

PUBLICATION
DU CENTRE EUROPEEN D'ETUDES
BOURGUIGNONNES (XIV^e-XVI^e s.)

N° 54 - 2014

RENCONTRES DE LEYDE - LA HAYE
(19 au 22 septembre 2013)

**«Culture historique : la cour, les pays, les villes
dans les anciens Pays-Bas (XIV^e-XVI^e siècles)»**

Actes publiés sous la direction de Jean-Marie CAUCHIES
Secrétaire général du Centre
et Robert STEIN
Université de Leyde

Neuchâtel 2014

OLGA VAN MARION

Leiden University

RICK HONINGS

Leiden University

LOTTE JENSEN¹

Radboud University Nijmegen

FACT OR FICTION. LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF JACQUELINE OF BAVARIA 1600-1850

The brief yet turbulent life of Countess Jacqueline of Bavaria (1401-1436) has never ceased to appeal to the imagination. The young heiress to the estates of her father, Count William II of Holland – who had to defend her counties of Holland, Zeeland and Hainaut against her uncle John the Pitiless only to subsequently have to cede them one by one to her cousin Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy – is far from forgotten. While most stories may be legendary or of an unreliable nature historically, according to her biographer,² they are inextricably bound up with the cultural legacy of the Netherlands. As recently as only a few years ago, in 2009, popular writer Simone van der Vlugt dedicated a novel to Jacqueline's marriages to four different husbands. Remarkably, Jacqueline's deflowering is described down to the smallest detail in her book. Earlier, two juvenile books had appeared on Jacqueline's role in the Hook and Cod wars.³

It is not only in literature but also in the museums that Jacqueline is still present. There, we cherish her portraits, her bow and even her plait. The latter may not be authentic, but the relics continue to fascinate to the present day. Tourists visiting Teylingen Castle, where tradition has it that Jacqueline died of tuberculosis, are still told the story of the 'Jacqueline jugs' ['Jacoba-kannetjes'] found in the moat and linked up by the nineteenth-century poet Willem Bilderdijk with her alleged drink problem. Rather more awe for the legendary countess is expressed through

¹ We want to thank Tim Vergeer, teachers assistant, for his help and support.

² A. JANSE, *Een pion voor een dame. Jacoba van Beieren (1401-1436)*, Amsterdam, 2009.

³ S. VAN DER VLUGT, *Jacoba, dochter van Holland*, Amsterdam, 2009; S.J. JANSEN, *Paniek op het slagveld. De strijd van Jacoba van Beieren*, Amsterdam, 2008; H. KOESVELD, *Het teken van de uil*, Barneveld, 2008.

the Jacqueline feasts that are regularly held in various cities in Holland and Zeeland, graced with re-enactments of jousts, joyous entries and women dressed as Jacqueline going hawking.

The current interest in the last scion in the line of counts of Holland originates in an age-long literary tradition. For some authors she was an *example* of female heroism, for others she was irresponsible and power-mad. What one writer saw as a series of failed political marriages another held to be the expression of a sensual character. Some regarded Jacqueline of Bavaria as a plaything of fortune while others considered her guilty of losing the counties of Holland and Zeeland to the House of Burgundy. Undisputed her power has never been. In this article the literary representations of Jacqueline over the period 1600-1850 take centre-stage.⁴

Hugo Grotius as ghost writer

In the earliest instance of literary travesty around Jacqueline's persona the young, brilliant jurist and historiographer Hugo Grotius the poet denounces the countess's administrative qualities. He does so in a work for which he adopts the form of a Latin heroic epistle: 'Responsum' (1602), written in the name of John the Pitiless, Jacqueline's uncle who she refuses to obey as her guardian and whose capture of her cities she contests.⁵ With Grotius for his ghost writer, John voices his grievances about the role his niece plays in the politics of around 1417. For instance, he depicts her conduct as leader of her armies as that of a peevish troublemaker. As he sees it, she is sending her men straight to their death with her preposterous military undertakings. It were better if she accepted the traditional woman's role:

Will not the next generations abhor this?

A woman who took up arms to avoid her guardian!

Take up your wool and your spindle. Do you not know what becomes a woman
and will you not return to your bobbins and balls?

That care you must take upon yourself, without troubling yourself
about borders, state affairs or the needs of the county.⁶

4 This article was based on results of R. HONINGS & O. VAN MARION, ed., *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, Haarlem, 2011; it is part of Van Marion's VENI project 'Indigenous roots of the Dutch Renaissance. A study of the conceptions of the medieval in early modern Dutch literature' (NWO).

5 HUGO GROTIUS, *Responsum Iohannis Bavari ad Iacobam* is an answer to Janus Dousa's letter of Jacqueline, *Epistola Jacobae ad Iohannem patrum*. Both texts can be found in: HUGO GROTIUS, *Poemata*, Leiden, 1617, pp. 180-197. See for this fictional correspondence: O. VAN MARION, *Heldinnenbrieven. Ovidius' Heroides in Nederland*, Nijmegen, 2005, pp. 114-128 and for an analysis and an English translation see *Responsum*: A. EYFFINGER, *Heroic epistle*, in *De dichtwerken van Hugo Grotius* 1, 2-3 A-B. Assen, 1988, pp. 149-192.

6 GROTIUS, *Responsum*, *op. cit.*, v. 55-60, translation A. EIJFFINGER.

Ungrateful Jacqueline is too, according to John, and moreover, other than he, her peace-loving uncle, she is not bent on *pax* but on *discordia*, what with her headstrong pride. It is not so much he as she who is the cause of much revolt and bloodshed. It is her military policy rather than his that colours the rivers red. In the end the uncle has a go at his niece's character. In his eyes, she is of a typically feminine nature, hence unstable and loose. Over many verses, he predicts all the calamities that will hit her: the political failures of her second and third marriage, the loss of her cities, her imprisonment in Ghent up to her premature death from a wasting disease.

