



Milking the Fat Cow

A Political Allegory on the Netherlands during the Revolt¹

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The Fat Cow in Art

The cow was the ultimate icon of Dutch prosperity as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.² A recent article linked the universally praised virtue of cleanliness in Holland to the economic importance of milk and butter production in the Golden Age – hygiene, after all, was an essential precondition.³ It is consequently not surprising that the cow figures as the personification of the Netherlands in prints and paintings, and occasionally in a political allegory.

The best known example is the little painting entitled *The Milch Cow* in the Rijksmuseum's collection (fig. 1).⁴ The inscription on this panel reads:

*Not longe time since I sawe a cowe
Did Flaunders represente
Upon whose backe Kinge Phillip rode
As being malecontnt.*

*The Queene of England giving hay
Wheare on the cow did feede
As one that was her greatest helpe
In her distresse and neede.*

*The Prince of Orange milkt the cowe
And made his purse the payle
The cow it shyt in Monsieurs hand
While he did hold her tayle.*

Detail of fig. 1

The cow is being ridden by Philip II, who waves a sceptre in each hand. Beneath the cow William of Orange sucks on the udders. Six members of the States-General (or the colonels from Antwerp?)⁵ grasp the cow by the horns.⁶ Francis of Anjou ('Monsieur'), the brother of the French king Henry III, pulls the tail, but the cow defecates in his hands. The English queen Elizabeth feeds the cow with a bundle of hay and in her other hand holds a wooden pitcher, which may be intended for the Prince of Orange.⁷ The explanation of this allegory is obvious. William of Orange is exploiting the Netherlands – the cow; the lawful ruler Philip II is barely able to stand his ground. The States-General try to maintain their influence with all their might. Protestant England, in the figure of Queen Elizabeth, is well-disposed towards the Netherlands. And finally the Duke of Anjou tries in vain to exert his influence.

The notion of the Netherlands as the milch cow was conceived in the most crucial period of the revolt against Spain. Following the Iconoclasm in 1566, Philip II appointed the Duke of Alva as governor. Alva's brutal conduct in the rebellious regions simply hardened the opposition. On his departure in 1573 he was succeeded first by Luis de Requesens y Zúñiga and then by John of Austria, who died in 1578.



The rebellious regions now found themselves facing a formidable opponent, both diplomatically and militarily, in John's successor as governor (1578-92), Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma: after 1579 he brought a number of towns under Spanish rule, the last being Antwerp in 1585.

In these decades the rebellion against the Spanish king was concentrated in the Southern Netherlands. Calvinism gained ground there; between 1577 and 1584/85 Ghent, Antwerp and other towns had Calvinist administrations. William of Orange, undeniably the leader of the Rebellion, tried in vain to hold the combined Netherlands together in religious tolerance, diplomatically and militarily. His attempt to offer Francis of Anjou, the brother of the French king, sovereignty over the Netherlands in 1580 ended in failure:

Anjou did, it is true, become Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders in 1582, but after the 'French Fury', an ill-advised attack on Antwerp in January 1583, he left the country without having achieved his aim.⁸ Two years later the city fell to the Duke of Parma. The fall of Antwerp in 1585 heralded the final split of the Netherlands.

The surrounding countries followed the struggle closely. It seems obvious to assume that the Rijksmuseum's *Milch Cow* must have been made in the period before Anjou's installation as Duke of Brabant in 1582 or – more likely – after the French Fury in January 1583, when he had to leave the Netherlands for good.⁹ In view of the iconography and the prominent place for Queen Elizabeth and the English inscription, it was undoubtedly intended for an English-speaking audience.

