votes were changed, and the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful. But William II's ambitions had been revealed and tensions grew ever higher.

³² See Dustin Neighbor's article in this special issue for more on the political importance and performative elements of city visits by figures of authority.

³³ Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 88; J. L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century: the politics of particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 215.

³⁴ Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 89.

³⁵ Rowen, *The princes of Orange*, 88.

³⁶ Roeland Harms, *Pamfletten en publieke opinie: Massamedia in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 93.

On the 30th of July, when the Municipal Theatre had already closed for the summer as it did every year, the stadholder had six opposition leaders arrested. On that same day, the (attempted) Siege of Amsterdam started.³⁷ After three days of negotiations, the troops withdrew again. Amsterdam agreed to continue contributing to the war chest, as long as there was war with Spain or France, the stadholder would be admitted to the council meeting if he wished to attend, and finally two prominent opposition leaders, Andries and Cornelis Bicker, were stripped of their positions. The prisoners were released a few weeks later.³⁸ While at first sight, this resolution appears to be wholly in favour of the prince, payment from Amsterdam was dependent on their being at war, so William II still had to continue his efforts to renew the conflict with Spain, which Holland continued to block. The dispute between the province and the stadholder thus persisted, though without further military action. Roeland Harms observes an increase in the number of pamphlets related to the dispute after the siege, which demonstrates that the conflict was far from over and the public debate was only increasing.³⁹

When the Theatre reopened in August as usual, it continued the debate as well by staging plays that discussed tyranny, resistance, abuse of power and its possible consequences. Some performances might have been meant to reflect on the recent Siege and celebrate surviving the incident. Apart from two more performances of *Gestrafte Kroonzugt*, the performance of Joost van den Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* is also significant. This is a sequel to Hooft's *Geeraert van Velsen*, which focuses on the Siege of Amsterdam in 1304, the reason for which is alleged involvement of Gijsbrecht in the abduction and death of Count Floris a few years earlier. The play was used to open the Amsterdam Municipal Theater in 1638 and was performed every year around New Year's Day until 1940. Like *Geeraert van Velsen*, this likely meant that an additional production could be organized fairly quickly if required. The play was performed on 23 September and the revenue of fl.255.25 suggests that the performance was very well attended.⁴⁰ Another noteworthy play is Coleveldt's version of the Count Floris story, *Graef Floris en Gerard van Velsen*, which was performed on 17 October. This is another example of a revival that might have been meant to interrogate recent events. The performance is registered in the theatre records as *Doot van Graaf Floris* (Death of Count Floris), which implies that, at least for this particular performance, the defeat of the count was the main focus of the play.⁴¹ The show earned fl.138,05, suggesting it attracted a reasonable crowd with a half full theatre.

³⁷ Prak, *The Dutch Republic*, 193.

³⁸ Harms, *Pamfletten en publieke opinie*, 94.

³⁹ Harms, *Pamfletten en publieke opinie*, chapter 2.

⁴⁰ ONSTAGE 'Friday 23rd September 1650' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/shows/1231>. Date of access: 11 February 2019.

⁴¹ ONSTAGE 'Monday 17th October 1650' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/shows/1240>. Date of access: 11 February 2019.

The conflict between Holland and the stadholder only ended when William II died unexpectedly from smallpox on 6 November 1650.⁴² His only child, William III, was born a few days later. We can merely speculate what might have happened had he lived. We do know that his death was impactful for the whole country. Holland saw the opportunity to prevent the election of a new stadholder, starting what is now known as the First Stadholderless Period, and which the Patriots themselves called the 'True Freedom'.⁴³ After the death of William II, portrayals of protest on stage became less popular. *Gestrafte Kroonzugt* disappeared out of the Theatre's repertoire after 1655. Another example is *Wraeckgierigers Treurspel*, Theodoor Rodenburgh's adaptation of *The Revenger's Tragedy* by Thomas Middleton, which premiered on 15 September 1650. The English play is a violent drama about ambition and the abuse of power at an Italian court and was originally published in 1618. The Dutch adaptation was performed five times in 1650, but was not revived in later years, despite at one point earning fl. 263.65, which suggest an almost full theatre.⁴⁴ It is of course possible that the English play was less popular as French influence started to grow, but the short-lived run could also suggest that the play lost its relevance after the conflict was settled. Another example is Reyer Anslou's *Parysche bruiloft* (Parisian wedding), a play about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre that took place in Paris in 1572, which was first staged in November 1650 as well. The play also shows the disastrous consequence of power abuse as the French monarchy is held responsible for ordering the death of hundreds of Huguenots. Yet the play would not gain popularity until the tensions between France and the Dutch Republic started to rise in the 1660s.

1650 thus saw a short but severe crisis that tested the boundaries of the power structures of the Dutch Republic. As this section has shown, the theatre played a role in this debate on and the challenging of power. The next two sections will present two case studies to explore in more detail how performances were used to debate as well as enact protest on the stage.

Warning Against Ambition: *Gestrafte Kroonzugt*

The title of Dirck Heink Pietersz' *Gestrafte Kroonzugt* literally translates to 'Punished Crown lust', in other words a desire for monarchical power that is met with punishment. The play is an adaptation of *La crueldad por el honor* by Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza. As is typical for *comedia* there are several sub-plots with romance and intrigue. This analysis will focus on the main plot: Nunio comes to court pretending to be the lost King Alfonzo, who was presumed dead in battle, right at the moment that the queen wants to name her son Alfonzus the new king. This is probably inspired on the legend of

⁴² Prak, *The Dutch Republic*, 193.