Grotius's characterization of the countess is extremely negative. This could be explained through his republican views as found expression in his Latin tractate *The antiquity of the Batavian Republic* (1610). The crux of his argument is that the counts of Holland have never been autonomous but that sovereignty has of old lain in the hands of the States of Holland. These appointed the counts and could depose them if they believed they exceeded their authority. Grotius lists a whole range of such deposed counts, numbering Jacqueline of Bavaria among them: 'When she, however, through the inconsiderate licence she assumed regarding her marriage policy, had made herself less deserving of power, she saw Holland given over to Philip of Burgundy while she was still alive and a witness of it.'⁷

The similarities between the tractate and the heroic epistle are striking. As a historiographer, Grotius presumably thought that Jacqueline, being a woman, wrongly laid claim on the counties of Holland and Zeeland. The consequences for later representations of Jacqueline were astounding: she was pushed aside as an incompetent fool.

Jacqueline of Bavaria on the stage

A highly imaginative source for seventeenth-century literary authors after Hugo Grotius was the old *Divisiekronek*, in particular the adaptation of it in the *D'oude Chronijcke* (1620 and 1636) in the name of Wouter van Gouthoeven.⁸ In it, Jacqueline's life story is disclosed at length and with all the gory details. As early as in the introductory verse the countess appears as an 'unhappy person' that has 'ever from childhood on been full of sorrow' through two causes: lost love and warfare. Since she could not have children, the county of Holland devolved to the House of Burgundy.⁹

7 HUGO GROTIUS, *The Antiquity of the Batavian Republic*, Assen, 2000, p. 93. (translation by Jan Waszink of HUGO GROTIUS, *Liber de antiquitate Reipublicae Batavicae*, Leiden, 1610).

8 In particular the often used second edition: WOUTER VAN GOUTHOEVEN, *D'oude Chronijcke ende historien van Holland (met West-Vriesland) van Zeeland ende van Utrecht. Beginnende vanden Jare onses Heeren 449. tot dit teghenwoordigh Jaer 1636*, Den Haag, 1636.

9 *Ibidem*, p. 435.

It is not only the subsequent account of Jacqueline's political activities, the death of her first husband and the failed marriages with her second and third husbands that greatly impressed literary authors, it is particularly the appendix about a presumed romantic fourth marriage that has been influential. In it,¹⁰ we again encounter a great deal of what audiences have for centuries been presented with on stage. Here is enacted, before the eyes of the readers, the moving romance with Zeeland nobleman Francis, Lord of Borssele (the marriage was forbidden by Philip of Burgundy and relegated to the realm of fantasy by Jacqueline's biographer Antheun Janse),¹¹ including Francis's ensuing imprisonment by Philip, Jacqueline's subsequent attempt to have Francis released, her difficult choice between man or power and finally her sacrifice of her inheritance in exchange for a marriage.

It was only a small step from chronicle to spectacle. The reputed wedding of 1432 features prominently on the title page of the first tragedy with the countess as its titular heroine: *Vrou Iacoba, Erf-Gravinne van Hollandt*, dating from 1638. It is a happy-ending tragedy in four acts written by poet-diplomat and merchant Theodore Rodenburgh (1574-1644), who was trying to develop his talents in the theatre in the shadow of the great poet Joost van den Vondel. The frontispiece of *Vrou Iacoba* is based on the four 'silent spectacles', or tableaux vivants, such as will have been shown on stage. Equipped with a sceptre and the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece, Philip of Burgundy looks on benevolently as a priest solemnizes the marriage of his cousin Jacqueline of Bavaria and Francis of Borssele. This silent spectacle marks the happy-ending end, after an intrigue of twenty-four hours into which the entire romance between the countess and the stadtholder has been packed. The author himself claims to have taken the data from Wouter van Gouthoeven's chronicle, which was brought on the market again in 1636, the bicentenary of Jacqueline's death.

Poetic licence did the rest. To the historical figures were added a great number of colourful characters, for which Rodenburgh went beyond the chronicle. For instance, he does not only have Jacqueline accompanied by chamberlain Willem de Bie, but he also gives her four 'ladies and lords-in-waiting', who get caught up in amorous adventures and regularly break into song. Since the story takes place in and around Jacqueline's court in The Hague, Rodenburgh could also give parts to some ten burghers and two 'townswomen' from The Hague, quite apart from councillors, envoys, a hermit and the prison publican.

The first act opens on Lady Jacqueline 'sleeping in her Seat', who, once awake, discloses her personal misery only to experience how she cannot, to her shame, reward her mother's envoys who come laden with presents – a scene that also features prominently in Gouthoeven's chronicle.¹² It then turns out she can only borrow the requisite two thousand thalers from just one man around the court,

10 *Ibidem*, pp. 457-458.

11 JANSE, *Een pion voor een dame*, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-311.

12 VAN GOUTHOEVEN, *D'oude Chronijcke*, *op. cit.*, p. 457.

sc. stadtholder Francis of Borssele, who readily makes her a present of them. The result, however, is that he falls head over heels in love with his mistress. Unusual in a tragedy, the noble heroine herself sings a song with musical accompaniment. The melody of this contrafact is not specified but the original words closely match the Magnificat. For the duration of ten stanzas the I-persona is most doleful, unable to forget her sorrows. Thus, she much prefers to leave this world:

My joy I lose,
As the sad choir of my senses
Shows me the past.
Because my memory
Of what fate has given me,
Appears all too real before me. [...]

