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‘All these things one has to endure from these Germans’. German stage characters as means to criticize changing social positions in seventeenth-century Amsterdam

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‘All these things one has to endure from these Germans’.¹ German stage characters as means to criticize changing social positions in seventeenth-century Amsterdam

In 17th century Dutch theatre many stereotypical German characters appeared on the stage. Uncouth, ridiculous Germans speaking Dutch/German pidgin became a stereotypical joke in comic theatre, and this caricature enhanced the reception and entertainment value of a play. Moreover, playwrights also criticized or denounced ‘moffen’ (‘Krauts’) in Amsterdam as welfare-grabbers or social-climbers. Criticizing Germans was relatively safe for a playwright. Laughing at ‘others’ created a sense of solidarity among the audience, ‘us’ versus ‘them’. Criticizing Dutch culture and populace, however, involved a risk for the author and actors. The audience could take the criticism personally and since theatre needed an audience to survive, this could be very harmful. An author therefore had to anticipate the response of the audience. Because of their relative proximity to the Dutch people, some authors inserted German characters into their plays as instruments to criticize the foibles in Dutch society and class relations in particular. They criticised the exuberance of Amsterdam’s society, the hypocrisy of rich upstarts, the naivety of those who are easily convinced by fancy titles and members of the working class such as handmaidens with ambition to climb the social ladder.

Keywords: seventeenth century; comic theatre; Amsterdam; German characters, social criticism; class relations

Introduction

Quacks, vagabonds, and braggarts, with accompanying features: bacon-eating, beer-guzzling, cocky, naïve and aggressive.² The seventeenth-century comical plays in the Republic provide ample examples of stereotypical, often negative portrayals of Germans. Such terms were used on stage to exaggerate the predominantly negative view of the Germans who became an increasingly common sight in the seventeenth-century Low Countries.

During the seventeenth century, many Germans settled in the Republic. Often hailing from nearby regions such as Westphalia, they moved west to perform seasonal labour in Spring, Summer or Autumn. Many of them migrated permanently to escape economic or political hardship.³ In 1654, an estimated third of the beggars in the Republic were German natives.⁴ The migration of Germans is different from that of other communities in that they mainly migrated on an individual basis. While immigrants from Brabant or French Huguenot refugees for example, arrived in the Republic in large groups to evade persecution after political events or religious unrest (the fall of Antwerp (1585) and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), respectively), German immigration was not triggered by any specific event, was more steady and therefore less conspicuous.⁵ Nevertheless, the Germans over time constituted by far the largest group of immigrants in Holland, including people from all walks of life and all social classes.⁶ On stage, they were well-represented, as opposed to other immigrant groups. A ridiculous German character, often speaking in a comical language mix of German and Dutch, quickly became a broadly-used joke in farces. Including the Dutch word ‘mof’ – a derogatory term for Germans – in the title of a play, or indeed announcing a German lead character⁷, must have triggered comical expectations and probably served as a good way to sell tickets. It is clear that German comical characters increased the entertainment value of plays.

Aside from staging the Germans for comic relief, playwrights also criticised German immigration, and more specifically the large number of Germans in Amsterdam, for example by showing their annoyance over the pressure they put on institutions for poor relief, or by criticising the all-too speedy social promotion of some immigrants.⁸ Most prejudices were negative: Germans were penniless beggars, vagrants, bankrupted or banished misfits. Even their ancestry could not be trusted,

because their claims were difficult to verify, or because it was impossible to know what they had concocted in their home region to have been forced to leave.⁹ Criticism was often specifically focused on permanent immigrants, and less on seasonal labourers, because the former most often ended up in cities, where the genre of theatre mainly thrived.¹⁰

The negative portrayal of ‘moffen’ on stage has been the subject of several scholarly articles.¹¹ Lotte Jensen, for example, has argued that German immigrants were represented in a negative way so as to stress the own, Dutch identity that was perceived to be in danger. The Dutch and German peoples had a lot in common as Germanic ‘northerners’, and the division of both identities therefore required special contrast. By constantly ridiculing the ‘moffen’ through various well-known stereotypes, playwrights could demonstrate the superiority of the Dutch over the Germans.¹²

However, the similarity between both peoples also allowed authors to blame the Germans for mistakes common also to the Dutch. In a way, criticising the Germans provided an implicit means to criticise Dutch society as well, specifically when it came to class distinction and people aspiring upwards social mobility.

In this article, I will take a closer look at the criticism of German characters so as to show to which extent the criticism of playwrights also included Dutch social practice. How did criticism of German characters differ from criticism of Dutch society? Did playwrights specifically aim to criticise upper class, or the ambition for upward mobility, or did they include other layers of society? And why and how were German stereotypes used as a mediator for self-criticism? The answers to these questions will shed light on changing social positions in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and the strategies employed by playwrights to voice their comments.