⁴³ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 700–713.

⁴⁴ ONSTAGE 'Sunday 18th September 1650' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/shows/1227> Date of access: 12 February 2019.

the Portuguese King Sebastian who disappeared in the battle of Alcácer Quibir. The story was that the king would one day return and save the country. Here Nunio usurps the young Prince (and rightful monarch) Alfonzus and his mother the queen, and aims to hold on to his power as well as abuse it to exact revenge on a courtier who slept with his wife. Ultimately Nunio is discovered as a fraud and imprisoned. Looking to avoid public shame he convinces Sanchio, whom both (falsely) believe to be his son, to kill him to preserve the family's honour. This is to no avail, however, as a Nunio is still made into a public display warning against power hunger. Alfonzus is restored to power as the rightful monarch and the subplots are resolved through marriages.

Using Spanish drama as source material was certainly not uncommon at this time. To the contrary, such appropriations were fairly popular. In 1650 alone, twenty-seven plays translated from Spanish were staged in Amsterdam.⁴⁵ This practice of appropriating Spanish material started while the Dutch Republic was still at war with Spain, and unlike what one might expect, the image of Spain that was created in these works was not always negative.⁴⁶ Despite the conflict there was a fascination with Spanish culture, and materials from Spain found their way to Dutch audiences in three main ways. Firstly, through French translations of the original Spanish, which were then adapted into a Dutch work. Secondly, by first being adapted in the Southern Netherlands (also known as the Spanish Netherlands, because they continued to be occupied by Spain) where both languages were spoken. Thirdly, via the Sephardic Jewish community, who spoke both languages and who had brought Spanish materials with them when they fled Spain and were probably kept updated on new cultural developments, by friends and family who had stayed behind.⁴⁷ Frans Blom and Olga van Marion argue that the popularity of the Spanish plays or *Comedia*, was due to the need for a larger repertoire once the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre, the first commercial theatre of the country, had officially opened. Spain had just experienced a Golden Age of literature, and had so produced a wealth of materials to draw from for their own productions. Furthermore, unlike the classists' works that the French favoured at the time, these plays were filled with action, intrigue, and romance. In other words, they were very entertaining. And while some omitted the Spanish source, others had found it to be a good marketing strategy to announce that a play was Spanish.⁴⁸ The popularity of

⁴⁵ ONSTAGE 'Stagings of plays translated out of Spanish in Amsterdam's public theatre' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/analysis/?q=3> Date of access: 10 December 2018.

⁴⁶ For a more elaborate study of this practice and image of Spain that emerges from these literary works, see Bood, *Between Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia*.

⁴⁷ See Frans Blom and Olga van Marion, *Spaans toneel voor Nederlands publiek* (Hilversum: Verloren 2021), 20-32; Frans Blom, 'Enemy Treasures: The Making and Marketing of Spanish *Comedia* in the Amsterdam Schouwburg' in *Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550-1850)* Ed. Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 115-44.

⁴⁸ Blom en Van Marion, *Spaans Toneel voor Nederlands publiek*, 9-13.

Spanish source material, therefore, does not necessarily mean that this play is about Spain or the recent war.

It should be noted nowadays that we think of translation as something meant to be as close to the original text as possible, though there are different approaches and opinions as to what that actually entails. In the early modern period, especially for drama, 'translation' was considered somewhat looser. The version that made it to the stage was frequently more an appropriation than a literal translation of the foreign language material. For *Gestrafte Kroon-zucht* there is no evidence of a French intermediary version, so it is possible that play was translated directly out of Spanish.⁴⁹ Whether Heink Pietersz' translated it himself is unclear. The cover page states that he 'rhymed' (*gerijmt*) the play, which probably means that he took a translation by someone else and adapted it for the stage. The print does not include a note on the translation process, which likely would have been included if he translated the play himself in order to claim credit. In fact, the print does not show any indication that there is a Spanish source.

Furthermore, a first indicator that the new cultural product might deviate from its source can be the title, which can be kept exactly the same to signal a close relationship to the original, but can also be changed to shift the focus of the work. For example, the title of Johan van Heemskerck's appropriation of the story of the famous medieval Spanish hero Le Cid, who defended Spain against the Almoravid forces, is *De verduytsche Cid* (1641), which translates to *The Dutchified Cid*. A suitable title for a play that presents a surprisingly positive image of Spain.⁵⁰ Heemskerck states in his preface in the print:

ick my liet duncken een Hollandts hert in een Spaenschen boesem ghevonden te hebben; dat is een onversettelijcken voorstander der Vaderlandsche vrijhey, en een oversaeght teghenspreker van den opdrangh der uytheemscher heerschappye: Die dese Cid afweert met woorden recht weerdigh om door een vryen Hollander tegen den heersch-sucht der huydendaagsche Spanjaerden uytghesprooken te sijn.⁵¹

I let myself to believe to have found a Dutch heart in a Spanish bosom; that is an unmovable proponent of partriotic freedom, and a dauntless opponent of the imposition of foreign supremacy: which this Cid rejects with words right worthy to be spoken by a free Hollander against the thirst for dominance of the present-day Spaniards.⁵²

The new title of the play is thus simultaneously a comment on the translation process as the language has been changed to Dutch, as well as an act of

⁴⁹ Bood, *Between Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia*, 354.