Of the world's sound and fury
I have had, alas,
So excessively much!
Yes so that my soul is
Stirred most strongly
To leave the world behind.¹³

Jacqueline's fortunes are reversed unexpectedly when, in the second act, she is seduced by Francis. This scene, too, derives from Gouthoeven's chronicle.¹⁴ During an intimate banquet in his house Francis proffers his lady his life and love. In the chronicler's version, the countess gives in straightaway, accepting Francis's impressive proposal but in the tragedian's, she plays *hard to get*. Initially unfazed, it is not until the countess has to take a rest during an exhausting hunt that she deigns to accept Francis's invitation to sit on his knee and casts aside her political objections.

The third act is devoted to the livid reactions of Philip of Burgundy, who has forbidden his cousin to remarry. The duke appears to take revenge and calls Jacqueline to account. A first altercation may not go anywhere but does give a good picture of Jacqueline's headstrong character. At first she plays dumb but when Philip exclaims that he has never seen anything so shameful, she rebukes him sharply. He flings at her that she is randy and lecherous, that her trouble is that she is 'wantonly on heat', much like the famous Neapolitan whore Johanna, which Jacqueline denies most emphatically. Then she embarks on a counterattack. Which of them is the 'filthier' here? Philip is so adulterous that he has reportedly fathered no fewer than thirteen bastards.¹⁵ The dialogue degenerates with threats uttered

13 THEODOOR RODENBURGH, *Vrou Iacoba Erf-Gravinne van Hollandt, etc.*, Amsterdam, 1638, f. B2r-v.

14 VAN GOUTHOEVEN, *D'oude Chronijcke, op. cit.*, pp. 457-58.

15 RODENBURGH, *Vrou Iacoba, op. cit.*, f. K3v-4r.

by the duke while Jacqueline maintains her composure. Afterwards, Philip has to admit that Jacqueline is tenacious in her deeds, so other means of wielding power must be found. Francis is put in prison, where the friendly publican succeeds in postponing his execution.

The highly inventive poet Rodenburgh, who as a translator is well-informed about the Spanish and English theatre, adds a little popular revolt to the story from Gouthoeven's chronicle. Commiserating, the burghers from The Hague are so indignant at Francis's imprisonment that they plot a rebellion against the duke, who is, after all, a stranger to the people from The Hague. In her turn Jacqueline is given a long lament, starting with the words 'Poor me. What is the Duke doing now! Van Borssele imprisoned!'¹⁶ However, a so-called 'happy-ending' tragedy needs to end well. The three main protagonists Jacqueline, Francis and Philip see their fortunes reversed from sadness to happiness. The duke is relieved to find that his stadtholder has *not* been executed. Under duress, Jacqueline renounces her estates to have her husband released. To her and her husband the modest titles of duke and duchess of Oostervant will suffice. Moreover, her beloved Francis, together with whom she can now carry on her life, is granted the Golden Fleece by Philip.

Rodenburgh's play premiered in the Amsterdam Theatre on 23 March 1638. The stage directions point to a re-enactment of the events of 1432. The actors were dressed as courtiers and the play was further adorned with picturesque displays, court processions and hunting parties. It must have been a hit with audiences given that another nine performances followed in quick succession and it was rerun for years.

Eighteenth-century theatre

It was not just in 1662, 1691 and 1710 that Jacqueline featured in Dutch tragedies;¹⁷ during the tercentenary of her death, in 1736, audiences in the Amsterdam Theatre were likewise captivated by her character. Playing there was the popular *Jacqueline van Beijeren, gravin van Holland en Zeeland* (1736), which drew such crowds that spectators at the back of the auditorium stood on tables and chairs to catch something of the action. This tragedy, too shows Philip the Good and his cousin diametrically opposed to each other as they grimly discuss Jacqueline's right to decide for herself as to a fourth marriage to Francis of Borssele. Playwright and managing director of the theatre Jan de Marre (1696-1763) has his titular heroine appear in Flanders with an army before Rupelmonde

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, f. L2v-3r.

¹⁷ JOAN VAN PAFFENRODE, *Den Onder-Gang van Ionk-Heer Willem van Arkel*, Gorkum, 1662; CORNELIS SWEERTS, *Jacqueline van Beijeren, erfgravin van Holland*. [s.l.], [s.n.], 1691; COENRAAD DROSTE, *Vrouw Jacoba van Beijeren. Gravin van Hollandt etc.*, Den Haag, 1710. About these tragedies: O. VAN MARION, *Omstreden macht. Jacoba van Beijeren in de vroegmoderne tijd*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beijeren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 35-62.

Castle, near Antwerp, where the play is subsequently set. In accordance with the strict rules of French-classicism bearing on eighteenth-century Dutch theatre, the number of actors is much more limited when compared to Rodenburgh's *Jaqueline* play of a century before. Several dilemmas have been added as well. Not only does Jacqueline have to decide whether she will choose love or retention of her estates (man or power), Philip, too needs to decide whether or not to kill his stadtholder by way of punishment. At the same time, imprisoned Francis has to choose between committing suicide (to help Jacqueline) or waiting for his execution. Finally, the friendly publican also has to make the decision whether Francis will be secretly spared or not.