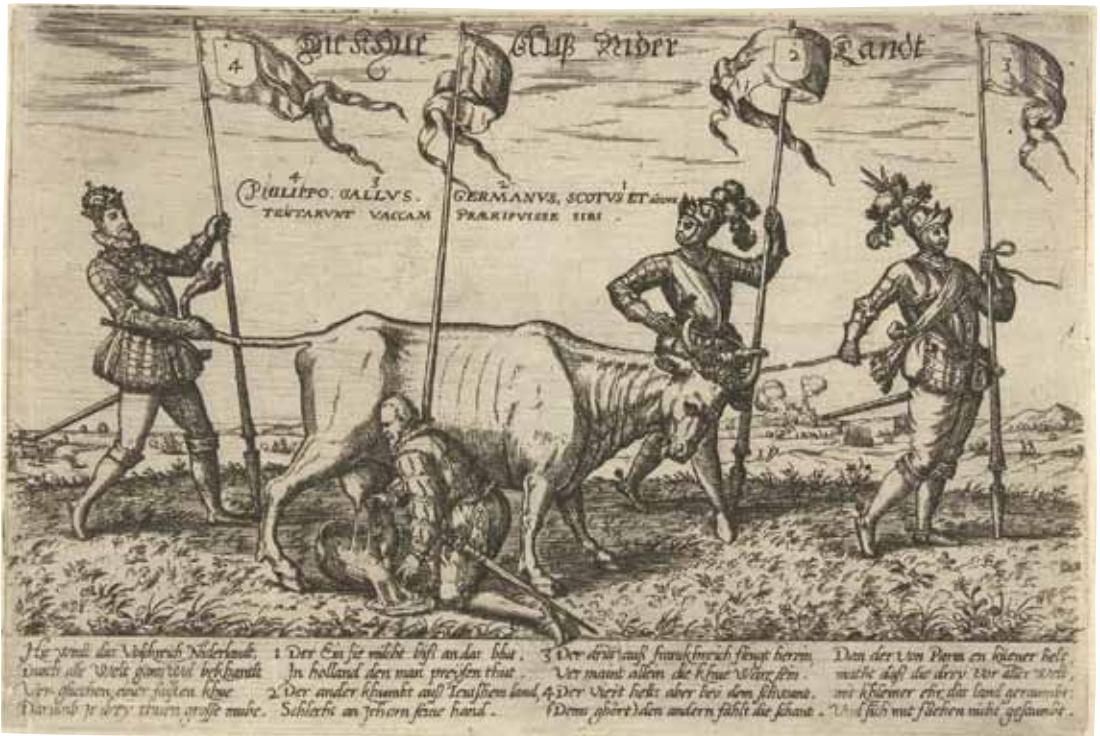
Fig. 1
ANONYMOUS,
The Milck Cow,
c. 1633-39 or later;
copy after a lost
original.
Oil on canvas,
52 x 67 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. SK-A-2684;
R.T., Baron van
Pallandt van Eerde
Bequest.

Recent dendrochronological research has revealed, however, that *The Milch Cow* in the Rijksmuseum was painted around fifty years later: the painting could have been done in 1633 at the earliest, but a date of 1639 or after is more probable.¹⁰ It consequently appears highly likely that this is a later copy or variant of a painting (or an unknown print) that was made before 1583.

A letter dated 2 March 1583 from the Spanish ambassador in London to Philip II's secretary proves that the subject of the Dutch milch cow was indeed known in the 1580s. In it the ambassador records that a painting with an almost identical composition to the panel in the Rijksmuseum – 'una vaca que significa aquellos Estados' – was sent to England from Flanders.¹¹ It is even possible that it was the original and the panel in the Rijksmuseum is a copy of it. It could also be that both works derive from an as yet unknown print.

In any case it appears that in those same months a questionable print with a similar, yet completely different subject was being circulated in Antwerp and drew the attention of the authorities. An anonymous Catholic resident of the city wrote about it in a letter dated 17 February 1583 to a likewise unknown fellow townsman in Cologne (the principal refuge for Catholics): the margrave-sheriff set up an investigation into printers' shops, among other places, to trace who produced the print of a cow on which Anjou was sitting while Orange pulled on the udders and the colonels (the heads of the civic guard) dipped their bread in the milk. The only possible purpose of this print would be to turn the people against the House of Orange. It was not clear, though, whether the print had actually been circulated; in any event the letter writer himself had never seen it.¹² This print was undoubtedly directed against Anjou, who was universally hated,

Fig. 2
ANONYMOUS
(Cologne?),
*Die Khue auss Nider
Landt*, in or after 1587.
Etching, 175 x 263 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-P-OB-80.058.



particularly after the French Fury.¹³ A somewhat later print, probably from Cologne, dated in or after 1587, entitled *Die Khue auss Nider Landt*, with an inscription in Latin and four couplets in German, shows a similar scene (fig. 2): this time, however, it is Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the governor between 1585 and 1587, who sits under the cow milking it dry, while Philip II pulls its tail, Anjou tugs it forward with a rope and – probably – Matthias of Austria, governor of the Netherlands from 1578 to 1581, holds it by the horns; Orange is absent here.¹⁴

The Fat Cow on the French Stage

The iconographic subject of the cow as a symbol of the Netherlands continued into the eighteenth century. In 1996 the American historian James Tanis described the ‘Tale of a Cow’ in its entirety.¹⁵ In this study the Rijksmuseum’s painting is described as the oldest known example of this allegory – even as the exemplar of this iconographic theme. This, however, is incorrect. This painting, as we have seen, is a later copy, and we know that the subject was popular in the theatre prior to that. A lucky discovery in the Hessisches Staatsarchiv in Marburg – a summary of a stage play – and a short passage from *De bello belgico* (1647) shed new light on the origins and history of the subject.¹⁶

On 30 April 1579 in Paris, in the presence of King Henry III, his brother Francis, Duke of Alençon and Anjou, and the ‘great gentlemen of the kingdom’, there was a performance of a farce entitled *La Vache Grasse*. The Marburg records contain a lengthy *sommaire* of this two-act play (see appendix).