⁵⁰ See Bood, *Between Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia*, chapter 3 for a more detailed reading of the play.

⁵¹ Johan van Heemskerck, *De Verduytsche Cid*, (Amsterdam, 1641).

⁵² Translation by Rena Bood. Bood, *Between Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia*, 178.

claiming the legendary figure of the Cid for the Dutch cause in their fight against Spain.

It is thus noteworthy that *Gestrafte Kroonzught* was given an entirely different title. The Spanish title, *La crueldad por el honor*, translates to ‘Cruelty for honour’. Honour was such an important concept in Spanish culture and key component of Spanish Golden Ages drama, that there were two different words for it: *honor*, which means ‘social category’ and *honra* which means ‘reputation’.⁵³ As A. Robert Lauer explains *honor* is associated with patrimony, so it is inherited from the male ancestor, while *honra* is “associated with the idea of surplus, ambition, property, wealth, power, high office, war, and culturally specific masculine values. This kind of honor is partly innate and partly acquired.”⁵⁴ *Honra* would thus fit better for a character who is ambitious, yet this is not the one used. And while honour was certainly part of anti-Spanish rhetoric, Rena Bood has demonstrated that in Dutch adaptations of Spanish drama, ‘honour’ could also be applied as a positive attribute.⁵⁵ While honour is important in *Gestrafte Kroonzught*, the focus of the Dutch version shifts from ‘family honour’ as the reason for cruelty, to the desire for power that elicits brutal consequences. And the Dutch version changes ‘cruelty’, a word that has connotations with practices that are heartless, without mercy and unlawful, to ‘punishment’ which suggests consequence for apprehensible actions that were taken, possibly of a legal nature. In the original ‘cruelty’ is a noun, while in the Dutch ‘gestrafte’ is an adjective placing even further emphasis on ambition as the main subject.

The paratextual material that was included in the print also supports this refocus. Since it was customary at the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre to sell prints of that night’s play at the door, these additional materials were meant to not only influence the interpretation of the reader, but also the viewer of the performance. The print of *Gestrafte Kroonzught* includes a prefatory poem by P. Dubbels, which states:⁵⁶

Zoo gaat het al die quaat met quaat wil wreken
Die na de goude Kroon en Scepter staat,
Zijn leven hangt aan een zijde draat⁵⁷

This is how it fares for all who wish to avenge evil with evil
Who desires the golden Crown and Scepter,
His life hangs by a [silken] thread

⁵³ Rena Bood, “‘The Barke is Bad, but the Tree Good:’ Hispanophobia and Spanish Honour in English and Dutch Plays c. 1630-1670” in *Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550-1850)*, ed. Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020) 145-164, 148.

⁵⁴ A. Robert Lauer, ‘Honor/Honra Revisted’ in *A Companion to Early Modern Hispanic Theatre*, ed. Hilaire Kallendord (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 78-90, 79.

⁵⁵ Rena Bood, “‘The Barke is Bad’.

⁵⁶ Likely Pieter Dubbels, an author about whom little evidence survives.

⁵⁷ P. Dubbels, ‘Op de Gestrafte Kroonzught’ in *De Gestrafte Kroonzught* (Amsterdam: 1650), A2.

The poem makes the connection between the desire for power and vengeance to argue that such desire can endanger someone's life through the common phrase 'hanging by a thread', which in Dutch includes the material of the thread: silk. Here revenge is not linked to honour, as we might expect from a Spanish play, but rather to power. This connection is more suitable for the conflict with William II, who was considered to be power hungry.

The new title and the paratext thus set the tone for the performance, making it harder to miss the warnings against the desire for and abuse of power that are present in the play's subtext as well as actual script. The concept of 'crown lust' is first mentioned early in the play, when Pedro, the first to fall for Nunio's scam, states that "de Kroonzugt (...) / Den Adel van zijn pligt en eden kan onthouden."⁵⁸ (Crownlust (...) / can keep the Nobility from his duties and oaths.) Here the nobility, who are already in a position of authority, are portrayed as wanting more power, and it warns that such ambitions prevent them from properly executing their duties. As William II was technically not royalty, but rather a member of the high nobility, this statement could be directed at his conduct. His desire to draw more power towards himself stops him from fulfilling his duties, which are to provide a sense of unity and keep the Republic save. Instead, he is causing conflict within the country and looking to place the Republic in a state of war again.

Later, after Nunio has been prevented from enacting his revenge, he reflects on his situation, lamenting:

Nu is 't met my gedaan, dit is het loon ten laatsten
 Van een wraakgierig hart, waar in de Kroonzucht plaatsten
 Dit is dan den triomf die ik onlukkig strijk
 Van deze staatzucht, ach! mijn Zoon, is 't mogelijk
 Dat deese mijn doot, tot loon van mijn bedriegeryen,
 Zal strekken tot u schant en nadeel?⁵⁹

No it is over for me, this is my last reward
 For a vengeful heart, in which crownlust was placed
 This is then the triumph that I unfortunately receive
 From this ambition for stately power, oh! my son, is it possible
 That this, my death, as a reward for my deception
 Will bring you shame and disadvantage?

Here the desire for revenge and power are explicitly linked. The use of 'wraakgierig' is noteworthy as well. There is no direct English equivalent, but it would most literally translate to 'vengeance-greedy'. This adds the sin of greed, thus further villainising Nunio. In this scene the audience also sees the 'reward' for such ambition, which is twofold. For Nunio this is death, while for his family it is the shame of being related to him. Actions of overreaching thus have a lasting effect, even after the perpetrator is gone. This is

⁵⁸ Dirck Heink Pietersz, *De Gestrafte Kroonzught* (Amsterdam: 1650), C2.