Amid all these deliberations, the action takes place more or less as the history books have it. In the first act, Francis is told that he will be tried that very same day for his forbidden marriage to Jacqueline but, again, the friendly publican succeeds in eventually preventing his execution. Here, too, Philip ultimately allows the formerly forbidden marriage to take place. The subject matter is familiar but Jacqueline's anger, as she claims her beloved after arriving at the castle with her armies, is of an unprecedented theatricality. She proudly holds up a little royal mirror to her cousin Philip. He might take away the powers of an 'oppressed woman' but that will not earn him the respect of his subjects. Suppose posterity gets to read that the duke of Burgundy imperiously robbed his cousin of her honour and her estates? If he wishes to be a worthy ruler, he should 'be deterred from that villainy' and honour the laws of the country. In contrast, Jacqueline herself knows how to rule her subjects with mutual respect. Philips had better return to Burgundy, where his 'hunger for power' is appreciated at any rate:

I seek to champion the privilege of my peoples;
Want to protect them, as I have sworn to do;
I seek to draw them through love, not fear, to me,
And wish, as far I may, to serve them as a Patroness.¹⁸

Philip responds with criticism levelled at women governing a country. They are the cause of the Hook and Cod wars. Their ineptitude has their subjects suffering unnecessarily during warfare. Philip believes it is high time for his cousin to turn over her estates to him. Or is she trying, through the marriage, to snatch away his power from him? Has her incapacity to rule not gone on long enough? Does she wish to plunge her emaciated people into 'bitter adversity, into murder and mad warfare'?¹⁹

The two rulers are diametrically opposed to each other in this tragedy. One advocates peace while the other wants war. But the countess experiences an inner

18 JAN DE MARRE, *Jacoba van Beijeren, gravin van Holland en Zeeland*, Amsterdam, 1736, p. 25.

19 *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

change from anger to acquiescence and she eventually chooses the welfare of her people and hence, peace.²⁰ Meanwhile, her character is an eighteenth-century sensitive lady. When in the fifth act Francis turns out to be still alive, her relief is such that she faints as she exclaims 'ô Heaven!'. The stage direction reads: 'She swoons, at seeing Borssele, and falls into the chair, which stands adjacent to the Table.' A picture of Jacqueline falling has been added as frontispiece to subsequent copies.

The play was so successful that at one of the performances in Amsterdam the doors of the theatre remained open. The play premiered on 3 December 1735, with performances – almost always in December or January – continuing for over thirty years, until the late sixties.

Political testimony of a dying countess

Even more so than in the debates on stage Jacqueline of Bavaria is given an opportunity to defend her life and loves to posterity in heroic epistles. Since Hugo Grotius in 1602 a long silence had reigned around the countess as writer but in the eighteenth century her persona is given a free rein again. This century was the heyday of the genre of heroic epistles.²¹ Ovid created a form in which mythological and historical figures get to speak at a dramatic moment in their life or shortly before their death. They address a loved one or confidant(e) who they try to entice into giving them a last token of their love. Jacqueline proved eminently suitable given that as many as six poets wielded her pen between 1716 and 1810.

The eighteenth century is also the 'age of women' according to Elisabeth Bekker (also known as Betje Wolff, 1738-1804). She herself wrote the verse heroic epistle *Jacqueline van Beieren aan Frank van Borssele* (1773) and had it published as a pamphlet. This text will serve here as an example of an eighteenth-century Jacqueline letter. The countess is writing for the last time to her beloved Francis during the last days before her death with a long plea in which she gives account of her life. Historical facts are passed in review. With every disaster uncle John the Pitiless and cousin Philip the Good are named as the guilty parties. The former, for instance, seized her cities directly after the death of Jacqueline's father while the latter forced her to disloyally give up her rule over her lands as he built his power upon her downfall. In between the writer utters cries such as 'How Burgundy gave me reason for sorrow!'²²

20 About this dispute: B. HARTLIEB, *Den Frieden als höchstes Gut. Jan de Marres 'Jacoba van Beieren' (1736)*, in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, t. 112, 1996, pp. 336-351.

21 See the eighth chapter in VAN MARION, *Heldinnenbrieven*, op. cit., pp. 245-305.

22 ELIZABETH BEKKER, *Jacoba van Beieren aan Frank van Borssele*, Second edition, Hoorn, 1773, p. 4.

This letter produced a storm of protests. In the preface to the second edition Bekker goes into the matter. Jacqueline was said to have been too emotional: 'Some [...] have thought, that this Letter does not obey the rules enough.'²³ The poetess defends herself. Should the character of Jacqueline of Bavaria have been calmer and more collected when she is in great distress, her beloved husband Francis is away from home and she is dying at the same time? Surely it is not the author Bekker herself who calmly walks to her study to think up a good defence?²⁴ She does not mince words here: literature ought to affect the readers' heart rather than persuade their head. In the distant future, in the year 2440, a front of critics will generally recognize that Jacqueline's character has been well-chosen and that she has been portrayed true to reality.²⁵

Apart from a lack of plausibility Bekker was apparently also accused of having made mistakes in her depiction of historical reality. Isn't it strange, someone argued, that the countess leaves out the 1418 siege of Dordrecht from the overview of her military exploits? Bekker acknowledges this kind of historical criticism as being 'weighty objections' and she admits to having made these mistakes that she has corrected in the second edition. But she would never go against the character of her protagonist. Bekker merely pictures a thoroughly unhappy countess, by no means a moral example towering high above human weaknesses. First and foremost Jacqueline is also a dying countess, unhappy through no fault of her own but 'because of a villainous uncle and an equally degenerate cousin.'²⁶

Jacqueline of Bavaria full of emotions

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Jacqueline of Bavaria increasingly turns into a prototype of a sensitive ruler. She already featured thus in the heroic epistle by Elisabeth Bekker but in the closet drama *Frank van Borselen en Jacoba van Beieren* from 1790 by Adriaan Loosjes (1761-1818), she finds herself constantly on the brink of an emotional abyss.²⁷ Brooding, colours draining from her face, fainting, breakdowns, sobs, tears: all the stops have been pulled out. The play is about Francis's imprisonment in Rupelmonde Castle, his death sentence and Jacqueline's attempt to free her husband. It all reaches a climax when the countess entrenches herself with a small fleet before Rupelmonde and through an

23 *Ibidem*, f. *3r.