Societal change in seventeenth-century Amsterdam

In the beginning of the seventeenth-century, Amsterdam was subject to several changes in its social structure. The traditional hierarchy included several layers. The upper layer included both nobility and the families of regents active in the political governance of the city. The second layer ('the great bourgeoisie') was made up of wealthy merchants, entrepreneurs, landowners, academics, higher functionaries, ship-owners and other well-off citizens who in terms of lifestyle, could compete with the top layer of society. The third layer ('large bourgeoisie') included shop-owners, master craftsmen, lower officials, teachers and similar professions. The fourth layer ('narrow bourgeoisie') was constituted by a heterogeneous group of clerks, schoolmasters, small shopkeepers and craftsmen. The layer below them was populated by soldiers, sailors, handmaidens, labourers, and staff active in all manner of lower professions. A marginal group at the very bottom end of society were known as 'het grauw' ('the grey'): beggars, vagrants and cripples.¹³

Common opinion was one had to know, and preferably stick to, his position in the hierarchy.¹⁴ In reality, however, society was never stable, but constantly changing under the influence of mass disease, war, political upheaval etc. Boundaries between the social strata were flexible and allowed for social mobility. That process could be slow or speedy, depending mainly on money.¹⁵

After the Fall of Antwerp in 1585 and the subsequent blockade of the river Scheldt – the main economic artery of the southern Low Countries - Amsterdam gradually took over from Antwerp as the main international trade port of the Low Countries. There was a great influx of wealthy immigrants from the south, fleeing from Spanish rule. After the establishment of the VOC (East India Company) and the WIC (West India Company), international trade concerns that would be the basis of the Dutch colonial empire, the city flourished as never before and became a worldwide

trading hub. The increased wealth of course brought about decisive change in the city's social hierarchy. Smart investors and entrepreneurs could make a fortune in a matter of years, and of course aspired social mobility.¹⁶ Money, as opposed to ancestry, soon became the main element of social position.

The old regent class of Amsterdam, the *magistraat* (magistracy) and *vroedschap* (council) also aspired higher status. These regents divided among themselves the key positions in urban government: the council chose the magistracy (consisting of four majors, the bailiff and nine judges) by exclusive appointment as vacancy occurred. Therefore, they formed a closed group and they made sure to keep power within their limited circle. In time, these patricians, but also wealthier merchants and entrepreneurs, aspired a noble lifestyle by investing in seigneurial lands, buying estates and castles, showing off their wealth through clothing and other luxuries, or by employing fictitious coats of arms or noble titles so as to claim an impressive ancestry for their families. The 'real' nobility of course looked down on these upstarts – primarily because they wanted their station to be as closed and elitist as possible – but other patricians and lower burghers as well frowned upon the noble aspirations of these *nouveaux riches*.¹⁷

Criticising *nouveaux riches*

As early as 1612, the playwright Samuel Coster, in *Teeuwis de Boer* commented on societal change through the voice of a ridiculous German 'jonker' (a low noble station comparable to English esquires). 'Jonker Berent' of course boasts highly of his noble ancestry, but this turns out to be a little problematic:

Noble born and of ancient decent

Whose twelfth grandfather, from whom my ancestry comes

Has been the most notable bishop of Paderborn.¹⁸

Despite all his pride, his ancestry traces back to a bishop, making him a bastard. His servant therefore notes:

His twelfth grandmother therefore a whore, where on earth
Does he get the idea of being noble?¹⁹

Noble qualities, such as virtue, bravery and leadership, are entirely lacking in Jonker Berent. He is uncivilised, rude, and his wife claims that he cannot please her.

Apparently though, he leads the life of a nobleman, staying away from any form of labour, rather spending his days hunting and living in a castle.²⁰ His servant, again, shatters the illusion:

It is too much to bear. Apparently, he waged his life in battle
Of which he boasts, but surely he must not brag
I believe he skewered a few hares to roast
But enemies with his spear? Not a single one,
Besides, that would be difficult, because he has never seen any.
A Nobleman, they say, grows up for battle, like an ox for the axe
But this man keeps a distance of a mile
To be out of shooting range. He and many like him
Are only brave in the field of battle
Against hares that run in fear from the noise of their dogs.²¹

The esquire's lack in noble qualities, moreover, is not compensated by a great fortune. And in these times, money, not ancestry, decides the social position and power among these 'butte Hollanieren'²² ('blunt' Hollanders):

[...] Truly, they [the Hollanders] are really dumb men
Because an esquire, as I am from old nobility,

And stately nobility are no longer in high esteem
As are a tailor or a merchant or the likes
In this city they esteem the riche
For notables, which is very foolish.
If they [the people of this city] were smart, and not foolish
They should revere and respect
And courtesy for an esquire. I mean, these are people
Of low birth. If they would find a diamond in the dirt
Like in Aesopus fable, they will not like it more
Than a grain of barley. Likewise, these Dutchmen rate
A simple shipman higher than a nobleman with four quarters.²³

Berent thinks it a scandal that merchants and simple craftsmen like tailors are in higher esteem than nobility, just because of their wealth. This opinion is of course ridiculous, as the audience knows full well that he lacks both a noble ancestry and the features of a true nobleman.

Through the character of Jonker Berent, Samuel Coster ridicules both those who unrightfully boast their noble ancestry, but also those *nouveaux riches* who aspire upwards social mobility. These social upstarts quickly think they are more important than the old class of the nobles: a shipman is in higher esteem than a nobleman with ‘vier quartier’.

This criticism, however, was best made in an implicit way. The patricians and upper middle class, by this time, were active in city politics and controlled the plays to be performed in the city, first in the chambers of rhetoric, later in the theatre of the city. It is very well possible that some of the people he sought to criticise with his play, were members of his audience. By voicing his criticism implicitly through the ridiculous

character of Berent, he could defend against any kind of accusation, and still communicate his opinion.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the awareness that ancestry did not matter as much as wealth increased even further. People of dubious social origins now rise to power in a matter of years and are said to become arrogant in the process.