⁵⁹ Dirck Heink Pietersz, *De Gestrafte Kroonzught* (Amsterdam: Tymon Houthaak, 1650), H3 right.

a shift from interrogating ambition and power abuse towards warning against such practices by showing the consequences.

In an attempt to salvage some the family's good name, Nunio convinces Sanchio (whom both believe to be Nunio's son at this point) to kill him in jail to avoid a public execution. In her analysis of the original Spanish play Marcia Welles argues that: "Sancho is unwavering in his obedience to the law of revenge. ... [H]e himself kills his own father, as a traitor and impostor (3.21), the act that gives the play its title *la crueldad por el honor*."⁶⁰ The need to kill one's own father for the sake of honour shows the cruelty of the concept. There is no mercy, not even for family. However, while the concept of revenge for family honour was evidently kept in the Dutch adaptation, we see here how ambition and power abuse are more foregrounded. In *Gestrafte Kroonzucht*, Nunio's death is not the climax of the drama. Instead, to further emphasise the consequences of overreaching, the play puts on a tableau vivant to make sure the audience has understood the argument. The image was so essential for the performance that the publication includes a detailed description of the display:

Vertooninge, alwaar Nunio d'Aulage is zittende op een Koninglyke stoel, omhelzende met zijn rechter arm de Wraak, in haar hand hebben een brandende toorts, en met zijn slincker voet steunende op het Bedrog, die in haar hand heeft een Kroon, daar hy met zijn slinkerhant na grijpt, aan welcke zy de Straf staat, gewapent, die hem met de rechterhant, in zijn slincker zy, met een pook doorstoot, aan de slincker arm hebbende hangen een schilt, met een blaauw velt, daar op geschreven staat, met gouden lettren, DE GESTRAFTE KROONZUGT.⁶¹

Display, in which Nunio d'Aulage sits on a throne, embracing with his right arm Revenge, who has a burning torch in her hand, and with his left foot leaning on Deceit, who has a Crown in her hand, for which he reaches with his left hand, on that side Punishment stands, armed, who stabs him with her right hand in his left side, with a rake, while carrying on her left arm a shield, with a blue background, on which is written in gold letters, THE PUNISHED CROWNLUST.

Nunio is turned into the personification of 'crown lust' in a tableau vivant constructed to show the punishment for such ambition. In the image, Crown lust is affectionate towards Revenge, and considering the context of the play, this points to the desire for vengeance and political power going hand in hand. This idea is further emphasised when the display is revealed by Sanchio to both the audience in the theatre and the crowd on stage. Sanchio addresses Alfonzus, the young, newly crowned, and moreover, rightful king, who is among the onlookers on stage "daar ziet ghy nu het loon / Van zijn

⁶⁰ Marcia L. Welles, *Persephone's girdele: narratives of rape in seventeenth-century Spanish literature* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 18.

⁶¹ Pietersz, *De Gestrafte Kroonzucht*, 12.

Wraakgierig hart, en Kroonzucht om u Kroon."⁶² (there you see the reward / For his vengeance-greedy heart, and Crownlust for your Crown). Again, death is presented as the consequence of overreaching for power. This tableau vivant could thus be read as a warning to William II, who was often accused of having ambitions for (near) royal power.

Moreover, not mentioned in Sanchio's description is the role that Deceit plays in the tableau vivant. On the one hand, Deceit functions as something on which ambitious people lean to achieve their goals. Nunio did that in the play by pretending to be King Alfonso. On the other hand, and more importantly, Deceit is holding up the crown that Nunio is reaching for, so it is also shown as the cause of such ambitions. Deceit deludes people into thinking that they are capable of (quite literally) grabbing power. The drama thus suggests that ambition is a dangerous and deceitful temptation. Furthermore, the description of the tableau vivant specifies that Punishment is standing on the left side of Nunio, as his left hand is reaching for the crown. This motion leaves the left side of his body vulnerable, which enables Punishment to strike him with a deadly blow. Nunio is too occupied with his ambition to defend himself, so instead of making him more powerful it actually makes him more vulnerable. When this involves people holding important societal positions, such as general commander of the army in the case of William II, the bigger implication may be that the country becomes vulnerable as well.

Through this tableau vivant the play also argues that it impossible to escape punishment, while the way it is executed might be different than expected. Nunio had hoped to avoid public humiliation by urging Sanchio to kill him, but by making him into a display, which is viewed by the characters and thus visible to both the 'public' in the form of the audience and the 'public' in the narrative, he still suffers disgrace. Another warning to a stadholder who is seen as prideful and in search of more esteem: overreaching could lead to humiliation. The tableau vivant thus exposes both the nature as well as the dangers of 'crown lust'. The tableau vivant was a familiar theatrical tool to early modern Dutch audiences, and since it will have been on display on stage for several minutes, the audience did have the time to make these connections.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, no audience responses survive, but we might be able to learn more about the reception of the play from its performance and publication history. The play's popularity in the early 1650s could be a sign that *Gestrafte Kroonzucht* was linked to criticism to the Orange family. The play was performed eleven times between 1650 and 1655 (see table 1). The first four were in the spring of 1650 and these were followed by two more in the autumn. At this time the tableau vivant might have had a sharper, perhaps even bittersweet tone, as William II had indeed overreached by calling himself 'Highness', crossing boundaries of constitutional laws, and, of course, the attempted siege. He had actively and openly tried