24 *Ibidem*, f. *3v.

25 *Ibidem*, f. *2v.

26 *Ibidem*, ff. *4v-5r.

27 ADRIAAN LOOSJES, *Frank van Borselen en Jacoba van Beieren*, in *Al de dramatische werken van A. Loosjes*, Pz 1, Schiedam, 1855. About this play see: L. JENSEN, 'Bemind, geëerbiedigd en bespot'. *Waarom Jacoba van Beieren geen nationale heldin kon worden*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 67-70.

envoy demands to be shown her husband. She even threatens to blow up her cog if she does not get her way:

I must see and speak to Borselen. – and, instead, I hear nothing. Say so to Philip my despicable cousin – and add, that if he refuses me this favour, I will take this refusal as proof of the death ... of my beloved husband. And that there is plenty of gunpowder in this cog to blow it up – that I will do so with my own hands.²⁸

It is as if Loosjes already sensed what national hero Jan van Speijk was to do over forty years later, the difference being that Jacqueline was prepared to sacrifice herself for love while Van Speijk gave his life for his country.²⁹ Ultimately the two lovers are reunited but not until Jacqueline has renounced her inheritance. However, their happiness is short-lived as it transpires fairly soon that Jacqueline has been struck by a fatal disease. In the dramatic final scene Jacqueline dies in her husband's arms, begging him to tell her once more that he loves her:

Jacqueline

Now it won't be long anymoremy dearest! Put your hand once more to my mouth. – (*Hereupon she attempted to kiss his hand, but her already powerless lips refused her that service*) no! that is done – yet give me your hand.... now in heaven in heaven... And here her words stuck in her throat; faintly, she just said: Borselen. – Hereupon pressing her hand in his, she gave two sobs, keeping her clammy hand clasped in Van Borselen's Borselen, completely overwhelmed by grief, looked at her, and closing her breaking eyes with his finger, he collapsed with a scream onto Jacqueline's dead body.³⁰

An emotional and dramatic farewell. That the readers knew how to appreciate this outburst of emotions appears from the fact that Loosjes's work was reprinted as many as five times.³¹

Jacqueline as political heroine

Yet there are two texts from the late eighteenth century that depart from the emotional pattern: the tragedy *Het ontzet van Dordrecht* (1784) by Simon Rivier and the epic *Jacoba van Beieren* (1790) by Adriana van Overstraten. In either text the Jacqueline image is greatly determined by the political affairs of the time. We will here focus on the epic by Van Overstraten (1756-1828), a Patriot poetess and author of epics and tragedies. She portrays Jacqueline as a veritable heroine, who had with unimpeachable courage defended liberty in times when 'the old

28 LOOSJES, *Frank van Borselen*, op. cit., p. 112.

29 See about the worship of heroes in the Netherlands: L. JENSEN, *De verheerlijking van het verleden. Helden, literatuur en natievorming in de negentiende eeuw*, Nijmegen, 2008.

30 LOOSJES, *Frank van Borselen*, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

31 That is to say in the years 1791, 1816, 1844 en 1855.

longing for freedom was gradually soiled through the rule of a tyrannical count'.³² She had not a good word to say about John the Pitiless: he was the tyrant who wrongfully contested her inheritance. The epic had Patriot overtones: the theme of Jacqueline of Bavaria taking a stand against 'the tyranny' and fighting for the liberty of her subjects had a parallel in contemporary political events: the revolt against stadtholder Willem V. The opening verses go to illustrate the assertive tone:

How glows each Batavian, with noble love of freedom!
In vain dares tyranny forge cursed shackles;
Liberty saw herself, through a young heroine of war,
Defended, albeit challenged, everywhere, by power and revenge.³³

Van Overstraten's forceful Jacqueline portrait fits in well with the political developments of the late eighteenth century. More and more women started to demand the right to speak and reached for their pens to reinforce the Patriot fight for more civil liberties.³⁴ With her epic about Jacqueline Van Overstraten placed herself in the camp of these assertive Patriot women. Her protagonist was anything but a woman eaten up with emotions but, rather, a brave, courageous and belligerent ruler. Van Overstraten wrote polemically in the preface: 'Jacqueline of Bavaria may serve as an example of the heroic courage that prejudice has often so unjustly denied women'.³⁵

Jacqueline of Bavaria as the strumpet of Hainaut

Nor did the nineteenth century give Jacqueline reason to complain about lack of interest. The mounting interest in her life should be considered in the light of the emerging nationalism in the Netherlands. The fascination for her as a historical figure (and in particular for her unique life story) found expression in all kinds of manner: in historical studies, poetical works and plays. One person had the greatest impact on the nineteenth-century Jacqueline image: poet Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831). He published an extensive satire on the Countess. Owing to his provocative stand, a discussion broke out during the 1830s on how to assess Jacqueline's life.³⁶

Between 1817 and 1827 Bilderdijk lived and worked as a poet and lecturer in Leiden. Since he could not obtain a professorship at the university, he gave a

32 ADRIANA VAN OVERSTRATEN, *Jacoba van Beieren in vyf boeken*, Amsterdam, 1790, pp. 1-2. For this poem see: JENSEN, 'Bemind, geëerbiedigd en bespot', *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

33 VAN OVERSTRATEN, *Jacoba van Beieren*, *op. cit.*, 1790, p. 2.

34 L. JENSEN, 'Bij uitsluiting voor de vrouwelijke sekse geschikt'. *Vrouwentijdschriften en journalistes in Nederland in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw*, Hilversum, 2001, pp. 53-84.