At this point too, Germans are used to voice this criticism, because they can be staged as characters who comment on Dutch society from an outside position. In Pieter Bernagie's *De ontrouwe kantoorknecht en lichtvaerdige dienstmaagd* (1685) Fytje, a wild-spirited German woman, criticises the hypocrisy of the citizens of Amsterdam, who are only interested in money. The wealthy see no need to prove their ancestry, are befriended and honoured by all and taken into important families. The poor, on the contrary, are shunned, and have a hard time proving family relations:

[...] These are different times

Had I been a barbarian, or a Hottentot, I would be wooed

The wealthy always have most friends.

When I had money, many who before did not even take notice of me,

Called me their niece, or remember how their and my grandmothers looked so much

[alike

And they lay out to which precise extent we are related. That is the way of things: no

[one wants to be called kin of those who have nothing.

They are afraid that they might be asked for help, and it is commonly known, that

[people do not like to give money.²⁴

Bernagie in this fragment voices a sensitive criticism through a negatively portrayed German character. Fytje is the stereotypical evil woman, who terrorises her family. The

farce revolves around the attempt to bring her back in line so that normal marriage patterns can be restored. By using Fytje as a channel for his opinion, Bernagie cunningly protects himself, as the audience of course would not take offense at this form of criticism when it is voiced by a German woman who is an obviously negative stereotype. The inferior status therefore allows for implicit criticism from the part of the playwright.

In Lodewijk Meyer's *De Wanhébbelycke Liefde* (1678), we see a similar process. Here criticism is voiced through the character of Hendrik, who is half-German on account of his mother, a poor Westphalian handmaiden. When Hendrik falls in love with the daughter of a poor German servant, his father speaks against their marriage, making him a hypocrite as he married a handmaiden himself. Hendrik confronts his father with his hypocrisy, stating that in Amsterdam, apparently money is the only thing that counts:

Old ancestry is not regarded highly anymore.

True, those who are highborn, want to be honoured as such

But if you look at this closely through a looking glass

My dear father, it is not important any more

To try to marry into these families

No, it is all about gathering wealth

Any farmer's son with some possessions

Or the daughter of a chimney sweeper or a cesspit cleaner

If the father leaves them loads of money

They can easily buy a comfortable house

Father, father, money is all that counts here in Amsterdam

Those who have it, can even claim a coat of arms and an old ancestry.²⁵

Dutch common sense

Another typical German type in farcical plays is a character who pretends to be of high birth, to marry into wealthy patrician families. Their self-assured boasting invariably convinces either a somewhat naive burgher's daughter, or her father, blinded by stories of lineage, titles and heroic deeds. Scholarly analysis of these plays has mainly stressed the negative portrayal of the German characters as fraudulent braggarts,²⁶ but in fact, the criticism to a certain extent also touches the Dutch patrician class. These merchant upstarts, rich but without any claim to nobility, will marry their daughters off to any 'nobleman' that shows interest, only to climb the social ladder and be part of an imagined elite.²⁷ The popular ending to these plays will have the charlatan spurned, mistakes declared and a Dutch competitor marrying the girl.

In a way, playwrights adhere to a bourgeois ideal of Dutch civility, stressing virtues perceived as typically Dutch, such as simplicity and sincerity. The scheme of the German charlatans is often discovered by more ordinary characters such as servants and handmaidens, who generally are less impressed by anything noble.²⁸ A good example of this process is Lodewijk Meyer's *De Gelukke list of bedrooge Mof* (*Nil Volentibus Arduum*, 1689). The reputable burgher daughter Alida prefers 'Olof Harmensz Propdarm' (stuffbelly) over her Dutch lover Eelhart (noble heart), who pretends to be German to win her heart. Meanwhile Oelke, Propdarm's servant, seduces Truitje, the handmaiden, but whereas Alida is easily convinced by the German charm, Truitje stays unimpressed:

Oelke

[...]

I want to raise you to a high state.

Truitje

You are completely crazy,

You penniless haggard bum, you don't have any money.

[...]

Oelke

[...]

Well listen, travelling costs a lot of money,

And my father does not have much.

Truitje

Then how would you make me a grand woman? That's just great.

Oelke

I will make a living for us. We will be poor, but honest.

Truitje

I shit on poor honour.

Oelke

Don't mind that too much

Even if we have to live as beggars on cold days

There still is our noble name.

Truitje

But money is even better, poor braggarts

Don't have to try their luck with me

My little savings, gathered sparingly over time,

Would not last a long time.²⁹

Truitje easily sees through the lies of her suitor. A noble name cannot compensate for a life in poverty, surely not if that means spending her own little savings. Oelke's promises mean nothing to Truitje, who is the embodiment of Dutch sobriety. She is not

tempted by a faint idea of nobility, and states her refusal rather bluntly, also considered as typically Dutch. This ‘bluntness’ (‘botheid’), read in a positive way as decency, steadfastness and sobriety, is squarely opposite from any awe for nobility and ancestry.³⁰

Working class

The working class too, is confronted with criticism. Labourers who sought to better their state were ridiculed. Here, the criticism is notably more explicit, and directed more openly at the Dutchmen themselves. Playwrights could far more easily criticise the lower classes than they could the patricians, who controlled the medium of theatre. Whereas Dutch labourers are not spared, German ones are criticised even more explicitly. This is shown for example in the criticism of handmaidens. In general, handmaidens enjoyed a certain degree of independence. They regularly changed employers and tried to match with them, for example in trying to dress the way their employers did. This was considered a threat to social order, both by some of the employers as by the city council, as dress was a way to distinguish between classes. That handmaidens dressed more luxuriously, could well make them more suitable partners for higher-placed men, which again would disturb class distinction.³¹ City officials in this time therefore repeatedly passed legislation on the dress of handmaidens.³² In 1642, it was explicitly forbidden for servant girls to wear any silk or velvet, so as to avoid that they would dress too much like their employers. The ordinance in a way repaired the visual distinction between women of different classes, and at the same time aimed to crack down on theft of garments by handmaidens, which apparently was a common occurrence.³³ The problem is theme of various farcical plays, for example Bernagie’s *Het studente-leven* (1684):

