WORDS AT WAR: THE EARLY YEARS OF WILLIAM OF ORANGE'S PROPAGANDA

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Abstract

The propaganda efforts in the early years of the Dutch Revolt left us countless pamphlets and dozens of songs and prints. Yet our understanding of the development, the operation, and the reach of particularly William of Orange's propaganda efforts remains limited. This article explores to what extent Orange consciously launched a public relations campaign through literary propaganda. Orange had good success in attracting literary talents to defend the cause of the Revolt and his own leadership. The authors who labored on Orange's behalf varied in social background and experience. Some were engaged in pamphlet writing and others in balladry, while a few gained a position as personal advisor to the prince. The anonymous hymn *Wilhelmus van Nassouwe* also hails from these early years, yet its origin is an unresolved mystery. A first reconstruction of Orange's propaganda network brings forth a new candidate for the authorship of this very influential song.

The propaganda efforts from the Dutch Revolt have left behind a burgeoning output. At first glance, there is plenty of material for us to gauge its content and effectiveness. Countless pamphlets and dozens of songs have survived, in addition to a wealth of letters, diaries, and contemporary chronicles and histories.[1] Yet our understanding of the development, the operation, and the reach of William of Orange's propaganda efforts remains limited. We know precious little about the organization of propaganda on Orange's behalf and whether his associates conceived of their collective enterprise as a group effort. This article explores to what extent Orange consciously launched a public relations campaign through literary propaganda. I demonstrate that Orange had success in attracting literary talent to defend the cause of the Revolt and his own leadership. The authors who labored on Orange's behalf varied in social background and experience. Some engaged in pamphlet writing and

[1] See Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand* for a survey of the production of political pamphlets during the first three decades of the Dutch Revolt. For a survey of the most important political songs from the beginning until the end of the Eighty Years War: *Het Geuzenliedboek* (2 vols.), eds. E.T. Kuiper & P. Leendertz jr. (Zutphen, 1924-1925).

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others in balladry, while a few gained positions as personal advisors to the prince. The anonymous anthem *Wilhelmus van Nassouwe* also hails from these early years, yet its authorship is an unresolved mystery. This first provisional reconstruction of the literary networks around William of Orange will shed light on a forgotten candidate, an alternative to Philips van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde, who had been long considered the author of the *Wilhelmus*, even though his candidacy has been the source of much debate among historians.

It is now widely accepted that William of Orange and his entourage regarded the manipulation of public opinion as important.[2] Yet scholarship so far has concentrated on discrete media such as pamphlets, prints, and the role of tendentious texts written with the purpose of achieving certain political ends.[3] Alastair Duke's essay on dissident propaganda is an inspiring first step for a topic that deserves a book-length study.[4] Much is still unknown about the relationship between pamphlets and the often enigmatic political prints, as well as the practice of circulating letters, the spreading of rumors, and the advancement of certain literary texts. Historians have also downplayed the so-called Beggars' songs as an important component of Orange's attempt to curry favor with public opinion.[5] Orange's involvement with most songs is indeed virtually untraceable.[6]

A case in point is the controversy—for many decades a point of heated debate among literary historians—surrounding the authorship of

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[2] See for instance: H.F.K. van Nierop, "Edelman, bedelman. De verkeerde wereld van het Compromis der Edelen," in *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 107 (1992): 1-27; and Alastair Duke, "Dissident Propaganda." See also the paper of K.W. Swart, "The Black Legend During the Eighty Years War," in *Some Political Mythologies*, eds. J.S. Bromley & E.H. Kossmann, special Issue of *Britain and the Netherlands* V (1975) 36-57; and C.E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, 1987).

[3] See for the use of pamphlets the pioneering study of Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*. For the use of prints, see especially Daniel R. Horst, *De Opstand in zwart-wit. Propagandaprenten uit de Nederlandse Opstand (1566-1584)* (Zutphen, 2003), and also: Duke, "Dissident Propaganda," 126ff. And for tendentious texts, see K.W. Swart, "Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje de strijd tegen de Spaanse overheersing aan te binden?" *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 99 (1984): 554-72, especially 564 and passim.

[4] Duke, "Dissident Propaganda".

[5] See Louis Peter Grijp, "Van geuzenlied tot Gedenck-clanck," In: *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 10 (1994): 118-132 &. 266-76, and also the introduction by Kuiper and Leendertz in: *Het Geuzenliedboek*, VII-XXXV.

[6] Kuiper & Leendertz give their assessment that about fifteen beggars' songs were written and distributed under the direct supervision of William of Orange (*Het Geuzenliedboek* I: XV-XVIII).

the *Wilhelmus*, the most famous of all Beggars' songs, particularly since it became the Dutch national anthem in 1932. We are a long way from reaching consensus, not only about the identity of its author, but also about the date of its composition, its religious content, its value as propaganda, and its qualities as a literary work. The measure of disagreement can be easily appreciated from the two most extensive *Wilhelmus* studies written over the past few decades, by Ad Den Besten (1983) and Abraham Maljaars (1996). While Den Besten insists that the author of the *Wilhelmus* was Philips van Marnix, lord of Sint-Aldegonde, Maljaars rules him out as a candidate. Den Besten thinks the text was composed in 1570, with Maljaars dating it at the end of 1568, or, at the latest, in the course of 1569. According to Den Besten the poem contains an upbeat Calvinist message, whereas Maljaars argues the author must have intended it as a tribute to the meek perseverance of a people at a time of great misery. Den Besten regarded the *Wilhelmus* as a passionate declaration of loyalty in support of William of Orange, while Maljaars considers it as a more personal poem of consolation, without any propagandistic motives. In the eyes of Den Besten the poem is an absolute masterpiece, with Maljaars finding the verse full of technical imperfection. Den Besten maintains that the *Wilhelmus* was originally composed in Dutch, yet Maljaars is certain it has been translated from an earlier version in German or Low German.[7]