35 VAN OVERSTRATEN, *Jacoba van Beieren*, *op. cit.*, 1790, p. *1v.

36 R. HONINGS, *Van doortrapte feeks tot verliefde gravin. Jacoba van Beieren in de negentiende-eeuwse literatuur*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 83-104.

private course at home, in Dutch history. The students must have been all ears as they listened to their eccentric, opium-addicted master. In contrast to what they were accustomed to from other courses and lecturers, Bilderdijk dished up a highly subjective account of the national history. He made no attempt to disguise his views on such historical figures as Jacqueline of Bavaria. The content of his lectures was not made public until after Bilderdijk's death in 1831, when his lecture notes were published as *Geschiedenis des Vaderlands* (1832-1853).

What were Bilderdijk's views on Jacqueline van Beieren? The countess played a key role in the Hook and Cod wars. Bilderdijk was very anti-Hook. Besides, he believed it unwholesome for women to fulfil political functions. He further accused Jacqueline, who was married four times during her short life, of lascivious conduct. At the age of fourteen, in 1415, she married John of Touraine, the Dauphin of France, to whom she had been betrothed as early as in 1406. He died in 1417, so Jacqueline was widowed when barely sixteen. Jacqueline's father, count William II, also died in that year. Bilderdijk, who thoroughly loathed anything French, had his suspicions about the cause of death: 'Whether one should ascribe his death to a French field mushroom or a surrogate thereof, is doubtful. It is said he had a growth on his thigh, and that when it was opened he became weaker by the day, and his end had come before one suspected it. Perhaps he had a French surgeon or the latter used perhaps a French lancet! At any rate, that a man of 52 years, and no more, *weakens* and so quickly dies of the opening of a growth on his thigh, looks suspicious. However, it was to have been caused by a dog bite. I believe as much; it surely was a *chien de français* [a French dog] that did it, and we should leave it at that.'³⁷

How did Jacqueline react to her father's death? While the war between the Hooks and the Cods reignited following the death of count William, Jacqueline had to have a husband again as soon as possible, according to Bilderdijk. She was 'not the little woman to protract the *annus luctus* [the year of mourning] any longer than was absolutely necessary'. She remarried in 1418, to her cousin, John IV, Duke of Brabant. This marriage did not last long, either, because of Jacqueline's salacious nature, in Bilderdijk's view. She felt ill at home in Brabant and recalled with longing the time with her dauphin, in whom she had had a 'sweet, witty and handsome man', 'who was everything to his young wife that his appearance promised'. Other than her late husband, with whom she had been genuinely happy, Duke John, 'whose physique was not such that he could satisfy her, and whose weakness of mind made him, moreover, despicable in the eyes of such a clever and cunning vixen' was unable to please her. Her conduct was so licentious 'that no-one but a Frenchman could endure it'.³⁸

37 WILLEM BILDERDIJK, *Geschiedenis des vaderlands*, dl. 4, Amsterdam, 1833, p. 54.

38 *Ibidem*, pp. 61, 77-78.

When in 1420 John of Brabant gave the counties of Holland and Zeeland into the custody of John the Pitiless against his wife's wishes, the 'frivolous woman', with her 'excessively hot temperament' no longer kept herself in check but 'gave full rein to the urges with which she was pervaded'. Then, her eye fell on the English Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who, she hoped, could 'satisfy' her. Jacqueline was, said Bilderdijk, a woman 'who *lassari*, but not *satiari* poterat' (could be tired out, but not satisfied) by her husbands. The duke was hardly keen on tying the knot but the 'strumpet from Hainaut' managed to 'trap and force' him so that he eventually, in 1422, married her.³⁹

Gloucester did not like the idea of having to enter the theatre of war for Jacqueline. He left his unhappy wife to her own devices. Jacqueline was imprisoned in Ghent. Shortly afterwards, she succeeded in escaping from her prison by disguising herself as a man. Now the war between the Hooks and the Cods flared up once more. At the beginning of 1425 John of Bavaria died of poisoning. Although there was no evidence whatsoever for this, Bilderdijk pointed to Jacqueline as having masterminded his death. For it was only her Hook following 'who had an interest in the murder, and who would have to consider themselves lost without this murder'.⁴⁰ The war ended in 1428 with Jacqueline concluding a peace treaty with her cousin Philip of Burgundy: the Reconciliation of Delft. This consolidated the power of Burgundy and ended the Hook and Cod hostilities.

On 17 April 1427 John of Brabant had died. This made Jacqueline, said Bilderdijk, 'once more a widow, and she could thus the more freely look out for another'. And this time, too, she found it difficult to live without a husband, according to the poet. Her 'frivolous and flighty nature' thus drove her to mingle with townspeople and farmers at popular feasts, thus bringing shame upon herself. Hence, she became an object of ridicule throughout the nation. In 1432 she wanted to get married anew, this time to the Zeeland stadtholder Francis of Borssele. To Bilderdijk, this was more proof of Jacqueline's coquettish character: 'Swiftly send for a priest! and Jacqueline has another husband!' Van Borssele was arrested soon afterwards. It was not until Jacqueline had officially renounced her counties that she was allowed to marry him, in 1434, two years before her death.⁴¹

Bilderdijk was even critical of the last years of her life, which Jacqueline is said to have spent at Teylingen Castle near Sassenheim. The countess, hardly virtuous in any case, lapsed into drink, he alleged. So-called Jacqueline jugs, unearthed in the castle's moat, derive their name, according to Bilderdijk, from the countess's practices. In his view, they were evidence of Jacqueline's unbridled alcoholism;

39 *Ibidem*, pp. 78-79, 81, 91.

40 *Ibidem*, pp. 96-97.