If one sees them walking about on the streets, one would think
they were decent girls, meanwhile, underneath their clothes, they are dirty and untidy
They spend all their money on lace, ribbon bows and the likes
And barely wear a decent undershirt.³⁴

In Joan van Paffenrode's *De Bedroge Girigheyd Ofte Boertige Comoedie van Hopman Ulrich* (1661), the same criticism is voiced by an old woman, Hildegond:

Take a good look at how some of them are adorned
With bows and needlework and all curly hair
So that it is difficult to tell the handmaiden from her lady.³⁵

Hildegond, on the other hand, propagates virtues such as simplicity and sobriety and instead wants to employ an 'old' maid: someone thrifty and smart, who knows her way around things and who works hard, instead of some puppet with curls and bowties.

While this criticism is general enough to include all handmaidens, German ones are singled out and criticised even more. As many of them worked as servant girls, this may come as no surprise. In Pieter Bernagie's *Belachelijke jonker* (1684), the character Johanna voices her critique explicitly towards German handmaidens:

Take a good look at these maids
Could you distinguish them
From the daughters of burghers?
Do they not wear fine gold like we do
Bowties and rings

And necklaces and all things?
Even rookies, less than a year after arriving
From Germany, with only
a meagre green cap
Now wear white caps all day
And when farmers come into the city
They do not know they are maidens
O no, they ask them
Miss, would it please your husband
That I speak to him?³⁶

Having fulminated against the pretension of maids in general, Johanna criticises Germans in particular. She's abhorrent of ostentatious Germans who arrive in Amsterdam broke, but then later, when they have amassed riches, look down on others. Johanna seems threatened by them and wants strict class distinctions.

The fact that German handmaidens were criticized even more harshly than their Dutch counterparts has a xenophobic undertone. Indeed, the German girls have come from 'outside' to undermine Dutch society. As strangers, they were expected even more than the Dutch girls to know their place.³⁷ In Bernagie's *De Belachelijke jonker* (1685), Neeltje tells her brother Joris, who has spent three years in the Dutch Indies, how Amsterdam has changed in his absence. Everyone, she says, is looking for status and has taken on a new name. Old friends are hard to find, even if one would scour the entire city. 'Klaas Janse', for example, now goes by the name 'myn heer Zwierhaan' (my lord fancy cock). But the fact that the Germans too change their names, irritates Neeltje even more:

So many *Poep* and *Knoet*, arrived without a single penny
Now have taken on impressive names and coats of arms.³⁸

In Thomas Asselijn's *De Stiefmoer* (1684), the German woman Machteld has worked her way out of poverty, which makes her arrogant in the eyes of others:

You Turk, having come here penniless, not too many years ago
[...]
And this upstart Madam imagines herself to be the grand lady of Amsterdam
But did she have an undershirt on, this haggard woman, when she arrived?
And besides, all she wears are my sister's clothes.³⁹

In *De Stiefvaar* (1690), a sequel play to *De Stiefmoer*, protagonist Marten Kroes has promoted himself from servant to husband. He too, is accused of not knowing his place and of taking advantage of the situation:

What has he been other than a lowly servant, having run all shitty errands in the street.
My friends can testify and help remember
How often he was waiting to this table to pour a glass of wine.
And now he wants to be master of everyone else.
[...]
And that's typical for these Germans, if they rise to any kind of state, they will want
[ever more,
[...]
Surely he has made his fortune, but has he spent a single penny of his own?
It is no great feat to become rich in such a way, and to make money with money.⁴⁰

In other words: Marten has accumulated his wealth through gambling, a practice widely criticised in the seventeenth century, for fear that social distinction may be broken. On the one hand, capital could be transferred to the hands of the undeserving, on the other hand, the elite could lose their high position. Gambling could turn society upside-down. Certainly in the second half of the seventeenth century, when gambling was a way to show off a luxurious lifestyle, concerns over the practice were rising. To avoid that entire families would be thrown into poverty, contemporary policy makers tried to regulate the practice of gambling.⁴¹ In *De Stiefvaar*, Asselijn shows the devastating consequences of gambling: poor Marten, after gambling his way to wealth and success, obviously struggles to adapt to his new station and terrorises his family. Another example is Pieter Bernagie's *De romanzieke juffer* (1685), where the Westphalian character Hans, makes money by gambling against a few wealthy youngsters.

I encountered some youngsters and made friends

And we played the dice with rich lords and merchants' sons, we tricked them, you see,

[these misters are as good as money. One of us could

cheat the dice, and we shared all that any one of us won.⁴²

The wealth amassed through cheating, allowed Hans to pretend to be a nobleman and try to trick young burgher's daughters. The practice of gambling in this way is shown to threaten social hierarchy and lead to unhappy and unequal marriages. Here also, the criticism is implicitly aimed at the interest in gambling of the native Dutchmen.

Why Germans?