With the interpretation of this song, historically so important, still remaining a puzzle, it will be difficult to evaluate the role of the *Wilhelmus*, or any other Beggars' songs, within the larger context of the propaganda campaign which became increasingly intense after 1568. Neither *Wilhelmus* scholar, it is worth noting, is keen on using the term "propaganda."[8] From a literary-historical point of view, propaganda carries too much conceptual baggage, as we have learnt from the tragedies occurring in Russia, Germany, and China during the twentieth century. Propaganda is considered the antithesis of sincerity and good taste; labeling something as propaganda can easily be seen as a dismissal of its serious artistic ambitions. In the case of the *Wilhelmus* the term propaganda has become even more delicate since the song was made the Dutch national anthem. The mere fact that there is so much debate about the *Wilhelmus*

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[7] See Ad den Besten, *Wilhelmus van Nassouwe. Het gedicht en zijn dichter* (Leiden,1983), and A. Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus. Auteurschap, datering en strekking* (Kampen, 1996).

[8] Cf. Den Besten, *Wilhelmus*, 3, 57 and passim; and Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus*,179 and passim.

underscores our lack of knowledge about literary propaganda techniques during the early years of the Revolt, especially its social context and public distribution.

For a proper understanding of William of Orange's propaganda efforts we still need to answer a number of questions—questions which have often been posed, but scarcely investigated in depth. What, then, do we mean by propaganda? What were Orange's ideas and those of his followers about the manipulation of public opinion? To what extent did Orange orchestrate the production and circulation of writings to promote the cause of the Revolt? In short, what was planned and what happened spontaneously? Were other parties involved in the propaganda-effort, and did Orange and his helpers borrow from other literary traditions in the Low Countries or elsewhere?

For a historical evaluation of Orange's "war of words" it is useful to consider a broad view of the role of verbal communication during this period of discord. This body of work conceptually encoded several strategies that ranged in nuance and effectiveness, since as a polemical technique, propaganda allows one to advance one's own cause while simultaneously damaging the enemy.[9] These were indeed the two main strategies of persuasion during the first decades of the Revolt. But there were also less obvious strategies, including the use of objective reporting.[10] The subtle, often ironic, and misleading use of the opponent's

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[9] For a general outline of the role of "negative" and "positive" propaganda during the political-religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, see Garth. S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi, 3rd edition 1999), 66-72. For an overview of the role of the printing press in the political and religious struggles all over Europe from around 1520 onwards, see Olivier Thomson, *Easily Led. A History of Propaganda.* (Stroud, 1999), 176-87.

[10] Traditionally the propagandistic activity of the early decades of the Eighty Years War is seen as a twofold strategy: the first is the production of a great number of justifications of Orange's own political, religious and personal behaviour, the second is an even larger number of anti-Spanish tracts, a kind of propaganda which is better known as 'The Black Legend'; cf. Alastair Duke, "Dissident Propaganda and Political Organization at the Outbreak of the Revolt in the Netherlands," in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585*, eds. Philip Benedict et al. (Amsterdam, 1999), 115-32, 125; P.A.M. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand in de pamfletten 1566-1584* (Nijmegen,1956), 35. A third strain in contemporary propaganda seems also to be very important, although it does not seem to be propaganda in a narrow sense of the word; namely, the stream of eyewitness accounts and other kinds of reportage. These were intended to give an insight in several dangerous situations, like internal conflicts, and specific psychological processes which tend to weaken the determination of the anti-Spanish coalition. In these texts, there was a certain tendency towards truthfulness. See for instance some remarks by Reinico Fresinga in the preface to his account on the siege of Steenwijk: 'Elck beschrijve slechs, wat hij in sijn Stadt, in sijn Lantschap, ende

own discourse also proved useful. Propaganda played a part on the battlefield as well since verbal intimidation and deception were traditionally part of military operations. Yet civilians might also become involved in such tricks. Catholic citizens in Antwerp, according to the chronicler Godevaert van Haecht, in April 1568 incited government soldiers to shout slogans such as "*vive le geus*" and "*vive le prince*" while marching through the streets, with the intention of beating to death anyone who came out to join them. Yet van Haecht tells us that the people of Antwerp soon saw through this ploy and succeeded in limiting the damage by warning each other.[11]

The propaganda in these first years was directed against the established order without, however, presenting Orange as a revolutionary. Orange justified his opposition out of fidelity to the public good established by king and God. In this regard, his propaganda echoed precedents established already by Protestants who opposed Rome and the secular powers that supported Catholicism. For decades Protestants of various hues and shades had been exploiting the printing press to distribute edifying reading matter on a wide scale, as well as pamphlets and the so-called martyrs' songs.[12] The selection of texts published in *Het offer des Heeren* ("The Lord's Sacrifice," ca. 1562) provides a poignant sampling of songs and pamphlets distributed among Anabaptists over the preceding years. Yet it was not just religious zealots who knew that the effect of certain ideas, news, and messages could be dramatically heightened and sped up through publication in print; as early as 1521, it was the government itself that published a proclamation against the distribution, possession, and reading of "heretical" texts. When the struggle for religious reform around 1565 became intertwined with the political conflict between the Netherlandish aristocracy and the king's government, the opposition seized upon strategies developed earlier by the Lutherans, Anabaptists, Calvinists, and other religious dissidents.