41 *Ibidem*, pp. 106, 116.

every time she emptied a glass of wine, she supposedly threw the glass out of the window. Sneerlingly, he remarked: 'a beautiful activity and peculiar pastime for a woman such as Jacqueline!'⁴²

Jacqueline in poetry

Not only in his *Geschiedenis des Vaderlands* but also at other places in his work did Bilderdijk speak out about Jacqueline. Among other things, he wrote a poem about her: 'On a Jacquelineas-kannetjen'. It was published posthumously. According to Bilderdijk, the jugs were proof that Jacqueline used her 'little mouth, so keen to kiss' for diverse purposes:

You little jug, some three four centuries ago
Sucked dry by the mouth so keen to kiss,
And then with a truly graceful flourish
Flung out of the Teylingensch window,
Do you remind us of the sweet creature,
So beautifully accomplished at winking with her eyes?

Come, tell us of her courtship,
When the widow of her three husbands,
In the grip of awkward guardianship
Banned to the lonely castle dwelling,
Coaxed a fourth to her side,
Once more to yoke up with her!

Tell us, what that little lip spoke,
Whose border you once pressed so sweetly?
What honey was there in that kiss
That so delighted good Borslen,
And how that blinking eyelet broke
When he picked the wilted rose?⁴³

Bilderdijk greatly influenced the image of Jacqueline as it evolved in the nineteenth century. Yet there were also other noted and lesser known poets who wrote about the hapless countess in these times. The image they depicted was more positive than the one painted by Bilderdijk. Men of letters such as Hendrik Tollens and Jacob van Lennep devoted a verse to her.

42 *Ibidem*, pp. 123. For a long time the jugs were considered proof of Jacqueline's proposed dipsomania. Others thought she had taken up in pottery. More serious researchers considered such interpretations to be invalid. See JANSE, *Een pion voor een dame*, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

43 As quoted by W. BILDERDIJK, *Op een Jacobaas-kannetjen*, in *IDEM, De Dichtwerken* 14, Haarlem, 1859, p. 17.

Nicolaas Beets (1814-1903), writer of *Camera Obscura* (1839), wrote a Jacqueline verse in the yearly *Muzen-almanak* for 1841. In it, he wondered how posterity could possibly regard her with pity. Of course, to her reputation was 'horribly attached, / The disgrace of a double marriage'. She was, moreover, responsible for the death of Albrecht Beiling, who as a prominent representative of the Cod faction had been buried alive in 1425. On the other hand, Beets argued, the persona and the life story of Jacqueline of Bavaria constituted an inexhaustible source of inspiration for poets and artists. Other than Bilderdijk, Beets believed that Jacqueline especially deserved sympathy:

If the offspring of Cods and Hooks
Together seek to excuse her,
It is, that she was a WOMAN, young and beautiful;
And though her folly was manifold,
She was guilty of love and passion only,
And unhappy through a crown.⁴⁴

Jacqueline of Bavaria returns to the stage

Last, two plays with Jacqueline for their subject appeared in the years following the fuss around Bilderdijk's *Geschiedenis*. Both dealt with the last years of her life and her love for Francis of Borssele. That Jacqueline renounced her counties and her power for love must even in those times have appealed to the imagination of the playwrights. The first play was published in 1835: *Jacoba van Beyeren en Frank van Borssele, romantisch tooneelspel*. Its author was Carel Alexander van Ray (1780-1842). He had produced a free translation of Prosper Noyer's 1834 melodrama *Jacqueline de Bavière*. The play typifies the preference for the national-historical theatre as well as the penchant for melodramatic theatre of the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ In his work Noyer had taken the 'romantic footpath' as he had Francis of Borssele commit suicide towards the end. The latter ended his life by voluntarily 'swallowing poison'.⁴⁶ Van Ray opted for a happier ending in his version. Francis is involved in a conspiracy because of which he ends up in the death cell. Philip of Burgundy drives him to despair by saying that Jacqueline will not have him but the duke of Gloucester. When Jacqueline tries to convince him of

44 NICOLAAS BEETS, *Jacoba van Beieren*, in *Nederlandsche muzen-almanak*, Amsterdam, 1840, p. 79.

45 About the preference for historical drama in the nineteenth century: L. JENSEN, *Helden en anti-helden. Vaderlandse geschiedenis op het Nederlandse toneel 1800-1848*, in *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 11 (2006), pp. 101-135. About the preference for melodramatic plays: R. HONINGS, *The melodramatic era. Theatre in Leiden in the first half of the nineteenth century*, in *Neerlandica Wratislaviensia*, t. 20, 2012, pp. 93-112.

46 C. ALEX. VAN RAY, *Jacoba van Beijeren en Frank van Borssele, romantisch tooneelspel. Noyer's Jacqueline de Bavière, vrij gevolgd en voor het Nederlandsche tooneel bewerkt*, 's-Gravenhage, 1835, p. iv.

the opposite, Francis refuses to believe her. He threatens to kill himself, just as in the French original. Jacqueline can only just restrain him from his deed:

Heavenly justice! ... Poison! ... (*She snatches the cup from Francis, and smashes it against the ground.*) Desist!, .. Francis ô my God! ... poor wretch, what are you trying to do! (*A brief silence.*) Francis! friend of my soul! (*She approaches him. Francis fends her off.*) Van Borsselen, you are fending me off What does this mean? ... Francis, ô my love! Come to your senses.⁴⁷

The play closes on a reconciliation between Jacqueline and Francis. The countess renounces her counties as a mark of her affection for her loved one, who is now released from his dungeon. Other than the French audiences, the Dutch spectators were given a typically nineteenth-century, middle-class moral at the end:

JACQUELINE, *encouraged*.