Why were German characters used to voice criticism on Dutch mistakes? Their ostensible likeness seems to be part of the answer. The Dutch and the Germans were

more alike than they liked to admit. That is why the Dutch so strongly positioned themselves against the Germans, and less against French or English immigrants. Both of these were in a way looked up to: the French because of their clothing and taste,⁴³ and the English because they were associated with the ideal of the 'gentleman'.⁴⁴ The question then is, where did the negative portrayal of Germans come from?

In her study on the 'mofbeeld' (representation of Germans) of Isaac Vos, Lotte Jensen notes how the historiographical work *Germania* by the Roman historian Tacitus influenced the later characterization of Germans. Tacitus described German traits, lifestyle and behavior. Through time these qualities were interpreted more negatively. *Germania* also influenced Dutch historiography as the Dutch saw themselves as descendants of the Batavians, a Germanic tribe. According to Tacitus the Batavians were the bravest, and many Dutchmen believed that the positive qualities of Germans were specifically applicable to Batavians, while the negative traits were passed on to Germans. Jensen concludes⁴⁵:

It will come as no surprise that Vos reserves the negative traits specifically for the Germans in both farces. By criticising in 'the other' traits that were in fact present in his own people, he could in a way refrain from self-criticism. One expects the negative traits of oneself to be even more present in others. Self-image and image of the other in this way are closely related.⁴⁶

In other words, playwrights used the relative proximity of the Germans and the Dutch to voice their sensitive criticism on Dutch society. The audience, feeling in a way superior to the ridiculed Germans, will not quickly be offended, while the author in the meantime, has voiced his opinion.

Nuanced characterisation

Germans are easy scapegoats. At first sight, the difficulties German immigrants faced had no place on the stage. However, there are some instances where playwrights show a more nuanced view of German immigrants. As many of them were fleeing for war, German characters could also be staged to inform the audience on the difficulties of the Thirty Years War. In Isaac Vos' *Klucht van de mof* (1644), Lubbert asks Jochim for news on the conflict:

Jochem

O dear mercy, what do we matter. The soldiers trample everything and leave nothing
[intact
They have a complete disregard both for religious and worldly authority, or what used
[to be
in Munster and Osnabrück, noble houses of lords [...]

Lubbert

Are they all gone?

Jochem

I believe so, because they try to top each other
When the imperial troops conquer, they are followed soon
By the Swedes, the Hessians, and chase them like twenty devils, and burn down
[everything
That we have to see with our own eyes, and we cannot tell anyone.⁴⁷

Vos also voices the dismay of the Dutchmen: 'Yes, whichever way you turn this, it is all evil doing.'⁴⁸

In *De Stiefmoer*, Thomas Asselijn also stages Germans who report about the war, as he has the German relatives of Machteld explain the way they sank into poverty:

Kasper: My lords, we are altogether poor people, who have lost everything in the war.

The bishop's people [Catholic] have made us naked and bare, we have nothing to live

[on

That is why we speak to good people, to give us anything out of mercy.⁴⁹

Every once in a while, they make some money by doing household chores:

We have both made almost half a thaler, by cutting the grass in a few fields

But we have to save this for Autumn, to buy bacon and sausage, if we do not want to

[starve in Winter.⁵⁰

How they will make it through Summer, is another concern. Asselijn obviously stages them as victims of the cruelty of war: 'We are perfectly content in our poverty, even if it bitterly strikes us.'⁵¹ Obviously impoverished and struck by war, they are still content and seem to be happy with their place in the world. The Germans war victims are portrayed as friendly, thankful, and humble. But to call them entirely positive, would be a bridge too far. After supper, they impertinently ask their hostess Machteld for shoes. And Machteld herself is of course a very negative German character – while she provided a meal for the begging family, her husband and child go to bed hungry. At the same time, the Dutch characters, Jochem and Aaltje, speak in an exclusively negative way about the German beggars: '*Jochem:* 'Isn't that a pretty band of beggars? they smell as if they haven't been out o their clothes for six days'⁵²– and later: 'pure villains [...] vagrants, beggars'.⁵³ Probably, the audience shared this opinion, balancing between repulsion and empathy.

Conclusion

The beginning of the seventeenth century saw an impressive accumulation of wealth in Amsterdam, which put pressure on the existing social hierarchies. Playwrights voiced their concerns about these societal changes. Common opinion was that everyone had to know (and remain in) their place in a strictly ordered society.⁵⁴ Many authors staged German characters to criticise changing social positions, because of their relative proximity to the Dutch people, and because it was a way to voice their opinions without offending part of their audiences. Mocking ‘others’ created a sense of community, of ‘us’ against ‘them’. Explicit criticism of their own society was too dangerous: if the audience felt offended, they would stay away, but in more serious cases, the urban government could prohibit plays or persecute playwrights. Authors had to be cautious to voice sensitive criticism on stage. By aiming their opinions on German characters, or by having them voice their criticisms, playwrights could implicitly mock the exuberance of Amsterdam’s society, the hypocrisy of rich upstarts, or the naivety of those who are easily convinced by fancy titles and braggish types.

Criticism is more explicit, and more directly aimed at the own Dutch people, when it deals with the ambition of lower class people to climb the social ladder. There was a great intolerance for gambling because this could disturb social order, and handmaidens who dressed too lavishly were mocked on stage. While these criticisms were more explicitly aimed at the Dutch directly than disapproval of higher classes, here also, German characters are even more negatively portrayed than Dutch ones.