The first part is a political morality play or *moralité politique*. Lady Lent seeks hospitality in a series of inns: The Arms of Holland, The Arms of Zeeland, The Arms of Antwerp and The Arms of Ghent. The landlord of the latter is Jan van Hembyze, the

landlady is Gerard van Montaigne’s widow and Francis van Rijnove is the chamberlain. Lady Lent is accompanied by an array of female Virtues: Abstinence, Moderation, Frugality, Mercy, Love, Chastity and others, all dressed appropriately. None of the inns suited them: they were all full of riffraff, rogues and followers of sects. In the end the company asked for accommodation at the Arms of Artois, an inn of good repute where the old religious customs and habits were also observed. Lady Lent and her retinue found hospitality there and had to stay there until order was restored in the other inns.

The scene enacted here is easy to recognize as an allegory on the political situation in the Southern Netherlands. In the farce, the Arms of Ghent is the most important inn; the only one where the names of the landlord and landlady are mentioned: Jan van Hembyze, the Widow Montaigne and Francis van Rijnove. Between 1577 and 1584, the year when Ghent fell into the hands of the Duke of Parma, the Calvinists were in power.¹⁷ Jan van Hembyze and the warlord Francis van Rijnove were the Calvinist leaders: in his words Ghent was a second Geneva.¹⁸ The landlady, the Widow Montaigne, represents an earlier stage in the Protestantization of Ghent: her husband, Gerard van Montaigne, was a scholar and a prominent theologian, who had been banished from the Netherlands, and from the 1550s held important offices in the Dutch reformed communities in London and in Emden; he died some time after 1571.

Radicalism in Ghent reached its peak in the spring and summer of 1579. At the end of 1579, under pressure from Orange, the uncompromising Hembyze was removed from the administration and had to leave Ghent. Artois and other Walloon areas and a group of Catholic noblemen, the Malcontents, on the other hand, became reconciled with Philip II: on

6 January 1579 the Union of Arras was signed in the town of the same name – the centre of the Artois region. The pious and Catholic Lady Lent's choice of the inn in Arras was therefore extremely topical and very sensible.

The Fat Cow does not appear on stage until the second act of the *comédie*. The King of Spain pulls her along by a thin, frayed rope. Members of the States-General hold her by the horns to stop her following the king. Everyone pulls her by the ears and horns, even the army officers, who do not want to be left out. Beneath the cow, at the udders, sit William of Orange on one side and the German army commander John Casimir of the Palatinate on the other:¹⁹ they are taking as much milk from the beast as they can. The Duke of Anjou appears on stage and begins to pull the animal by its tail with all his might to wrench it away from the king. Onlookers are watching the play: the Queen of England, the French, the Scots, the English, the allies of the House of Orange and others wait for the moment when the beast is slaughtered. But the cow will not have any of it. She walks forward to follow her true Master, the King, and turns around forcefully to escape the clutches of Anjou: he has to let go of her. Casimir gets a kick and falls backwards so that the pail of milk is knocked over. Even the members of the States-General are thrown to the ground. Only Orange walks away unscathed. The towns and villages had lost all confidence in these gentlemen with their big mouths, only William of Orange should continue to milk the cow. The cow has no other choice: her true Master, who had treated her so well in the past, had neglected her for too long.

The subject of the *Vache Grasse* lived on in Parisian theatre. In the second volume of his *De bello belgico* (1647),²⁰ the Roman Jesuit Famianus Strada (1572-1649), a great admirer of the Duke

of Parma, describes the performance in Paris – after the signing of the Union of Arras in early 1579 – of a *fabula*, a stage play with the same subject but a different intent. Here the king also pulls the cow on to the stage by a flimsy rope. When that breaks, the Duke of Parma ties the cow up again. Members of the States-General sit on the back of the animal and hold on to the horns, while Anjou tries to help them by pulling the beast by the tail. Orange and John Casimir, one on each side, struggle to milk the cow into a large pail. There are Dutch, many French, German and English people among the onlookers. Queen Elizabeth tries one thing and then another to remain on friendly terms with them. At a sign from the Duke of Parma the cow jumps up, gets away from her attackers, throws off the men sitting on her back and kicks Casimir and Orange over. When Orange makes a renewed attempt to keep hold of her, she threatens him with her horns, knocks over the pail of milk and with one bound throws herself into the arms of the king.²¹ Here the successful Duke of Parma emerges as the victor on stage.

So how do the two stage scripts relate to comparable depictions of the Dutch Cow in the prints and paintings discussed above?

It is entirely possible that it was not an artist who thought up this allegory and that it stems from the world of farce: all sorts of actions – pulling, hitting and kicking, a pail of milk falling over – suggest a play. The nature of the scene in the prints and paintings is different, less forceful and violent. There is no hint at all that the cow is in danger of being slaughtered.

There is a somewhat older drawing, probably made in Brussels in 1577, likewise in the Marburg archives (fig. 3), which shows an ox – the Netherlands once again – being led to the slaughter, but this gruesome scene has an entirely



different meaning: headless members of the States-General hold the ox by the tail, while the new Spanish governor, Don Juan (John of Austria), leads the animal to a place where opponents of the king are being hanged or beheaded. This is about the meat, not the milk.²² This drawing consequently does not contradict the supposition that the image of the Netherlands as a cow milked dry could originate from the world of the French theatre.