Well then! it is accomplished! (*With force.*) Up, my Van Borsselen! up! To hospitable Holland! To quiet, peaceful Teijlingen! It is there that love and loyalty will repay us for departed greatness, there, where the most beautiful earthly reward awaits us: DOMESTIC BLISS!⁴⁸

The critics were hardly charitable in their judgements. An anonymous reviewer termed Noyer's French original abominable, an example of 'contemporary bad taste'. But he had no sympathy either for the Dutch adaptation with its Biedermeier moral. In his view, the history had been botched up, and as a result, the whole was 'shocking'.⁴⁹

The second play to be discussed here was written by Flemish man of letters and physician Adolph Frederik Hendri de Lespinasse (1819-1881): *Vorstin en vrouw, of Jacqueline, gravin van Holland, historisch drama in V bedrijven* (1840). Just as in the latter play, Jacqueline and Francis of Borsselen get separated. An emotional Jacqueline is going crazy with sorrow as she understands that Francis is to die:

Calm down? no, I shall go crazy,
Crazy, and it will be merciful to
Me. Calm down? Tell the sea to remain calm
And mirror-smooth, when the hurricane
Lashes its tide with angry breath! Tell
The tigress, that she calm down, when
Her cubs have been snatched from her! Yes –
Calm down? ... Die, as he must die!⁵⁰

47 *Ibidem*, p. 204.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 211.

49 *Vaderlandsche Letter-oefeningen* 1 (1836), p. 488.

50 A.F. HENRI DE LESPINASSE, *Vorstin en vrouw, of Jacoba, gravin van Holland. Historisch drama in V bedrijven*, Utrecht, 1840, p. 112.

In this play, too all is well that ends well as it closes with Jacqueline sacrificing her entire inheritance for the sake of love: 'Take crown, / Take title, all, leave – leave me his heart! / (*they embrace again; curtain.*).'⁵¹

Thus, Jacqueline of Bavaria changed in the first half of the nineteenth century from a woman who was not too particular when it came to marital fidelity to a lady who chose love. The Bilderdijk view, which had caused quite an uproar in the thirties, eventually slipped into the background. What remained was the inexhaustible interest on the part of poets and artists in the countess with her extraordinary life story. Or, as Nicolaas Beets remarked in his Jacqueline poem:

She fascinates in verse and story;
Her name fills auditoriums;
Poet and Painter wear themselves out,
To portray her at her loveliest,
As beautiful widow, gentle bride;
And, what names we forgot,
Reviled, derided, learnt to hate,
She found favour in everybody's eye;
Tearful, child and greybeard alike
Can point out the house at Teylingen,
Where once her last hope faded.⁵²

Fact or fiction

The manner of representing Jacqueline of Bavaria has from the middle ages until well into the twenty-first century been in a constant flux. According to Antheun Janse, representations of her began to emerge early, during and shortly after Jacqueline's death, in a period in which Jacqueline was almost exclusively shown in the best possible light.⁵³ Little or no criticism was voiced; possible mistakes were explained away by the historiographers or deflected and passed on to people in her environment. Attention was particularly focused on her life story. As much is also true of Wouter van Gouthoeven's *D'oude Chronijcke*, which has greatly influenced seventeenth and eighteenth-century drama. The criticisms on the part of Hugo Grotius as a poet and historiographer could do little to change this. On the stage and in heroic epistles the historical facts from Gouthoeven's chronicle were added to imaginatively. Emphasis was increasingly laid on Jacqueline's 1432 dilemma, when she was forced to choose between her political ambitions and her love for Francis of Borssele (man or power), with a great deal of attention to emotional outbursts.

51 *Ibidem*, p. 131.

52 BEETS, *Jacoba van Beieren*, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

53 A. JANSE, 'Ellendighe vrouwe'. *Jacoba in de historiografie tot de vroege zestiende eeuw*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 15-34.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Jacqueline is briefly accorded a role in the political debates of those years: the war between Patriots and Orangists. Several Patriot authors use the countess to their own ends; after all, her rebellion against 'tyranny' has similarities with the Patriots' war against William V. Then, in the early nineteenth century Jacqueline's tumultuous love life is again emphasized. That had everything to do with, especially, the strong stand the poet and historian Willem Bilderdijk took. In his *Geschiedenis des Vaderlands* the latter inveighed against what was in his eyes Jacqueline's unchaste, lascivious and man-eating behaviour. However, most other nineteenth-century authors, poets and playwrights, emphasized her tragic side and were of the opinion that she was to be pitied, if anything.

In this article the literary representations of Jacqueline between 1600 and 1850 have taken centre-stage. This should certainly not be taken to imply that after this period, there is no more fiction to be found in which Jacqueline plays the main role. Even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the countess continued to fascinate writers.⁵⁴ Authors ranging from Menno ter Braak and Ina Boudier-Bakker to Simone van der Vlugt draw the picture of a strong, independent and liberated woman. In the most recent authors Jacqueline even appears as a feminist avant la lettre. A similar development is to be found in juvenile literature where, especially since the twenty-first century, Jacqueline is represented as a woman who wants to pull the strings and takes all sorts of initiatives, also sexually.

The fact that relatively little was known about Jacqueline had the advantage that it made her eminently suitable for writers wishing to blow up or make up certain aspects. Viewed thus, in every century Jacqueline of Bavaria played the role she was expected to play – acting as a projection screen⁵⁵ – and she was thus rather a literary character than a historical figure. And it is because of this that the tragic countess continues to captivate us to the present day.

54 J. GOEDEGEBUURE, *Jacoba als projectiescherm*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 107-115; H. VAN LIEROP-DEBRAUWER, *Strijdvvaardig en eigenzinnig. Jacoba van Beieren in de jeugdliteratuur*, in *Vrouw van het Vaderland. Jacoba van Beieren in literatuur en kunst*, ed. R. HONINGS and O. VAN MARION, Haarlem, 2011, pp. 117-132.

55 Jaap Goedegebuure uses this technical term in his article (see note 54).