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daer hy gebruikt is worden, persoonlick gesien heeft, oft daer hy autentijcke ende geloofwerdige bewijsstucken van heeft; verclarende tselve met genoechsame omstandicheden, met aenteeckening van plaets, jaer, dage, ende oirsaecke waeromme, sonder enige partyschap, ende sonder iet anders aen te sien, dan de eere Godes, ende liefde der waerheit, des Vaderlands, ende Nacomelingen [etc.]," from Reinico Fresinga van Frennicker's *Memorien* (1584), in: Gerhardi Dumbar, *Analecta* III (Deventer, 1722), fol. A3v.

[11] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, 2 vols., ed. Rob. Van Roosbroeck (Antwerpen, 1929-1930) vol. 2, 21.

[12] Cf. Louis Peter Grijp, "Zingend de dood in," *Veelderhande liedekens. Studies over het Nederlandse lied tot 1600*, ed. Frank Willaert (s.l. 1997): 118-48.

Many people in the Low Countries keenly followed the struggle of the French Calvinists to win recognition as a tolerated religious community. Numerous pamphlets, prints, and songs accompanied the first civil war of 1562. The nature and scale of religious troubles in France and the Netherlands were strikingly similar, with France's conflict starting earlier. Although religious persecution in the Low Countries was more often relentless and extensive than persecutions in France, before 1565 it had hardly stirred up serious political violence. But towards the end of 1565 rumors grew that the king of Spain was on the brink of finally settling the problem of religious dissidents and obstreperous political factions; this spurred an affiliation of nobles known as the *Eedverbond* or Compromise. In April 1566 the confederated nobles presented a petition to the governess-general of the Low Countries, Margaret of Parma, requesting the cessation of the heresy placards. Under political duress, Margaret had to suspend prosecutions for heresy—a sensational triumph for the Compromise and the Protestants who backed it.

Yet for our purpose, the real significance of the Compromise's actions lies in the manner in which, in a short space of time, the interests of the nobles became publicly linked to those of the oppressed Protestants. The coining of the word *gueux* was crucial. When Berlaymont, a member of the Netherlands' Council of State, branded the dissenting noblemen as *gueux* (French for beggars), within a matter of weeks the phrase came to mean just about everyone at odds with the royal government. Eyewitnesses have described how the word *gueux* overnight became a catch-all phrase used across the provinces. So popular was the image of the beggar that people dressed up in rags and went around with wooden bowls and other paraphernalia, including the famous beggars' medal.[13]

The subsequent developments that took place in this "wonder year" cannot be understood without reference to this craze for 'beggars'. The open-air sermons which attracted massive audiences, and the wave of iconoclasm that swept the country from August 1566, were partly driven by the sense of dissatisfaction was gripping the country as a whole with the nobility speaking out on behalf of the entire nation. Even if many noblemen were disturbed by the effects of the genie they had released from the bottle during the euphoric days of April 1566, this was an extraordinary moment in the history of public opinion in the

[13] Cf. Van Nierop, "Edelman, bedelman," 17ff.

Netherlands. The power struggle between the central government and the aristocracy that had raged since the reign of Charles V suddenly acquired a palpable public dimension. Was this the moment, perhaps, when the ruling classes realized they could muster the support of large crowds of people through the use of carefully chosen words and symbols?

If that moment can be identified at all, I would indeed suggest it was the extraordinary summer of 1566. Alastair Duke has explored the explosion of pamphlets, songs, and other media in the *wonderjaar*.[14] While Hendrik lord of Brederode led the most radical faction of the aristocratic opposition into armed conflict, Orange, together with the dukes of Egmont, Bergues, and Hornes, tried to steer a more peaceful course. Orange stuck to this prudent course until early 1568 because he wanted at all costs to avoid violent confrontation; he launched—to use Geurts's apt expression—a "paper war" precisely to maneuver himself into a favorable position.[15] In November 1566 and early in 1568 two tracts by William of Orange appeared in which he justified his cautious policy.[16] It was not until the spring and early summer of 1568 that he suddenly stepped up his publicity campaign. This was the moment when he became aware that the new governor-general, the Spanish duke of Alba, was absolutely determined to crush all opposition, including the moderate faction; Alba had Egmont and Hornes executed after a summary trial, and Orange knew he would not be spared.[17] It was during these months that Orange planned his military campaign, which seemed so promising on paper. He first wished to lure Alba's troops from the south by means of several aggressive diversions in the west, east and north of the Low Countries and then to gather a large force in France with which to invade the country and occupy all cities in Flanders and Brabant that had Spanish garrisons. The operation failed as a result of

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[14] Duke, "Dissident Propaganda," 123ff; and also his "Posters, Pamphlets and Prints. The Ways and Means of Disseminating Dissident Opinions on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt," in*Dutch Crossing* 27 (2003): 23-44.

[15] Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 11. See further Swart, "Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje," 563ff.

[16] Geurts mentions: *T' grote Requeste vande gereformeerde Religie, 1566, In Novembri* (a text composed by Gilles Le Clerq, the secretary of Orange's brother Lodewijk); and *De verantwoordinge des Princen van Oraengien teghen de valsche logenen, daer mede sijn wedersprekers hem soecken t'onrechte te beschuldighen* (from the beginning of 1568). See Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 20f and 25ff.

[17] *Verklaringhe ende Uutschrift [etc]* (July 1568). During the summer of 1568, there appeared at least three other popular pamphlets in which Orange explained his rebellion against Alba; cf. Geurts *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 25-29.

a lack of coordination, but also because Orange's supporters in the towns were too slow to react when Orange's troops appeared before the gates. The fiasco temporarily resulted in Orange's bankruptcy, and a nervous breakdown.