What, then, is the political and cultural context of the French stage plays? Both farces were performed in Paris in 1579. The Spanish-slanted version may have been staged in early 1579 for an unknown audience. The moderate pro-Orange production had its premiere on 30 April for an audience made up of Henry III, King of France (1574-89), his brother

Francis, Duke of Anjou (1555-84) and the great of the kingdom, the important, noble families.²³ Anjou was staying in the Netherlands in the second half of 1578, was in Paris for a few days in March 1579 and made a grand entrance back into Paris on 26 April with a large retinue. He remained there until 3 August, partly to discuss a possible proposal of marriage to the English queen; at that time he and the king were on extremely good terms and his stay in the Louvre was a great source of pleasure and satisfaction for Henry.²⁴ But as a rule Anjou's ambitions with regard to the Netherlands made the relationship between them a tricky one.²⁵

There was great interest in France in the political developments in the Netherlands. Allusions to the revolt against the Spanish king were also

Fig. 3
ANONYMOUS
(Brussels?),
*Warning against the
Spanish Tyranny in
the Netherlands, 1577.*
Pen and dark brown
ink, brush in colours,
325 x 410 mm.
Marburg, Hessisches
Staatsarchiv, inv. no.
4 f Niederlande 212.

made in a number of other comedies. In the same year the well-known playwright Pierre de Larivey (1541-1619) published six *comédies facétieuses*; in two of them there are references to the political situation in Flanders. A treaty that does not amount to much is mentioned in *Les Jaloux* and *Les Esprit*; this is evidently the Perpetual Edict of 1577.²⁶

Between 1562 and 1598 France itself was involved in a series of eight religious wars between the Catholics and the Huguenots. The sixth conflict, which lasted less than six months, had ended in September 1577; in November 1579 the Huguenots took up arms again until November 1580. This meant that the performance of the farce on 30 April 1579 took place in a period of relative peace, in which the king, a devout, rather bigoted Catholic, was able to re-establish his tarnished authority somewhat. In this period the most refined, decadent party culture at court reached its highpoint. The famous festivals, some of which are depicted in the Valois Tapestries, were the high points of this culture.²⁷ The drama also became extremely popular. Tragedies were top of the list, followed by comedies and then farces.²⁸ *La Vache Grasse* is referred to in the Marburg source in turn as a *farce* and as a *comédie*: in the first category *The Fat Cow* comes into category of the *farces polémiques*, satires directed against the Catholics or the Calvinists. However this farce is not mentioned in any of the summaries of sixteenth-century comedies or farces.²⁹

It is not clear where *La Vache Grasse* was performed for the court on 30 April: possibly, but by no means certainly, in the Palais Bourbon, a mansion owned by the king not far from the Louvre, with a room measuring 66.50 by 15.60 metres, or possibly in the gardens of the Louvre.³⁰ Nothing is known about the author either, and we can only make assumptions about the staging.

The morality play or *moralité politique* was an allegorical theatrical representation of the political and religious situation in the Netherlands seen from a Catholic point of view.³¹ As we have seen, Lent and six or more Virtues visit four inns; only the last of them, the Arms of Artois, offers hospitality. The staging might have been similar to that of the rhetoricians' plays: a stage on which little houses – *mansions* – were built with the arms of the towns on signboards; the group of players went from inn to inn.³²

The high point was obviously the farce of the Fat Cow – the Netherlands, prosperous but threatened on all sides – who successfully tears herself away from her attackers. There are absolutely no clues as to how such a farce was staged. There are all kinds of examples of stage plays featuring animals such as pigs, bears, lions and so on.³³ The cow, which had to perform a variety of actions in the play (kicking over the pail, pulling away from Anjou), could do those things if there were actors in a cow outfit, but Father Strada says 'bos in scenam praepinguis immissa est' – 'a very fat cow was brought on to the stage' – so it may well have been a real cow that performed all these stunts with the help of the actors. During the festivities surrounding the Peace of Munster in Amsterdam in 1648 a cow was brought on stage in one of the 'performances' as a metaphor for Holland in a similar context: 'I know how cunningly each has tried/ to get this Milch Cow in his power'.³⁴

Daringly, the *joueur de farces* playing the second most important guest – the Duke of Anjou – ridicules him mercilessly.³⁵ His pretence of freeing the Netherlands from Spanish tyranny is presented as a failure.³⁶

In Conclusion

First and foremost we can conclude that the allegory of the Fat Cow was intended not so much for a Dutch audience as for people in the

surrounding countries, all of which had an interest in the outcome of the conflict between the Spanish king and the Netherlands and their leader William of Orange. The two plays were aimed at a French audience (one of them specifically at the court); the painting in the Rijksmuseum and the possible original mentioned by the Spanish ambassador for an English audience, and the somewhat later print from around 1587 for a German-speaking audience.³⁷ Even then the cow was already an export product and a symbol of the Netherlands' prosperity.

The staging, secondly, can be interpreted in many ways – only the cow, milked dry, is a fixed feature, the

changing figures surrounding her in ever-changing roles give the performance an entirely different political interpretation.