That being said, the picture of Germans on stage in seventeenth-century Dutch farces is not altogether negative. Certainly Germans who were impoverished by the Thirty Years War, are sometimes portrayed in a rather more positive way, and get the chance to report on the cruelties of war for a Dutch theatre audience. These instances,

however, are few and far between. The overall image is that Germans were used as a channel for implicit criticism on contemporary society, so as not to offend the Dutch audiences.

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- ¹ ‘Wat een mens van dat Moffegoed moet verdragen’.
- ² W.A. Ornée, *De ‘mof’ in de Nederlandse blij- en kluchtspelen uit de 17^e en 18^e eeuw* (Groningen: Wolters, 1970), 8.
- ³ Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17^e-eeuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 213.
- ⁴ W.F.H. Oldewelt, “Het aantal bedelaars, vondelingen en gevangenen te Amsterdam in tijden van welvaart en crisis”, *Negendertigste jaarboek van het genootschap Amstelodamum* (1942), 21-34, spec. 23.
- ⁵ Leo Lucassen, “Poepen, knoeten, mieren en moffen. Beeldvorming over Duitse immigranten en trekarbeiders in zeventiende- en achttiende-eeuwse kluchten”, in *Vreemd Gespuis*, ed. Anne Frank Stichting (Amsterdam: Ambo Novib, 1987), 29-37, spec. 29.
- ⁶ Erika Kuijpers & Maarten Prak, “Gevestigden en buitenstaanders”, in: *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Deel II-1: Centrum van de wereld 1578-1650*, ed. Willem Frijhoff & Maarten Prak (Amsterdam: SUN, 2004), 189-239, spec. 196.
- ⁷ For example Isaac Vos, *Klucht van de moffin* (1642) and *Klucht van de mof* (1644), Lodewijk Meyer (NVA), *De gelukte list, óf bedrooge mof* (1689), and many farces in the eighteenth century. For more titles: Ornée (1970) and Lucassen (1987).
- ⁸ Lucassen, *Poepen, knoeten, mieren en moffen*, 32.
- ⁹ Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad*, 289.
- ¹⁰ Lucassen, *Poepen, knoeten, mieren en moffen*, 31.
- ¹¹ Ornée, *de ‘mof’* and Lucassen, *Poepen en knoeten, mieren en moffen*.
- ¹² Lotte Jensen, “Drunken Swines”. The representation of Westphalians in Dutch Literature from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century”, in: *Niederlandisch-Deutsche Kulturbeziehungen 1600-1830*, ed. Jan Konst, Inger Leemans & Bettina Noak (Gottingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), 87-99, spec. 98.

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- ¹³ Willem Frijhoff & Marijke Spies, *1650. Bevochten eendracht* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1999), 189-190.
- ¹⁴ H.F.K. van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten. De Hollandse adel in de zestiende en de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984), 29.
- ¹⁵ Frijhoff & Spies, *1650*, 190.
- ¹⁶ Benjamin B. Roberts, *Sex and Drugs Before rock'n' Roll. Youth Culture and Masculinity during Holland's Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 23-25.
- ¹⁷ Frijhoff & Spies, *1650*, 195.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Coster, *Boere-klucht van Teeuwis de Boer, en men Juffer van Grevelinckhuysen*, ed. F.A. Stoett & N.C.H. Wijngaards (Zutphen: Tieme, 1967), 34, vs. 317-319: 'Eddel ghebooren und van olden stam / Wiens twelfsten Olt Vedder, do mijn geslicht heer quam / Had wesen den Eerweerdighen Bisschof van Paderboorn.'
- ¹⁹ Coster, *Teeuwis de boer*, 34, vs. 320-321: 'Sijn twaelfde Bestemoer argo een Hoer, waer halenset uyt een hoern, / Daerse de eeldoom van rekenen van haer gheslacht?'
- ²⁰ Van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten*, 44.
- ²¹ Coster, *Teeuwis de boer*, 39, vs. 443-452: 'Tis te bijster, in de krijgh het hy sijn leven wel geviert / Dat hy daer van roemt, neen seecker hy mach wel swyghen, / Een deel hasen gheloof ick is hy wel ghewent an 't spit te ryghen, / Maer van 's Landts vyanden reech hyer zyn leven niet ien, / Trouwen, dat comt aers by, want hy hetse sijn leven niet ghesien, / Een Edelman seytmen, wast tegen de krijgh op, as een os tegen de bijl / Maer dese man houdt gaern een borstweeringh van een mijl, / Dan is hy immers wel schoot vrij, hy seeckers en sijns ghelijcken, / 't Bennen Krijghsluy int velt, die niet schielijck beswijcken, / Achter een haes, die vreesachtigh begint voor haer honden gebaer te loopen.'
- ²² Coster, *Teeuwis de boer*, 33, vs. 276.
- ²³ Coster, *Teeuwis de boer*, 33, vs. 279-292: '[...] Sint mijnder zielen hesselijche plompe Venten, / Went eyn Joncker wie ich bin van olden gheslechten, / En statelijcken Adel wettense je me nit tho achten, / Wien schruer wien Kofkeerl en dierghelijcken, / Wemen in desse stede gros achtet, on holdt de rijcken / Voor eyn sinnelijck persoon, on dat is gar

nerrisch, / Mo wentse verstandich weeren, en nie soo nerrisch, / Se sollen reverentiallich om mit Cortosy erbieden, / Ontsach haben vom den Joncker, mir meyt, 't sint lieden / Von gheringer conditcioen, die lecket wie den Esopus hoon / Eyn ordonnant im den drech hoop vinde on hun min steyt oon, / Wie en enich gersten Cueren, lijcket soo desse Hollanieren estimieren / Geringe Schifluyden boven den Joncker van vier quartierien.'