⁶² Pietersz, *De Gestrafte Kroonzucht*, 12.

to gain more power, and he had failed. Based on the revenue Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom suggest that the play was a moderate success.⁶³

Date performance	Guilders (fl)
28 March 1650	173,75
31 March 1650	43,95
4 April 1650	125,40
2 May 1650	120,05
12 September 1650	80
13 October 1650	71,45
13 February 1651	162
9 July 1651	151,5
14 December 1651	80,925
1 February 1652	39,425
15 February 1655	130,20
Total	1.278,65

Table 2: Revenue earned by performances of *De Gestrafte Kroonzucht*

That the play was never revived after 1655, despite earning a decent revenue of fl. 130,20 with its last performance, might also suggest that *Gestrafte Kroonzucht* had become linked to the discussion about William II to such an extent that it was no longer of interest or relevance outside of that context. After 1654 the debate about the stadholderate changed. The public now discussed the fate of the young William III, who was officially excluded from ever becoming stadholder through the Act of Exclusion. This was a secret clause in the 1654 peace treaty that ended the First Anglo-Dutch War (1552-1654), the existence of which was not revealed until a week after the treaty was agreed by the States General.⁶⁴ Arguments about overreaching are harder to make about a young boy. In fact, in this new context, the play could have been interpreted as being in favour of William III since it is the crown of young Prince Alfonzus that Nunio usurps. Nunio in turn could now be interpreted as a representation of Johan de Witt, the leader of the States General at time. The anti-Orange argument would thus be softened or even lost entirely. This might have been a reason for the Municipal The-

⁶³ Jautze, Álvarez Francés, and Blom, 'Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', 27.

⁶⁴ K.H.D. Haley, *The British & The Dutch: Political and Cultural Relations through the Ages* (London: George Philip, 1988), 94; Prak, *The Dutch Republic*, 47-48; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 722.

atre to no longer stage the play, but without further evidence, this is speculation. Regardless, *Gestrafte Kroonzugt* might have lost its place on the stage, but not before it had served as a challenge to ambition and power abuse.

Unwelcome Visits and Planned Resistance: *Geeraerdt van Velsen*

As discussed above, William II visited Amsterdam on 27 June 1650, despite warnings that he would not be welcome. He was promptly denied access to the council meeting, which angered him. That same day the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre decided to put on a performance of P.C. Hooft's *Geeraerdt van Velsen*. This well-known play was performed at least once a year since the opening of the theatre building in 1638, as were most of his plays.⁶⁵ Hooft's first biographer, Geeraardt Brandt, claimed that this particular play was much appreciated by the "geleerden" (learned) audience.⁶⁶ *Geeraerdt van Velsen* was performed on 28 May 1647 as part of the memorial for Hooft's death, which suggests that this might even have been his most popular play.⁶⁷ Due to these regular performances, it would have been relatively easy for the theatre company to put on the production at short notice, since the décor, costumes and props would have been ready, and the actors would not have needed much time to rehearse. This would have allowed them to plan the performance as soon as it became known what date the stadholder was hoping to arrive.

The timing of this production implies that this particular performance had a somewhat different meaning than the ones that had come before. As discussed above a play can be interpreted entirely different even a decade after its first performance if the circumstances and audiences had changed. And sometimes the very act of performing can make a statement. This was probably the case for this particular performance of *Geeraerdt van Velsen as well*. Unfortunately, no print of the play from that year survives. If it had, it could have provided us with valuable insights into the way the theatre makers wanted to frame this performance through the paratextual material, like we saw above with *Gestrafte Kroonzugt*. Nevertheless, the play text and its timing in the context of the ongoing political conflict, means that the audience would likely have made the link between the performance and the visit of the stadholder. Additionally, in the past visiting stadholders had been entertained with drama performances. In fact, in 1618 this very play was performed for then Stadholder Maurice of Orange during his visit to the city.⁶⁸ So even though there is no evidence that William II attended the theatre that day, the theatre company might have anticipated his attendance, and there is a possibility that he was indeed there. Therefore, this performance of

⁶⁵ ONSTAGE 'Geeraerdt van Velsen' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/plays/13>. Date of access: 22 February 2019.

⁶⁶ Geeraardt Brandt. *Het leven van Pieter Corn: Hooft en de lykreedden*, Ed. Pieter Leendertz, Jr. (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1932), 12–13.

⁶⁷ ONSTAGE 'Tuesday 28th May 1647' <http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/shows/891>. Date of access: 1 March 2019.

⁶⁸ Porteman & Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, 239.

Geeraerdt van Velsen could potentially protest William II's plans directly to him. The very performance could thus be considered a political act.