This, though, leaves us with the general question as to the significance of the play as a source of inspiration for political prints. Further research is certainly needed, but in any case it is remarkable that the farces were able to show an explicit political viewpoint more easily through action and text than the allegories do in pictures. It is certain that the French plays we have discussed are to date the earliest known examples of the theme of the Fat Cow as an allegory of the Netherlands.

APPENDIX I

Manuscript in the Hessisches Staatsarchiv in Marburg³⁸

*Sommaire d'une farce iouée a
Paris en Avril dernier 79 en la
presence du Roy et de M. le Duc d'Alençon
accompaignez des
plus grans seigneurs du Royaume , intitulée*

LA VACHE GRASSE

*La Farce dicte La Vache Grasse
tenue a Paris en presence du Roy. Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou son frere et autres plus
notables seigneurs de la France en Avril dernier 79*

*Le sommaire de la farce intitulée LA VACHE GRASSE estoit tel,
Le Quaresme a demandé logis a l'Escu d'Hollande, Zeelande, d'Anvers
et de Gand: mais nullepart n'a peu estre hebergé en aucune desditz
logis pour estre occupez de brigans, meurtriers, sectaires et autres*

sortes de telles gens malheureux et malvivans: Ledict Quaresme avoit pour chambrieres ou pedisseques³⁹ Jeusne, Abstinence, Sobriété Charité, Amour, Pudicité, et autres semblables Dames de Vertu, chacunes d'ycelle habillée selon ce qu'elles representoyent puis ainsi accompagné vint demander logis a l'Escu d'Arthois, hostellerie plaine de vertus et bonnes meurs, et ou les anciennes coustumes et observances ont encores lieu, et sont religieusement observées: illes Quaresme trouva place y estant receu avec toutes les bonnes cheres et caresses du Monde: occasion, qu'il fut esquillonné d'y faire seiour, jusques a ce que ordre, fut mis aus autres logis où il avoit trouvé si grand desordre: L'hoste au logis de l'Escu de Gand cy dessus mentionné estoit Imbise,⁴⁰ Madame la vefue de Sr de Mortaigne⁴¹ estoit hostesse: Et Monsr de Rihove⁴² maistre varlet. A tout ce que dessus estoit apposé une Moralité gentiment composée, signifiant ce que le tout designest particulièrement

Pour la seconde partie de la Commedie fut representé le Roy d'Espagne menant apres soy une grasse vache avec une corde bien delie. Et quasi rompue, les cornes de laquelle estoient occupies par les Estate Generau et chacun tiroit la povre vache a soy, tantost par les cornes, tantost par les oreilles, l'un deça, l'autre dela: les officiers pareillement de guerre, et autres telles gens griffoyent apres pour y avoir leur part. Aux mamelles embas estoient assis le Prince d'Orange d'une costé, et le Duc Jan Casimir⁴³ de l'autre, quy chacun d'eux en un grand vaisseau tiroient le laict de la povre vache tant qu'ils pouvoient. Le Duc d'Anjou semblablement y estoit representé, quy de tout son possible tiroit la povre beste par la queue a rebours taschant de l'arracher hors des mains du Roy Catholicque. Des deux costez estoient spectateurs de ceste Tragedie: la Reyne d'Angleterre, les Francoys, Escossois, Angloys, les confederez du Prince d'Orange et autres attendans tous que l'on tueroit la povre vache, esperant chacun deux en emporter son lopin. Mais se sentant icelle si miserablement tourmentée et vexée, savance pour tousiours suivre son vray Maistre le Roy Catholicque; pour aquoy plus ayzement parvenir, et eschapper premierement des mains de Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou quy la tenest ferme par la queue, se retourne de si grand roideur, qu'il fut contrainct de la lascher: Ce fait se voyant delivrée de ce coste, donne un grand coup de pied au Duc Cazimir, le renversant par terre, quand et le vaisseau de laict qu'il esperoit emplir: restant seul le Prince d'Orange quy ne receut aucun dommage pour ceste fois. En fin elle se fit aussi quitte de ceux quy luy griffoyent le dos et iecta pareillement les Estatz par terre quy la tenoyent par les cornes empeschaur de suivre son Maistre. Ce fait les villages et autres du commun, sapporcevam (?) du dommage que durant cest esbat ils avoyent receu de Messieurs ces grimpeurs, se ruerent sur ceux qu'ils estimoyent estre source et cause de tous leurs maulx, ayans pour conduite le Prince d'Orange, qu'ils laisserent tirer le laict de la povre vache selon son plaisir. Laquelle se voyant en tel estat, ne pouvoit que desplorer sa misere de ce que le Roy son Maistre ne l'estoit en si long temps venu visiter, estant maintenant contraincte en changer un autre, et vivre cy apres en grande desolacion en esgard an bon traitement que paravant elle recevoit de luy.