The failure of the 1568 campaign marks a second decisive moment when Orange realized that the citizens he wished to "liberate" were not sufficiently informed about his plans and the exact nature of his motives for such a military operation. He realized he would have to communicate more effectively so as to avoid another disaster in future.[18] His supporters abroad learned the same lesson; having stuck out their necks in vain to back Orange's campaign against Alba in 1568, they needed convincing again that the cause to which they had committed themselves was good and just. Meanwhile the prince had incurred further damage, following his losses at the end of 1568, before things improved. In France he suffered defeats fighting alongside the Huguenots. His commitment to the Low Countries conflict had become minimal. He had no funds left, and painfully lacked the trust of his former supporters. Many historians consider the year 1569 as a period of complete disillusionment, characterized by Orange's total inability to develop a new strategy that was convincing and effective.

Only in the course of 1570 did Orange take into account the full extent of the emergency in the Netherlands. The visit in January of the mayor of Leiden, Paulus Buys, signaled a first step in Orange's renewed interest in the affairs of the Netherlands. Buys came to Nassau to see the prince at his ancestral Dillenburg Castle, to let him know that his oppressed compatriots were counting on him. A series of harsh sanctions imposed by Alba's Council of Troubles, an extra-ordinary law court, and above all his unpopular tax demands, had turned Alba into a figure of hate for large sections of the population. William of Orange was seen as the only person who could save the Netherlands from its tragic fate. Hatred of Alba was strong, not only among Calvinists, but also among many Catholic merchants, craftsmen, and shopkeepers who felt overwhelmed by the tax demands and the increasing economic crisis. In a sense, the anti-Alba propaganda was largely self-inflicted since almost everybody found his tough and uncompromising actions deeply repugnant.

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[18] Cf. the remarks of Alastair Duke in K.W. Swart, *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand 1572-1584* (Den Haag, 1994), 30-31.

For a long time historians have believed that the wheels of Orange's propaganda machine finally began to move again during the spring and summer of 1570. This assumption has been important for the dating of the *Wilhelmus*. In 1979, H. Bonger summed up what had by then become the accepted view: "In 1571 the moment had come to bring the people closer to the Prince by means of a special song, and to restore faith in him."[19] Nevertheless, as we shall see, several texts and prints dating from 1569, and possibly even from the end of 1568, appear to anticipate this call to reinstate the Prince—rather astonishing in view of the atmosphere of total defeat. This paradoxical situation defies easy explanation. The sudden rise of Orange's reputation after 1570 may well have been result of his earlier propaganda efforts, dating from one or two years earlier, even though specifics remain frustratingly elusive. It was during the years 1570-1572 that the concept of "father of the fatherland" began to emerge. It is possible that the image of the caring, persevering and wise nobleman first developed in propaganda, with Orange only afterwards beginning to see himself in this light.[20]

Who were the people behind the propaganda activities in the period 1566-1574? In the course of these eight years we can discern a growing number of established authors who in one way or another become acquainted with William of Orange. There was Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert, for example, who politely refused several posts offered by Orange from 1566 onwards, but nonetheless contributed to a number of poignant publications, and helped Orange raise funds for military operations.[21] Then there were Gilles le Clercq and François Baudouin, both Calvinist lawyers, and there were noblemen like the brothers Philips van Marnix and Jan van Toulouse;. All four men were involved in various publicity campaigns from as early as 1565-66, though not always on behalf of William of Orange. In 1568 the French Protestant diplomat Hubert Languet acted as advisor to Orange. Several clergymen became involved in Orange's publicity campaign: Adriaen Saravia (starting in 1568),[22]

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[19] H. Bonger, *De dichter van het Wilhelmus* (Amsterdam, 1979); see also the summary of different arguments in A.J. Veenendaal, "Vier vragen betreffende het Wilhelmus," in *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 67 (1954) 1-20 (quoted from *Het Wilhelmus in artikelen* ed. J. de Gier (Utrecht (1985) 73-92, 79ff.

[20] Cf. Swart, "Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje," 566-68.

[21] For the relationship of William of Orange and Coornhert around 1566-1572, see H. Bonger, *Leven en werk van D.V. Coornhert* (Amsterdam, 1978), esp. 38, 42-47, 67-68.

[22] Cf. Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia (c. 1532-1613). Dutch Calvinist, First Reformed Defender of the English Episcopal Church Order on the Basis of the Ius Divinum* (Leiden, 1980), 26ff and passim.

Petrus Dathenus (co-author of the treatise *Apologeticon* of 1570),[23] and the Frenchman Franciscus Junius (from as early as 1566), to name but three of them. For a long time Franciscus Junius set up camp in Emden, home to other Calvinist writers, such as Coornhert's brother Frans Volckertsz., and the Amsterdam rhetorician Laurens Reael, who maintained direct contact with Orange's circle. Around 1570 the poet Johan Fruytiers also resided here; it was Fruytiers who, a few years later, was appointed master of petitions for the States of Holland at Orange's recommendation, possibly as a reward for services rendered, and his commitment to the cause of the Revolt during the previous the years. It is likely that poets such as Lucas d'Heere, the brothers Jan Baptist and Balthazar Houwaert, and Jan van Hout were already in touch with William of Orange and his circle during these years.[24] The same was probably true of the highly talented nobleman and poet Jan van der Noot.[25] This list for the years between 1566 and 1574 can be expanded to include several gifted humanists, such as Janus Dousa, Hadrianus Junius and Hendrik Geldorp.[26]

Almost all these authors were in their thirties.[27] But otherwise, they were a fairly diverse group of skilled writers from a wide range of social

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[23] See T. Ruys, *Petrus Dathenus* (Utrecht, 1919), 83ff.

[24] See for Lucas D'Heere: W. Waterschoot, "Oranjepropaganda te Delft in 1581," in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 73 (1980): 133-40, and K. Bostoen, "Marnix en D'Heere in tegenspoed," *Literatuur* 5 (1987): 11-19. For the two brothers Houwaert: Eug. De Bock, *Johan Baptist Houwaert* (Antwerpen, 1960). For Jan van Hout: Johan Koppenol, *Leids heelal. Het Loterijspel (1596) van Jan van Hout* (Hilversum, 1998), 34 and passim.