²⁴ Pieter Bernagie, *De ontrouwe kantoorknecht en lichtvaerdige dienstmaagd* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1685), 25: '[...] 't Is nu een andere tyd. / Al was ik een Barbaar, ja Hottentot, ik wierd wel gevryd. / Die goed heeft, krygt ook haast grote Vrinden. Terwyl / Ik geld gehad heb, hebben veele, die my te vooren niet eens aan hadden gekeeken, / Nu Nicht genoemt, en ze weeten nét dat haar, en myn Bestemoêr malkander wonderwel geleeken. / Ze konnen uit syfferen, hoe na dat we malkander bestaan. Dat gaat zo. Niemand wil bloedvrind heeten van een die niet heeft. / Ze zyn bang, datzer ergens om verzoeken mogten, en 't is gemeen, datmen niet gaerne geeft.'

²⁵ Lodewijk Meyer (NVA), *De wanhébbelyke liefde* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1678), 147, vs. 49-60: 'Men maakt hier zulken staat niet meêr van oude geslachten. / 't Is waar, die der van óf komen, willen zich doen achten, / Maar wanneer men het te deeg mét een bril beziet, / Myn lieve Vader, 't is 'em dat eijer eeten niet, / Om zich wéderom met diergelyke stammen te paaren, / O neen, maar 't is om met die kwinkslag schatten te vergâren: / Want komt 'er een boerenrékel, én heeft hy goed, / Of een dóchter van schoorsteen-óf stillevegers bloed, Zo de vaâr maar goude kluiten nalaat, én dat mét hoopen, / Zo kunnen zy zich gemakkelijk in een tréffelyk huis verkoopen. / Vader, vader, 't géld is de leus hier te Amsterdam, / Die dat heeft, verziertmen haast wapens, én een oude stam.'

²⁶ Ornée, *De mof*, 9-10; Lucassen, *Poepen, knoeten, mieren en moffen*, 32.

²⁷ For example Pieter Bernagie, *De romanziëke juffer* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1685); Pieter Langendijk, *De zwetser* (Amsterdam: Erven Jacob Lescailje en Dirk Rank).

²⁸ Ornée, *De 'mof'*, 9.

²⁹ Lodewijk Meyer (NVA), *De gelukte list, óf bedrooge mof* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1689), 46-47: 'Oelke: [...] Ik wil jou in hoogen stoot stéllen. / *Truitje*: Jy bint half zeuven, /

Jy kaalvink, jy hébt pas nagels, tot 'et klouwen van jouw poort. [...] / *Oelke* [...] Heurt, umb de Landen to bezeen, at kóst, jo viel géld / Und it is by mienen Voder zóe wét armzilig gestéld. / *Truitje* Waar zou ik dan een groote Vrouw op weezen? dat komt heerlijk. / *Oelke* Op dat ik winnen zól; zunt wie aerm, wie zunt eerlik. / *Truitje* Ik kak erais in die kaale eer. / *Oelke* Door mooten y kein acht op sloon, / Wan wie oek al ibz keeve doogen zolden bédelen goon, / *Zoe* is ons geslécht dóch goot. / *Truitje* Ja géld nóch béter, kaale vinken / Hoeven an myn niet iens te ruiken, óf't souw'er stinken. / Ien klein Spaarpotje, dat ik zuinigjes héb vergaard, / Zouw'er niet veul in klikken, én was op mit'er vaard.'

³⁰ Frijhoff & Spies, 1650, 37.

³¹ Derek Phillips, *Well-being in Amsterdam's Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Pallas, 2008), 86.

³² Rudolf Dekker, "Upstairs en downstairs. Meiden en knechts in het dagboek van Constantijn Huygens Jr.," *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 25 (2002): 78-87, spec. 80-81.

³³ Roberts, *Sex and Drugs Before rock'n' Roll*, 66.

³⁴ Pieter Bernagie, *Het studente-leven* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnus, 1684), 7: 'Alsmenze by de straat ziet gaan, zou de waereld wel meenen, / Dat 'et Puikjes waaren, ondertusschen zyn ze van ondren beklonterd, en de slenters hangen by de beenen. / Jy lui geeft je geld aan Kantjes, Strikken, en zulke voddery, / En je hebt nau een Hemd aan 't lyf.'

³⁵ Jozef van Paffenrode, *De Bedroge Girigheyd Ofte Boertige Comoedie van Hopman Ulrich* (Gorinchem: Paulus Vinck, 1661), 20: 'Siet maer eens hoe datter een deel van die cameniertjes weten op te toyen, / Se zijn bestrikt en bequikt 't spijt de juffers, soo zijn haer de lokjes gekrult, / Soo dat je dik niet en weet of je haer voor de meyt of voor de iuffer nemen sult.'

³⁶ Pieter Bernagie, *De belachelijke jonker, en: Studente-leven* (Doetinchem: Misset, 1882), 8-9: 'Ik bidje, let eens op de meiden, / Zoud gy ze kunnen onderscheiden / Van Burgers Dochters, draagen zy / Niet van fyn goud, zo wel als wy, / De Strikken aan het Hoofd, en Ringen, / En Kettingen, en alle dingen? / Zelfs Groentjes, die eerst voor een Jaar / Uit Mofland kwamen, en toen maar / Een schraal groen Bokje hadden, draagen / Nou witte Kapers alle dagen. / Als

dan de Landslui hier in stad / Eens komen, weeten zy niet, dat / Het Meiden zyn, ô neen, zy
vraagen / Haar, Juffrouw zou 't u Man behaagen / Dat ik hem spreek.'