NOTES

- 1 My thanks to Professor Rob Erenstein, theatre historian, for information about the history of French theatre, Gijs van der Ham and Daniel Horst (Rijksmuseum), and Ms W.C. Pieterse for their advice. A word of special thanks to Professor Guido Marnef from Antwerp, who placed his documentation about this painting at my disposal.
- 2 M. Meijer Drees, 'Patriottisme in de Nederlandse literatuur (ca. 1650-ca. 1750)', *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 88 (1995), pp. 256-60.
- 3 B. van Bavel and O. Geldersblom, 'The economic origins of cleanliness in the Dutch Golden Age', *Past and Present*, November 2009, pp. 41-69.
- 4 *All the Paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A Completely Illustrated Catalogue*, Amsterdam/Haarlem 1976, p. 638: as 'English school ca 1585'. See C. Boschma and G. Jansen, *Meesterlijk Vee. Nederlandse veeschilders 1600-1900*, exh. cat. Dordrecht (Dordrechts Museum)/Leeuwarden (Fries Museum) 1988-89, pp. 10-11, 51, and in particular the important entry by G. Marnef in J. van der Stock, *Antwerpen, verhaal van een metropool, 16de-17de eeuw*, exh. cat. Antwerp (Hessenhuis) 1993, no. 128.
- 5 See note 12 below.
- 6 See the proverb 'Dien de koe toekomt, die vat haar bij de hoornen' or 'bij den staart' ('He who owns the cow may catch her by the horns' or 'by the tail'); and 'Die de osse toebehoort, houdt hem vaste bij de koord' ('He who owns the ox holds him fast by the rope'); P.J. Harrebomée, *Spreekwoordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, Utrecht 1862, appendix to the first volume, pp. 233-34.
- 7 See for this interpretation the letter from Don Bernardino de Mendoza to Don Juan Idiaquez of 2 March 1583, quoted in note 11.
- 8 M.P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 166, 185-212.
- 9 Anjou had already been involved with the Netherlands in 1578. It is unlikely that he was portrayed pulling the cow's tail as Duke of Brabant. A date *ante quem* for the painting is 15 June 1584, the day of his death.
- 10 The dendrochronological examination by Professor Peter Klein determined that the panel is made from three oak planks. The youngest heartwood ring was formed in 1622. An earliest felling date of 1631 is possible, but a felling date between 1635 and 1641 is more likely. Given a minimum of two years for seasoning, the earliest possible date for the creation of the painting is 1633. Assuming a median of fifteen sapwood rings and two years for seasoning, a creation date of 1639 onwards is more plausible (report 22 October 2011).
- 11 Letter dated 23 February 1583 from the Spanish ambassador in London, Don Bernardino de Mendoza, to Philip II, in which he announces the sending of the painting and also adds a flattering interpretation, as if the painting signified that the people of Antwerp were happy to remain on the side of the king: '...because, you see, the people in Antwerp were happy with your faction, I am sending the painting they did herewith.' ('... porque vea vs an quedado los de Amberes contentos de su faction, embio con este despacho la pintura que an hecho.'). On 2 March the ambassador wrote to Philip II's secretary, Don Juan Idiaquez: '...The painting that they sent there of Flanders, a cow which represents those States and His Majesty riding her, his long spurs drawing blood. The Orange is milking her and a lady, England, gives her some hay with one hand and a wooden bowl to Orange with the other, Alanzon [Anjou] is holding the cow's tail.' ('La pintura que enviaron allá de Flándes, una vaca que significa aquellos Estados y S.M. caballero sobre ella, con unas largas espuelas que saca sangre. El de Orange ordeñando, y una dama, que es de la Inglaterra, dándole un peco de heno y con la otra mano una horterera á el de Orange, y Alanzon tiene á la vaca por la cola'); in *Colección de documentos en éditos para la historia de España*, vol. 92, Madrid 1888, p. 475. With thanks to Professor Guido Marnef, who put his research in the archives of Simancas at my disposal; also his article in exh. cat. Antwerp, op. cit. (note 4), no. 128. Also letter dated 7 October 1985 to the Rijksmuseum from the late Professor K.W. Swart in London.
- 12 Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, manuscripts divers 3191, févr. 1583: 'The margrave here led an enquiry and searched book printers' workshops ... also to find who had printed a picture of a cow with Allençon [Anjou] riding her, Orange pulling her udders, and the Colonels and the others dipping their bread in her milk, but this image has not yet been disclosed or at least we do not know who has seen it.'