[25] See K. Bostoen, *Dichterschap en koopmanschap in de zestiende eeuw* (Deventer, 1987) 95-97 (n.261) for Van der Noot's appointment by Orange and Hoogstraten as one (but possibly the most important) of the twelve 'Capitaines' within the community of exiles from Antwerp in London in 1567, with a special task to 'parlementer, et aussi appaiser" the so-called "common people."

[26] The nature of the contact and the cooperation between William of Orange and those humanists seemed to be quite different. To mention only a few examples some authors were operating as voluntary propagandists, like Hendrik Geldorp in 1570, with limited success however: his text *Belgicae liberandae ab Hispanis Hypodeixis* appeared as early as 1574 (Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 43). Others were working for William of Orange as diplomat or agent, like the very talented poet Janus Dousa in 1572, who carried out a diplomatic mission to Queen Elisabeth; see C.L. Heesakkers and Wilma Reinders, *Genoeglijk bovenal zijn mij de Muzen. De Leidse Neolatijnse dichter Janus Dousa (1545-1604)* (Leiden, 1993), 31, 47); the historian and medical doctor Hadrianus Junius was appointed as William of Orange's personal physician in 1573: C.L. Heesakkers, *Tussen Erasmus and Leiden. Hadrianus Junius en zijn betekenis voor de ontwikkeling van het humanisme in Holland in de zestiende eeuw* (Leiden, 1989), 16.

[27] Only Languet was about fifty years old. Coornhert and Baudouin were in their forties, and Marnix became thirty in 1570, the year of his employment with William of Orange. Jan van Hout was still a few years younger; he was born in 1542.

backgrounds.[28] Despite these social differences they formed a close network of contacts. Several of them had a connection with Antwerp; there was also a group from the triangle Leiden, Haarlem and Amsterdam; a third group of writers hailed from France. German authors seem to have been absent among Orange's literary supporters.[29] This is surprising since many of those listed here, including Orange himself, were living in Germany during the period between 1568 and 1572.[30]

Does knowledge of this network of ideological, linguistic, professional, and artistic talents help us shed light on the authorship of the *Wilhelmus*? The question to what extent William of Orange was himself involved in the production of pamphlets may help in this query. It is likely that Orange around 1570 aimed at coordinating and controlling most if not all publications in order to get his political message across, and that his campaign, between 1568 and 1570 in particular, focused on finding support abroad rather than in the Netherlands. This is not to say that in the Netherlands propaganda-efforts came to a complete halt during these years.[31] Decades of religious tension had given the inhabitants of the Netherlands a thorough training in the practice of concise and acute pamphleteering, though much of this genre must have escaped the attention of William of Orange. Several Beggars' songs that became popular after 1566 were undoubtedly largely spontaneous.[32] Nevertheless, the material issued in Emden, Wesel and other places of exile was of a different order, its output not only pamphlets and books, but visual prints as well. A large part of it was apparently not exclusively intended for the Low Countries but for the Empire, France, and England. It is reasonable to assume that especially these internationally-oriented publications came about under the influence of Orange.

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[28] To mention only a few examples: Janus Dousa and Jan van der Noot were noblemen, Lucas D'Heere was a painter, Dirck Coornhert, son of a merchant, was an engraver and a civil servant, Jan van Hout, son of a cloth manufacturer, was secretary of the city of Leiden.

[29] The only exception seems to be Johann Meixner, who wrote most probably—in German—*Verklaringhe ende uutschrift* of 1568 (which appeared also in French and English); cf. Swart, "Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje," 565.

[30] For Emden and surroundings this applies also—besides the persons already mentioned above—to Coornhert and Philips van Marnix.

[31] Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 25-41.

[32] One of the most famous early Beggars' songs, 'Slaet op den trommele', was written in 1566/1567 by Arent Dirckszoon Vos, an older pastor from De Lier, near Delft. Vos did not seem to have a serious contact with any political faction. See H. Bruch, *Slaat op den trommele. Het Wilhelmus en de Geuzenliederen.* (Leiden s.a.), 21ff..

In the years leading up to 1570, the bulk of Orange's propaganda action was concentrated in one person, Jacob van Wesembeke, the former pensionary of Antwerp, who had known Orange since 1565. In April 1567 he took refuge in Germany, and from then onwards became steadily involved in publicity work for the prince. He helped with some of the pamphlets that justified the 1568 military campaign. But it was not until February 1570 that Wesembeke officially took up a position with Orange. He worked hard on developing a network of contacts with anti-Spanish factions, in particular in Holland and Brabant, and with groups of exiles in Cologne, Wesel and Emden. This, he hoped, would bring Orange support for his next massive invasion, which was planned for the second half of 1570. Wesembeke's talents as a communicator were used for diplomacy. One of his tasks was to convince local leaders that Orange would only risk battle if the provinces contributed enough money to recruit a large army. For weeks Wesembeke traveled up and down the Low Countries while sending very encouraging messages to Orange, mostly over-optimistic misrepresentations of the situation. This meant that when Orange began his military preparations, he only gradually became aware that there was significantly less support than anticipated. As a result Wesembeke lost favor with Orange, although he continued for several years to work for him as a copywriter.[33] In 1572 Wesembeke was sent away after he had printed and distributed a manifesto without asking Orange's permission.[34] He faded into anonymity after 1573, and even the date and place of his death is unknown.