Geeraerdt van Velsen is a suitable play for such a protest. Like *Gestrafte Kroonzught*, it deals with a tyrant. An important difference is that this play is based on events from Dutch medieval history. In 1297 a group of conspirators, under the leadership of Geeraerdt van Velsen, kidnapped Count Floris V. Originally the plan was to extradite Floris to the English King, who had his own problems with the count, but something went wrong, and the conspirators ended up killing him instead. Hooft's play follows these events, which are here triggered by the rape of Machteld, the wife of the titular character, and it features debates among the conspirators about what to do with the count after he is captured. The historical conspiracy, as well as Hooft's adaption, appear to have been fairly popular, as several new plays followed Hooft's, some clearly meant as sequels to his version of the narrative. These include Suffridus Sixtinus's *Gerard van Velsen lijende* (1628), Jacob Jansz Coleveldt's *Graef Floris en Gerard van Velsen* (1628) and most famously Joost van den Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* (1638). Henk Duits suggests that when Vondel wrote *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* he likely based his characters more on Hooft's play than on historical sources, since those were not readily available at the time.⁶⁹ In his research on the afterlives of the murder of Floris V, Jan William Verkaik argues that Hooft's version of the story has had a significant impact on the way Floris V was viewed.⁷⁰ *Geeraerdt van Velsen* might have had a similar effect for Floris V as Shakespeare's *Richard III* has had for its titular character in creating a persistently negative view of the ruler in cultural memory.

Verkaik argues that this negative view of Floris V was established by Hooft by adding characteristics often associated with Philip II of Spain to Floris' persona to invite comparison between the count and the king against whom the Dutch Revolt originally started.⁷¹ But the tone is really set in the opening scene of the play where Machteld van Velsen tells the audience about how Count Floris V raped her in her own home while her husband was away for business. In the same speech, Machteld expresses concern about what her husband might do to retaliate. This heart-breaking speech immediately sets Floris up as a power-abusing ruler who mistreats his citizens, while also opening the discussion on how best to resist such tyranny. The passage further discusses an unwelcome visit in which the authority figure violates his power, which in the context of the events of 1650 could resemble the unwelcome visit of William II who was perceived to aspire to tyranny, though his stay in Amsterdam was less violent.

Furthermore, as several studies have indicated, Hooft's *Geeraerdt van Velsen* also draws on the writing of several influential political historians and

⁶⁹ Henk Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse Opstand. Studies over de relatie tussen politiek en toneel in het midden van de zeventiende eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1990), 24.

⁷⁰ Jan Willem Verkaik, *De moord op graaf Floris V* (PhD Thesis, University Utrecht 1995), 69.

⁷¹ Verkaik, *De moord op graaf Floris V*, 69-70.

theorists, such as Levy, Tacitus, Machiavelli, and Grotius, giving the play a strong textual foundation to discuss republicanism, resistance, and tyranny.⁷² In that light, *Geeraerdt van Velsen* has been interpreted as encouraging caution with resistance, because its unhappy ending implies that even justified rebellion can end in disaster. Fokke Veenstra, for example, argues that it is a “popular anti-Machiavellianism” play, and Pavel V. Sokolov views the character Van Aemstel as Hooft’s spokesperson, and argues that Van Aemstel “adheres to the moderate position”.⁷³ However, Freya Sierhuis rightly points out that these conclusions are drawn by prioritising certain parts of the play, such as the Chorus and Van Aemstel, over the voices of the other characters and the overall plot of the play.⁷⁴ Instead, Sierhuis argues that a deeper engagement with political thinkers such as Machiavelli becomes visible in the text once we take the play as a whole into consideration. This approach results in a more nuanced exploration of the question of how one should act when faced with power abuse in a way that does not condemn resistance as harshly as previously assumed. This also means that the play has more potential to be an act of protest than previously assumed, especially since the circumstances and audiences had changed since the play was originally written and performed. When *Geeraerdt van Velsen* was first performed in 1618, during what is now known as the Twelve Years Truce between the Dutch Republic and Spain, an argument for caution and nuance would have certainly been a relevant interpretation since there was a major, countrywide religious conflict. The Truce Conflicts, or the Arminian Controversy as Sierhuis calls it, were a particular complicated dispute, which started as an argument between two theologians, Arminius and Gomarus, at Leiden University and escalated into a heated public debate on religion and eventually political conflict between the Arminians or Remonstrants on one side and the Gomarus or Counter-Remonstrants on the other. The Remonstrants generally argued for more tolerance and freedom within the Calvinist faith, while the Counter-Remonstrants were in favour of a stricter Calvinism. Oldenbarnevelt, the States Advocate and essentially the most powerful man in the country, sided with the Arminians, and the Stadholder Maurits, ended up on the opposing side. The political side of the conflict was largely ended

⁷² For studies of the influence of these authors on the play and P.C. Hooft as an author see for example: Freya Sierhuis, ‘Revenge, Resistance and the Problem of Machiavellianism: P. C. Hooft’s *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (1613)’, *Dutch Crossing*, 34 no. 2 (2010), 115-137; Pavel V. Sokolov, ‘Lucretia without Poniard: Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft’s *Geeraerdt van Velsen* between Livy and Tacitus’ in *History and Drama: The Pan-European Tradition*, Eds. Joachim Küpper, Jan Mosch and Elena Penskaya (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 72-85; Fokke Veenstra, *Ethiek en moraal bij P.C. Hooft: twee studies in renaissance-idealen* (Zwolle : W.E.J. Tjeenk Willink, 1968).

⁷³ Fokke Veenstra, ‘Hooft’s *Geeraerdt van Velsen* als anti-Machiavellistisch Drama’ in *Niederlandistik in Entwicklung, Vorträge und Arbeiten an der Universität Zürich*, Ed. by S. Sonderegger and J. Stegeman (Antwerpen: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), pp. 19–70; Sokolov, ‘Lucretia without Poniard’, 83.