- The margrave threatened whoever printed it ... this picture and these lies just causing agitation against Orange who is only seeking the good of the country or his own good.' In the margin: 'if it is true that this picture has been printed, it will serve to draw the Colonels away from the side of the magistracy given that Alençon considered relieving them of their command.' ('Le markrave icy a faict inquisition et recherche icy en les boutiques d'imprimeurs des livres ... aussy pour chercher celuy qui avoyt imprimé un image scavoir une vache sur laquelle estoit assys Allenchon et Oranges tirant les mamelles et le Colonels et les autres trempant leur pain en cest laict, mais cest image n'a pas esté encor divulgés au moins ne scavons celluy qui l'auroyt veu/ Le marckrave menacoit ceux qui auroyent imprimé ... cest image et mensoingés ne tendant que a esmouvoir le peuple entre Oranges qui ne cherche que le bien de la patrie ou le sien propre.' ... 's'il est vraye que cest image soyt esté imprimée il serve pour tirerr les colonels du costé du magistrat pourveu que Alenchon les a pensé distituer de leur offices.') The eight colonels here appear as actors. This council was formed in December 1577 as a new institution responsible for the defence of the city with – not under – the magistracy, with which it was frequently in conflict. The colonels were some of the fiercest opponents of Anjou; his armed attempt to assume power in Antwerp on 17 January 1583 (the French Fury) failed thanks to the action of the colonels; Orange tried in vain to become reconciled with Anjou; F. Prims, *De kolonellen van de 'burgersche wacht' van Antwerpen 1577-1585*, Antwerp 1942, pp. 232-41. It is possible that the people holding the cow by the horns in the Rijksmuseum's painting are the Antwerp colonels: however, there are only six men, not eight.
- 13 G. Marnef in exh. cat. Antwerp, op. cit. (note 4), no. 128.
- 14 F. Muller, *De Nederlandsche Geschiedenis in platen*, Amsterdam 1863-70, vol. 1, no. 966; J. Tanis, 'The Tale of a Cow', *The Low Countries, Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands, a Yearbook 1996-97*, p. 154 and quoted literature. See also the later print F.M. 1914, where the cow is being milked by Castile, with an allusion to the Battle of Dunkirk in 1658; see Boschma and Jansen, op. cit. (note 4), p. 67, fig. 66.
- 15 Tanis, op. cit. (note 14), pp. 152-62. In the collection of Brigadier J.S. Schreiber in England there is a panel (39.4 x 49.5 cm) with a similar picture; based on the portraits it is dated around 1586; the identity of the man milking the cow (Alva, Leicester?) cannot be clearly established, so we shall not consider it here; Tanis, op. cit. (note 14), p. 155, and K. Hearn, *Dynasties, Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, exh. cat. London (Tate Gallery) 1995-96, no. 42.
- 16 Around 1983 Dr J.H. Kluijver (†), one of the publishers of the correspondence of William of Orange, drew the Rijksmuseum's attention to this item, which he had encountered in the Hessisches Staatarchiv in Marburg and which had been appended to one of the letters from William of Orange. Photographs of this item were ordered at the time, but with no record of the exact location in the archives. Despite intensive investigation into Kluijver's surviving papers in the Huygens Institute for Dutch History in The Hague and in the archives in Marburg, the original item has not been traced. The writer would like to thank Dr J.W. Smit and Professor Gerhard Menk for their efforts. For *De bello belgico* see note 20.
- 17 On the situation in Ghent see J. Decavele, *De eerste protestanten in de Lage Landen; geloof en heldenmoed*, Louvain 2004, esp. pp. 69-81 and 265-83, and J. Decavele (ed.), *Het eind van een rebelse droom*, Ghent 1984, pp. 32-63.
- 18 See also G. Marnef, 'The process of political change under the Calvinist Republic in Antwerp (1577-1585)', in M. Weis (ed.), *Des villes en révolte. Les républiques urbaines aux Pays-Bas et en France pendant la deuxième moitié du xviiè siècle*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 25-33.
- 19 John Casimir (1543-1592) marched into the Netherlands in June 1578 with an army paid for by Queen Elizabeth; he and his cavalry joined the Calvinist radicals in Ghent on 10 October, but left the Netherlands for good in February 1579.
- 20 *De bello belgico decas secunda ... anno MDLXX-VIII usque ad annum MDXC*, Rome 1647, pp. 55-57; in 1649 a translation was published in French (Rouen/Paris) and in Dutch (Amsterdam). Also mentioned, as borrowed from Strada, in the *Tableau de l'Histoire générale des Provinces Unies*, Utrecht 1777-84, vol. 3, p. 433 by the French diplomat Antoine Marie Cerisier (1749-1828), who was working in the Republic; Dr Gijs van der Ham pointed me to this source.