The downfall of William of Orange's first *spin doctor* has stood in the way of a proper appreciation of his pioneering role. As early as 1568 Jacob van Wesembeke began work on a history of the religious conflict in the Low Countries entitled *Description de l'état, occurences advenus au Pays Bas au faict de la Religion*. Its first volume, probably commissioned by William Orange, appeared simultaneously in French and Dutch in 1569. Wesembeke also intended to produce versions in German and Latin—he translated everything himself—but apparently failed to do so. Yet the mere fact that such translations were actually being planned sug-

[33] R. Fruin, "Prins Willem I in het jaar 1570," in *Robert Fruin's Verspreide geschriften* deel II—*Historische opstellen* deel II, eds. P.J. Blok, P.L. Muller & S. Muller Fz. (Den Haag, 1900), 111-166, 160ff. See also J.D.M. Cornelissen, "Medewerkers van den Prins," in *Prins Willem van Oranje 1533-1933*, eds. G.L. de Vries Feijens et al. (Haarlem, 1933) 235-53, 244ff.

[34] Cf. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 41-42.

gests that Orange, throughout this difficult period, continued to aim at wide-spread international support for his activities. On the other hand, the probable failure of the German and Latin versions to materialize shows that the propaganda machine was suffering teething troubles. A planned second volume also never appeared, probably because of shortage of money.[35] Nor can it have been particularly helpful that Orange was largely cut off from the conflict during these years, dividing his time between the family castle at Dillenburg and his allies in France, both being far removed from his supporters in the Low Countries.

A tentative historical reconstruction of this period is possible. In all likelihood, William of Orange began to seek out and cultivate authors, preferably with a literary talent, in 1569, or possibly even earlier. He did so on an ad-hoc basis, commissioning authors for writing specific pieces. We have good reason to assume that Jacob van Wesembeke played a key role in commissioning authors. In a letter dated 19 April 1569, Wesembeke urges Orange to push ahead with plans to distribute pamphlets explaining the just cause of the Revolt, in particular among the German princes.[36] Wesembeke took up the cause himself, writing a number of political pamphlets in 1569, including one about the execution of Hornes and another one about the death sentence of the Antwerp mayor Anthonis van Straelen, under whom Wesembeke himself had served. These texts were published with Orange's approval, and probably also his financial support.[37]

In addition, there is a small collection of propaganda prints from 1569 that blast Alba's reign of terror.[38] The striking fact about these images is not so much their gruesome representation of Alba's actions, but the absence of captions in Dutch. Both the images themselves and the margins contain a fair amount of text, all in German or French, and occasionally a few words of Latin. This suggests that the prints were designed for a foreign public, with William of Orange's interests at heart. It is difficult to think of anyone else but Orange who would have

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[35] For a reconstruction of the main historical data around Description see Fruin, "Wesembeke of Marnix?" in *Robert Fruin's Verspreide geschriften* deel VII—*Kritische studiën over geschiedbronnen* deel I, eds. P.J. Blok, P.L. Muller & S. Muller Fz. (Den Haag, 1903), 111-40.

[36] Fruin, "Wesembeke of Marnix?" 125. See also Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus*, 188.

[37] See for a summary of the several publicity activities on behalf of William of Orange by Jacob van Wesembeke: Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand*, 25-42.

[38] Cf. Horst, *De Opstand in zwart-wit*, 87ff, the catalogue no.'s 22, 23, 24, and also on p. 110, illustration no. 30.

been so inclined to direct this effort, or been in a position to circulate anti-Spanish leaflets abroad at this moment in time. Presumably Orange had more trust in the support of foreign monarchs than in Low Countries rebels; in September 1570 he wrote a letter expressing irritation about the apparent unwillingness of the Netherlands to "shake off the yoke imposed upon them, for their own sakes, and that of their children."[39]

This was probably not a fair appraisal of the resolve of many Calvinists and other opponents of Alba at this difficult time. Yet Orange's irritation does not imply that he failed to grasp the importance of reaching out to this group of supporters as well. He had, after all, learnt a hard lesson from his defeat in 1568. He fully realized that he had to do everything in his power to ensure the support of the inhabitants of the Low Countries. This was clearly the message he consistently gave during these years to his right-hand man Jacob van Wesembeke.[40]

In view of these developments, it seems that 1569 and 1570, the years of desperation, were crucial to the development of Orange's publicity machine. Towards the end of 1570 the propaganda campaign entered a new phase with the appointment of Philips van Marnix as Orange's new right-hand man. From the beginning Marnix had been a passionate supporter of the Revolt; not only at the level of politics—he was one of the most active and articulate members of the Compromise in 1566—but also as an ardent advocate of Calvinism. In 1569 his militant approach to the religious controversy reached a literary climax with the publication of his extensive anti-Catholic satire *Den byencorf der H. Roomsche kercke* (*The Beehive of the Holy Roman Church*). Marnix had written this work in 1568 while in exile at Lütetzburg Castle, not far from the East-Frisian village of Norden. It seems unlikely that William of Orange would have had any direct dealings with Marnix' output as a writer at this stage. The Calvinist Marnix preferred to keep some distance between himself and Orange, whose stance in the religious conflict in these years was somewhat ambiguous.

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[39] Citation in Fruin, "Prins Willem I," 120.

[40] See, for instance, an instruction letter to Jacob van Wesembeke, from November 18, 1570, in which he was summoned to communicate beforehand the future transition of Deventer to followers of William of Orange in other important cities in the provinces of Zeeland, Utrecht, Holland, Groningen and Overijssel: *La Correspondance du Prince Guillaume D'Orange avec Jacques de Wesenbeke (Archives ou Correspondance inédite de la maison D'Orange-Nassau. Supplément au Recueil de M.G. Groen van Prinsterer)*, ed. J.-F. van Someren (Utrecht/Amsterdam, 1896), 137ff. See for its disappointing aftermath: Fruin, "Prins Willem I," 160-62.