⁷⁴ Sierhuis, ‘Revenge, Resistance and the Problem of Machiavellianism’, 118.

by the arrest of several significant Arminians, such as Grotius and Oldenbarnevelt was executed on charges of high treason.⁷⁵ In 1650 the Republic was once again experiencing a quickly escalating internal political conflict, but of a different nature.

This change in context means that certain parts of *Geeraerdt van Velsen* could be interpreted in a different manner. A scene that was probably viewed differently in 1650 is the discussion that takes place in the third act among the conspiring nobles about what to do now that they have kidnapped Floris V. Van Velsen and Van Worden want to transport Floris to England, but Van Aemstel opposes this plan:

Harman Van Woerden: Wat middel zoudt gij dan goed vinden te gebruiken?

Gijsbert van Aemstel: Den graaf en graaflijkheid haar wieken wel te fnuiken,
doch niet door vreemd geweld, maar naar voorouders zeên.
Beschrijft de ridderschap, beschrijft de grote steên,
waar d'opperheid bij staat, en laat die wederhalen
de buitenspoorse macht in d' oudbezette palen.⁷⁶

Van Woerden: What course do you suggest that we should follow, then?

Van Aemstel: The Count's wings must be clipped, his powers be curtailed;

But not with foreign troops: but in accordance with
Our ancient customs. Call on the knights, the cities,
Who grant all power and might: let them once again
Set power in excess within its ancient bounds.⁷⁷

Here Van Aemstel calls on his fellow conspirators to trust the 'ancient customs' which refers to the States General, a version of which had been present in the Low Countries for centuries before the Republic was founded. This interaction could have been interpreted differently in 1650 than in the 1610s. In May 1618 Maurice was on a similar tour of the cities of Holland as William II was undertaking, in order to convince municipal governments to side with the Counter-Remonstrants. Maurice's visit was more warmly welcomed by the citizens of Amsterdam, and several theatre performances were arranged for him. Among those was *Geeraerdt van Velsen*, which was staged by the theatre group 'Nederduytsche Academie' (Dutch Academy), who were Remonstrants and Remonstrant sympathisers. Porteman and Smits-

⁷⁵ For more on the public debate during the Truce Conflicts see: Roeland Harms, *Pamfletten en publieke opinie*: Freya Sierhuis, *The literature of the Arminian Controversy: religion, politics and the stage in the Dutch Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kleij, *Early Modern Theatre and the Public Sphere*, chapter 2.

⁷⁶ Hooft, P. C., *Geeraerdt van Velsen* in *Geeraerdt van Velsen — Baeto of Oorsprong der Hollanderen*, ed. by Henk Duits (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2005) Act III, 778–782.

⁷⁷ Translation by Freya Sierhuis. Sierhuis, 'Revenge, Resistance and the Problem of Machiavellianism', 124.

Veldt suggest that this performance was meant to urge the stadholder to see the importance of moderate government rather than the radical policies he was proposing.⁷⁸ In that context this passage can be interpreted as an urging to stop the chaos and let the States General do their job. The audience was thus encouraged to side with Van Aemstel in this instance. In 1650, however, the States General had sided with the prince. Sierhuis argues that the plan to send Floris to England was prompted by the precariousness of their situation because the count was favoured by the people.⁷⁹ That is why Van Velsen and Van Woerden are considering the drastic steps to which Van Aemstel is objecting. In 1650 the citizens of Amsterdam, and the rest of Holland, found themselves in a precarious situation as well as now that States General supported their adversary. This could have encouraged the viewers who, in other circumstances, might have agreed with Van Aemstel, to side with Van Velsen and his more extreme measure this time.

The final act might have been interpreted differently in 1650 as well, since *Geeraerd van Velsen* ends with a celebration of Amsterdam, Holland, and the Dutch Republic which all pledge alliance to the Nassau family, Maurice in particular, in their fight against Spain. This celebration is presented in the form of a prophecy made by the river Vecht, a major river near Amsterdam. The river predicts that Maurice will make Amsterdam famous ('vermaren'). The city is compared to a maiden who is growing into an intelligent young woman to portray how Amsterdam is coming to maturity and 'flourishment' of prosperity.⁸⁰ The Maiden was a commonly used symbol for a city, province, or the entire country, so the audience would have been familiar with such a personification of the city.⁸¹ According to the river, the city would enjoy Maurice's special protection:

De naamhaftige stad verdadigd door zijn dolk
zal nemen toe in macht en menigte van volk
meer, dan tevoren in driehonderd zonningen,
en wijder uit den kreits van hare vesten dringen⁸²

The famous city, protected by his [Maurits'] sword
will increase in power and population
than in the years before
and expand wider than the current city walls

The prophecy further states that this protection, and promise of growth and prosperity also meant that "Heim'lijke nijd ontvaên haar mindere gespelen" (Her less fortunate friends [other cities] will feel jealous in secret).⁸³ This singles Amsterdam out as special among the Dutch cities. Indeed, when

⁷⁸ Porteman & Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, 239.

⁷⁹ Sierhuis, 'Revenge, Resistance and the Problem of Machiavellianism', 125

⁸⁰ Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 1612-1620.

⁸¹ M. Meijer Drees, *Andere landen, andere mensen: De beeldvorming van Holland versus Spanje en Engeland omstreeks 1650* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997), 124

⁸² Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen* 1622-1625.

⁸³ Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 1621.

Hooft wrote the play, the city had already taken up a prominent position in the Dutch Republic, and its role continued to grow over time. By 1650 the city was the most important city in Holland. Performing this scene could now be interpreted as a celebration that the prophecy written by one of the city's most prominent authors had essentially come true. Considering the conflict between William II and Amsterdam, this might have come across as the city rubbing their success in the face of the stadholder and those who might have supported him.