- 21 See Cerisier, op. cit. (note 20), vol. 3, p. 434: 'They released a big fat cow right into the theatre in Paris...' ('On lâcha à Paris en plein théâtre une vache fort grasse...')
- 22 The text in the cartouche contains a pointed, ironic warning about not trusting the Spanish and John of Austria, who in the summer of 1577 broke the promises of the Perpetual Edict and sent the Spanish army to the Netherlands again: 'Alsmen der Spaengers Tyrannie will gedennen, Soe moent wel Buffels worden geacht, Die tvuordeel om de selfde te mogen crencken hebbende, niet min willens ten vleysghuuse worden gebracht. Ghy Edlen wacht U voor Don Johan tsal ons al vromen, Want tis seker dat vuytte hell niet goets mach comen.' ('If people want to remember Spanish Tyranny, they must think about Buffalos. Which having been harmed in the same way, do not want to be taken to the slaughterhouse. You Nobles wait for Don Juan to no avail, For it is certain that nothing good may come.') G. Menk in F. Wolff, *Alte Dokumente sind uns so lieb wie Gold*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 71; with thanks to Professor Menk for this reference.
- 23 A. Jouanna et al., *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion 1559-1598*, Paris 1998, p. 275.
- 24 Holt, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 115-20. P. de l'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du Règne de Henri III, tome III: 1579-1581*, Geneva 1997, p. 29, and M. François (ed.), *Lettres de Henri III, roi de France...*, vol. 4 (11 May 1578 - 7 April 1580), Paris 1984, p. 167; letter dated 22 March 1579: '...my brother the Duke of Anjou came to find me, showing so much trust and demonstrating such friendship and goodwill that I was extremely happy and pleased.' ('...mon frere le duc d'Anjou m'est venu trouver avec tant de confiance et de demonstration d'amitié et bonne volonté que j'en ay receu un estreme plaisir et contentement.')
- 25 Jouanna et al., op. cit. (note 23), pp. 277 and 933.
- 26 M. Viollet Le Duc, *Ancien Théâtre François ...*, vol. 6, Paris 1855 (reprint 1972), pp. 48-50, 144. See Fritz Holl, *Das politische und religiöse Tendenzdrama des 16. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich*, Erlangen/Leipzig 1903, p. 212.
- 27 F. Yates, *The Valois Tapestries*, London 1975, esp. pp. 51-102; also W. Vroom and G. van der Ham, *Willem van Oranje, om vrijheid van geweten*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1984, pp. 90-99.
- 28 G. Brereton, *French Comic Drama from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, London 1977, pp. 2-6.
- 29 B.C. Bowen, *Les caractéristiques essentielles de la farce française et leur survivance dans les années 1550-1620*, Urbana (Illinois) 1964, p. 9: the author ignores these farces. List of 'farces et moralités polémiques' after 1550: J. Beck, *Théâtre et propagande aux débuts de la Réforme*, Geneva/Paris 1986, p. 34; H. Kindermann, *Theatergeschichte Europas, Band II. Das Theater der Renaissance*, Salzburg 1959, pp. 191-99.
- 30 S.W. Deierkauf-Holsboer, *L'Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre français à Paris de 1600 à 1673*, Paris 1960, pp. 27-28. Also P. Champion, *Paris au temps de Henri III*, Paris 1942, pp. 115-16.
- 31 Bowen, op. cit. (note 29), pp. 148 and 208, mentions a morality play in 1595 with twenty-nine allegorical figures including Shrove Tuesday and Lent.
- 32 Kindermann, op. cit. (note 29), pp. 227-38, esp. p. 233. Also E. Rigal, *Le théâtre français avant le période classique (fin du xv^e et commencement du xvii^e siècle)*, Geneva 1969 (reprint), p. 239. Also W.M.H. Hummelen, 'Veele huyskens daer De Retoryck op was, stellages van rederijkerskamers bij Blijde Inkomsten', *Court, State and City Ceremonies, Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 49 (1998), pp. 94-123, with illustrations.
- 33 Rigal, op. cit. (note 32), p. 257. See for the Dutch rhetoricians' farces F.L. Kramer, *Mooi vies, knap lelijk, grotesk realisme in rederijkerskluchten*, diss. Groningen 2008, with numerous examples of animals or actors disguised as animals: lists pp. 270, 274, 276 and pp. 92-94, 97, 100, 150, 170, 176-83.
- 34 '... ik weet, hoe listich elk getracht/ heeft, deeze Mellik Koe te krijghen in zijn macht.' Meijer Drees, op. cit. (note 2), p. 256. W.P.C. Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1486-1853*, Den Haag 1889-1920, no. 5742.
- 35 A. Baschet, *Les comédiens italiens à la cour de France sous Charles IX, Henri IX, Henri IV et Louis XIII*, Paris 1882, p. 87.
- 36 K.W. Swart, *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand 1572-1584*, The Hague 1994, p. 167.
- 37 Muller, op.cit. (note 14), no. 966.
- 38 With thanks to Monique Peeters, Amsterdam City Archives, for checking the transcription.
- 39 *Pedissequus* is a senior court official.

- 40 Jan van Hembyze (1513-1584); portrait by Frans Pourbus in Decavele, op. cit. (note 17), p. 34.
- 41 The widow of the learned theologian Gerard de Montaigne was a cousin of his friend the theologian Jan Utenhove (Ghent 1516-London 1565/66); see J.H. Hessels (ed.), *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum, tomus secundus, Epistulae et Tractatus cum Reformationis tum ecclesiae Londino-Batavae historiam illustrantes (1544-1622)*, Canterbury 1889, p. 52, note 7; *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische Altertümer zu Emden* 20 (1920), p. 226.
- 42 Francis van Rijhove (1531?-1585); portrait, anonymous artist, in Decavele, op. cit. (note 17), p. 35.
- 43 John Casimir of the Palatinate (1543-1592), a general who also played a large role in the French religious wars; King Henry III knew him personally; Jouanna et al., op. cit. (note 23), pp. 765-66.



Detail of fig. 1