Yet during the final months of 1570 the two men finally joined forces.[41] Orange asked Marnix to oversee all communications with the Reformed Church. From then on Marnix was involved in the production of a series of pamphlets, which—depending on the demands of the moment—were either strongly political or religious in tone or, if required, a combination of the two. Orange noticed that he had found in Marnix an author who had influence with the Calvinists. Their collaboration coincided with the moment when Orange finally began to show an interest in the cause of the Calvinists, without wishing to give them any real power. We may assume that one of his reasons for appointing Marnix was to give militant Calvinists the impression that they enjoyed considerable influence. In fact, what we see here is a form of "propaganda by appointment", since Marnix was clearly part of Orange's decision to step up the propaganda campaign in the Low Countries.[42] The collaboration between the two men developed well over the next few years, and from April 1572, when the anti-Spanish coalition led by William of Orange managed to secure a stronghold in Holland and Zeeland, the publication of justifications, apologies, histories, and various literary texts became increasingly institutionalized. Both the States of Holland and those of Zeeland appointed authors and commissioned particular pieces of writing, but never without Orange's approval.

Does this description of the fast and goal-oriented build-up of a propaganda campaign have anything to reveal about the origins of the *Wilhelmus*? Is it possible to know a little more about the circumstances that gave rise to this song in the light of Orange's involvement with the stream of publications on behalf of his cause between 1568 and 1572? Does the song stem from the Wesembeke period, or from the time Marnix was Orange's closest advisor? Does it fit into the native tradition of more or less improvised songs, or does it more obviously belong to the internationally oriented writings by Orange's supporters in exile, in particular in the Empire? We have to accept that the matter at present remains a comparative exercise with too many pieces of information missing. But there is enough tantalizing material to put forward a speculative hypothesis about a possible author, even though the ad-hoc methods of the network of authors and printers around William of Orange complicates such an effort.

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[41] It is generally supposed that Marnix overcame his skeptical feelings for William of Orange somewhere between August 26, 1570 and January 26, 1571; cf. Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus*, 162.

[42] Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus*, 162-163, and Cornelissen, "Medewerkers," 252.

Who exactly are the people so far considered as the author of the *Wilhelmus*? First, of course, Marnix, but also Dirck Coornhert, and his brother Frans; then there is Jeronimus van der Voort, Adriaen Saravia, and the Houwaert brothers. For different, and to my mind, valid reasons the last five names on this list have never received much serious expert attention.[43] By contrast, much has been made of the question whether either Marnix or Coornhert was responsible for these verses. For the purpose of my argument I want to focus on the most important reasons that have been brought forward against the authorship of either of these two.[44]

Against Coornhert's authorship is the fact that he was known to have strict ideas about style that are incompatible with the *Wilhelmus*; the text lacks his adherence to the stricture that rhyming words ought to be used only once, or at least not more than once every sixty lines.[45] Next there is Marnix's candidacy to consider. Besides objections of style and technique, there are also ideological problems. Moreover, interesting new viewpoints have emerged during recent attempts to date the poem more accurately. The song contains a reference to Orange's failed invasion of the southern provinces in October 1568, which means it must postdate this event. We can also establish that it cannot have been written after the capture of Brill in April 1572. Maljaars has given a number of arguments, none of them watertight, showing why it is unlikely that the poem was composed after 1569, the most important of them being the fact that the poem acknowledges Orange's recent defeat as well as the hardship suffered by the people of the Netherlands under Alba's reign of terror. This seems to fit well with the desperate atmosphere of 1569-1570.

The argument, put forward by Bonger and several others, that there was no breeding ground for such a patriotic song at this time, is in any case refuted by the activities of Jacob van Wesembeke, described above. If we are indeed to assume, then, that the poem was written in, or

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[43] See Den Besten, *Wilhelmus*, 3-4, and Bonger, *De dichter*, 17-19.

[44] A mainly historical approach to the issue of the authorship is replaced during the last few decades by a more philological approach. The focus is on the peculiarities of the text, rather than on the strategies of William of Orange and his deployment of propagandistic networks. The historical approach is still at best summarized by A.J. Veenendaal, "Vier vragen betreffende het Wilhelmus," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 67 (1954) 1-20 (reprinted in *Het Wilhelmus in artikelen*, ed. J. de Gier (Utrecht, 1985) 73-92; see also: F.K.H. Kossmann, "Het ontstaan van het Wilhelmus," in *Prins Willem van Oranje 1533-1933*, ed. G.L. de Vries Feijens et al., (Haarlem, 1933) 243-366.

[45] Maljaars, *Het Wilhelmus*, 253.

shortly after 1569, we can more or less rule out Marnix. Are there any other eligible candidates? Should it be someone who, in one way or another, was in contact with William of Orange or Wesembeke? Not necessarily, though the song's message does strongly suggest such a connection.

Maljaars does not wish to rule out the possibility the poem was originally conceived in German, or perhaps even Low German. This remains a matter for discussion, but an interesting detail in this context is that the oldest surviving source for the *Wilhelmus* is still a German version printed in 1573. The numerous approximations of Dutch words and phrases in this text suggest that it was a translation from the Dutch, and that translator must have been a native Dutch speaker.[46] This fits the pattern Orange adopted for his propaganda campaign in 1569, at Wesembeke's instigation, i.e., focusing his attention primarily on potential allies abroad, in particular in the Empire.[47]

The network of authors we have analyzed includes one poet who has rarely been mentioned in the *Wilhelmus* debate, and only indirectly. It is difficult to understand why this author has been overlooked. He was an accomplished poet, well-versed in the art of song composition, not only in Dutch, but also in German and French.[48] I am referring to Johan Fruytiers. A representative of the chamber of rhetoric "De Roode Angieren," hailing from the village of Rijnsburg, he made his name at poetry competitions in Rotterdam (1561), Brussels (1562), and Antwerp (1564). Probably born in one of the southern provinces, he maintained good contacts in Antwerp. He held Reformed convictions, was possibly a Calvinist,[49] and translated and edited a number of biblical texts,

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[46] Cf. Eberhard Nehlsen, "Eine bisher nicht bekannte Fassung des Wilhelmusliedes aus dem Jahre 1573," *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 78 (1985): 214-23.