Moreover, this passage does not only praise Amsterdam, but it also shows the special connection between the city and the stadholderate, one which had now been broken. Praising the bond between Maurice and Amsterdam places the situation with William II in a new perspective and sharp contrast with the past, as it highlights the changes. For example, when the prediction of Amsterdam's growth is immediately followed by a portrayal of the city as a safe haven from tyranny:

Want, al wie tirannie te woediglijk ontstelt,
bloedige wetten of vijandelijk geweld,
ellendelijk zal uit haar vaderland verjagen
met vrouwen, kind'ren jong en hoop berooide magen,
door open poorten zij [Amsterdam] ontfaên zal naakt en bloot
en met meedogendheid verkwikken in haar schoot.⁸⁴

Because, all who are by oppressive tyranny,
bloody laws or hostile violence,
miserably driven out of their homeland
with their wives, young children and many destitute relatives
she [Amsterdam] will greet with open gates, publicly receive
and let them with compassion recuperate.

This passage creates the image of Amsterdam as a protector against tyranny, a city that welcomes those who have been oppressed. In the footnote to this passage, Henk Duits suggests that it primarily refers to immigration from the Southern Netherlands, which started after the fall of Antwerp in 1585.⁸⁵ While this sentiment towards refugees was probably still felt, since the Peace of Westphalia it would have lost some of its relevance in regard to armed, international conflict. However, since it was made clear to the stadholder twice that he would not be greeted 'with open gates' during his tour of Holland, this suggests that William II is now the tyrant from whom Amsterdam provides protection and shelter. Hence the original pro-Orange sentiments of the 1610s had become subversive in meaning in 1650. This performance of *Geeraerdt van Velsen* can thus be interpreted as an act of protest against William II as it shows support for Amsterdam and its politics, while subverting the authority and pride of the stadholder.

⁸⁴ Hooft, *Geeraerdt van Velsen*, Act 5, 1626-1631.

⁸⁵ Hooft, *Geeraerdt van Velsen*, Footnote 1626 p. 108.

Finally, because *Geeraerdt van Velsen* is based on Holland's history, the narrative is closer to home and more relatable. While the play engages with contemporary political theory, the 1650 performance actually moves the concept of rebellion against tyranny further out of the theoretical discussion that plays like *Gestrafte Kroonzugt* presented and moves it closer towards a real possibility. On the one hand, the nuanced discussion on how to deal with tyranny remains but on the other hand the warning against what might happen, namely civil war and potential death, takes a new dimension. In the context of William II's visit to Amsterdam, this warning is not only presented to the people at large, but directly to the stadholder himself as well, since the theatre company would have been justified to expect the stadholder to attend, like Maurice had done in 1618. This anticipation is ultimately what matters, not whether or not he was actually there, as it speaks to the intended message of the performance. The council of Amsterdam, and other cities as well, had already shown themselves not to be afraid to stand up against the prince's ambitions. They had not physically harmed William II, nor called in foreign help like Van Velsen and his co-conspirators had done in the play, but did whatever they could to undermine him. They resisted his plan to renew the war with Spain, defunded the troops, criticized the violation of State Law, and refused him access to cities and meetings. All of these demonstrate that they did not hesitate to take increasingly drastic steps to stop him. It is not hard to imagine that the audience members in Amsterdam might have identified themselves with one of the nobles plotting against an abusive leader. Thus, while being one of the most complex plays performed that spring, *Geeraerdt van Velsen* is also one of the most explicit in its protest against William II. The timing of the performance in combination with its presentation of how the citizens of Holland have risen up against tyranny before warns that similar resistance is certainly possible again.

Conclusion

1650 was a tense and turbulent year for the Dutch Republic. Power structures were tested, and boundaries were crossed as Holland and William II argued over the size of the army and the possibility of renewing the war with Spain. The conflict was cut short by William II's sudden death, and we can only speculate what might have happened had he lived. The Siege of Amsterdam suggests that some further form of armed conflict could have been a possibility. When protest has been shaped into a literary form it is often less straightforward and direct in its criticism, which can make it harder for future readers to understand. Through close reading the plays, studying paratextual material, theatre records, the timing and the context in which these plays were performed I have sought to explore to what extent and how protest in theatrical form took place on the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre. As the theatre records show a significant number of plays dealt with tyranny and resistance that year, and it appears that as the conflict escalated, so did the message on stage. From more abstract discussions about tyranny some plays moved to explorations of resistance and even to acts of protests.

Gestrafte Kroonzuight warns for the disastrous consequences of ambition. By not highlighting the honour element in the narrative as much, the play is distanced from its Spanish source, and instead emphasises the potential punishment for overreaching, especially for kind of monarchical power that William II supposedly desired. The play can be read as a warning against such ambitions. The performance of *Geeraerdt van Velsen*, was a more direct act of protest against the stadholder, which demonstrates how the meaning of a text can change when placed in a new context. Performed on the day of William II's visit to Amsterdam, the play about the historical killing of political leader, acts as a reminder of what the Dutch, and more specifically the citizens of Amsterdam, were capable of doing when faced with power abuse. This performance even had the potential to directly address the stadholder. This article has explored how theatre makers have adapted drama to contemporary needs, and as such how plays can act as a means of protest. This has been done in the past and will continue in the future.

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