[47] An international, or at least German, orientation in the production of propagandistic literary texts seems very plausible, since we know of a German song, which is considered to be of Dutch origin (we only have acquaintance of several German copies): 'Bewegliche Demonstration'. This song shows quite a lot of similarities in content and argumentation, with the "Wilhelmus." It seems to stem from the same circles as this song, and also from the same period. See F. Kossmann, "Een 'Bewegliche Demonstration' tot lof van prins Willem van Oranje," *Het Boek* 21 (1933): 113-30, and also his "Is de 'Bewegliche Demonstration' uit het Nederlandsch vertaald?" *Het Boek* 22 (1933-1934): 95-98; and see also Maljaars *Het Wilhelmus*, 235ff, and E. Hofman, "*Eine Bewegliche Demonstration* en de A-tekst van het Wilhelmus," *Spiegel der Letteren* 40 (1998): 206-18.

[48] See for instance the introduction of D.F. Scheurleer in *Ecclesiasticus, oft de wijse sproken Iesu des soons Sirach* (ed. D.F. Scheurleer). Amsterdam (1898), XXXVII and XXXIX et passim.

[49] See for a summary of the few biographical facts we know about Johan Fruytiers: *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* vol. VI, eds. P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok & Fr.K.H. Kossmann (Leiden, 1924), 526-29.

including the apocryphal *Ecclesiasticus*. It is possible that Fruytiers fled the Netherlands as early as 1566. In 1567 he published an adaptation of a French history about the Huguenots. It was probably printed in Emden, as was his interesting prayer book *Schriftmetige gebeden* [*Prayers from Scripture*], published by Goossen Goebens, who was originally from Antwerp.[50] It is likely that Fruytiers lived in Emden during these years; he witnessed the 1570 flood in East Friesland, about which he published a long descriptive poem in 1571.

In 1574 Fruytiers was present at the siege and subsequent relief of Leiden, to which he dedicated another piece immediately after the events. But more important in the context of the authorship of the *Wilhelmus* is that Fruytiers wrote at least two Beggars' songs—one about the 1568 battle at Heiligerlee, and a second one about the 1573 siege and relief of Alkmaar, both published immediately after the event.[51] Fruytiers was obviously a natural talent when it came to composing occasional poems about contemporary subjects.

So far, the facts seem to correspond well with what we know about the likely circumstances surrounding the creation of the *Wilhelmus*. Can we also find literary and stylistic arguments in favor of Fruytiers's candidacy? Den Besten's dissertation, quite inadvertently, provides a further stylistic clue. In the song, the pronouns "du" [you] and "ghy" [thou] are used indiscriminately, a phenomenon often commented on in *Wilhelmus* scholarship, for the two forms to occurring alongside one another in the same text was not at all common in sixteenth century verse composition. But this is indeed the case in the *Wilhelmus*; the author, even when addressing God, alternates between "du" and "ghy". We know that Marnix was one of the few poets who had a strong preference for "du" in the second person singular, and he is certainly quite consistent in his use of "du" with regard to God. For Maljaars this is yet another reason to rule out Marnix as a serious candidate for the authorship of the *Wilhelmus*. A good ten years before Maljaars, Ad Den Besten was of course faced with the very same problem. In order to show that Marnix could have used "ghy" and "du" indiscriminately, he gave an example of a poem which also combines "du" and "ghy"—from *Schriftmetige gebeden*, the 1573 prayer book by Jan Fruytiers. On the basis of the assumption,

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[50] See for the role of printer Goossen Goebens in the Emden circle of Dutch exiles: Paul Valkema Blouw, "The International Career of an Emden Printer (Goossen Goebens 1560-76)," *Quaerendo* 27 (1997) 113-140.

[51] *Het Geuzenliedboek* I, 58-61 and 149-53.

somewhat far-fetched, that Fruytiers may well have included the work of others in his collection, Den Besten then jumps to the conclusion that the poem in question must be by Marnix.[52] The argument is hardly convincing. If we were to assume, however, that Marnix cannot possibly have been the author of the *Wilhelmus* because of the earlier dating, and if we subsequently assume that Fruytiers did indeed write all the poems in his *Schriftmetige gebeden* himself, Den Besten's argument in favor of Marnix suddenly becomes a strong argument in favor of Fruytiers. However, the two "ifs" tell us that too many pieces are still missing in the authorship puzzle to allow any firm conclusion.

Further research into the *Wilhelmus* puzzle should uncover new facts that will bring us closer to solving the song's authorship. In this article, I have tried to chart to what extent there was a conscious attempt to launch a propaganda effort on behalf of William of Orange. Surprisingly, this crucial question has never been sufficiently addressed. Striking is the fact that from 1569 onward, Orange surrounded himself with a very diverse set of authors who varied in social and economic background and geographical reach: both the southern and northern Netherlands, and even France. Further research will shed light on the various connections among these writers—and the printers, book sellers, diplomats and various local agents within whose networks they were enmeshed. It is only by unraveling this social world that we will find the "missing links" that hide deeper knowledge about the history of this simple yet powerful ballad, the *Wilhelmus*.

[52] Den Besten, *Wilhelmus*, 128.