³⁷ Phillips, *Well-being*, 33.

³⁸ Pieter Bernagie, *De Belachchelyke jonker* (Amsterdam: Albert Magnum, 1684), 13:
'Zo menige Poep, en Knoet, die hier op strowisschen zyn komen gedreeven, / Hebben 'er
zelf wytse Naamen, en Waapens gegeven.'

³⁹ Thomas Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, ed. Eelco Verwijs (Amsterdam: z.p., 1907), 320:
Jou turkin alsje bent, die hier op een stroowisch is koomen dryven, noch voor zoo weinig
jaaren! / [...] / En deese nieuwbake Madam beeld'er noch wel in dat s'et puikje is van
Amsterdam: / Maar ofze wel een hemd aan'er gat had, die schooibrok, toen z'er in kwam? /
't Zijn noch al mijn susters kleeren diese daar draagt.'

⁴⁰ Thomas Asselijn, *De Stiefvaar* (Amsterdam: Erven Jacob Lescaijle, 1690), 7: 'Wat is hy meer
als je honds jongen geweest, die alle kakboodschappen moest gaan doen by de straat. / De
vrinden konnen nevens my getuigen en noch gedenken, / Hoe menigmaal dat hy hier wel
achter de taafel heeft gestaan om ons een glas wyn te schenken. / En nou zou men elk mans
miester wel willen weezen / [...] / En dat heb je van die moffen, alze zo wat tot staat
koomen, zouwenze wel elk ien boven 't hoofd streeven, / [...] / Dat hy fortuin gemaakt heeft
is waar, maar heeft hy der wel een stuiver van 't zyne toe geavontuurd? / 'T Is geen kunst zo
ryk te worden, en met veel geld geld te winnen.'

⁴¹ Herman Roodenburg, *Onder censuur. De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van
Amsterdam, 1578-1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1990), 334-335.

⁴² Bernagie, *De romanzieke juffer*, 32: 'wy liepen op jonge lui, wy maakten ons vrinden, / En
speelden, met de ryke Heeren, en Koopluy kinderen, die zoopen wy uit; zie die Messieurtjes
zyn zo goet, als geld. Één van ons kon / Valsch dobbelen, wy deelden al wat iemand won.'

⁴³ Van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten*, 232.

⁴⁴ Ernest Zahn, *Regenten, rebellen en reformatoren: een visie op Nederland en de Nederlanders*
(Amsterdam: Contact, 1989), 65.

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- ⁴⁵ Lotte Jensen, “‘Libben labben an eyn stucxken swijne vless’. ‘Moffen’-beeld bij de toneelschrijver Isaac Vos”, *Vooy* 15 (1997): 22-27, spec. 24-26.
- ⁴⁶ Jensen, *Moffen-beeld bij toneelschrijver Isaac Vos*, 26: ‘Dat Vos de negatieve eigenschappen met name reserveert voor de Duitsers in beide kluchten, mag geen verbazing wekken. Door in ‘de ander’ eigenschappen te hekelen die voor het eigen volk ook geldig waren, wordt het eigen volk als het ware tijdelijk van diezelfde negatieve reputatie gevrijwaard. Naar een alledaags niveau vertaald: ondeugden die op jezelf van toepassing zijn, veracht je des te meer bij een ander. Zelfbeeld en beeld van de ander hangen in die zin nauw met elkaar samen.’
- ⁴⁷ Vos, *Klucht van de mof*, 15: ‘*Jochem*: Och liefve deucht wat scholle wy, de krijgers erdravent soo schoon, dat ‘er nichts averblift, / See seen nicht an geystligh noch weltigh, wat plegender in stift / Munster on Oosenbrug, voorneme Hernhuser too wesen [...] / *Lubbert*: Sinne die dan nou miest wech? / *Jochem*: Dat leuf ick wol, soo asse haspele / Iegen eyn aner, wen de Keyzersche eyn plecke in nemen alto hant / Kamen de Sweeden ont Hessen, ont joegense veur twentig duyvel, ont steecken de bru in brant. / Dat meten wy met goe oogen anseen, ont duren der nicht eyn woort wedder seggen.’
- ⁴⁸ Vos, *Klucht van de mof*, 16: ‘Ia ’t magh wesen hoe ’t sijn wil, ’t altoos stucken die niet deugen.’
- ⁴⁹ Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, 322: ‘*Kasper*: Mien Hern, wie zund altzammen arme luden, wier haben alles durch den krieg verloren. / Der Bischops volker haben uns nakt un blut gemacht, wi hebben nicht um von te leben, / Doorum mutten wi de gutte luden anspreegen, datse uns ut barmhartigkeit wat geben.’
- ⁵⁰ Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, 322: ‘Wie heben elk wol ein half steig doolder verdind, mit etliche kampen gras toe sniden, / Moor dat mutten wie bit up de harfst verwooren, um spek und wursten to kaupen, sonst wollen wi toe winter gebrek lieden.’
- ⁵¹ Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, 322: ‘Wi sind in unser armude wol to vrede, hoe ubel und bitter dat ‘et us treft.’

⁵² Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, 325: ‘*Jochem*: Is dat niet een schoone bedelaars trein? ze stinken of ze in gien ses dagen uit de bolster benne geweest.’

⁵³ Asselijn, *17e eeuwse blijspelen*, 327: ‘puure schurken [...] landloopers, beedelaars.’

⁵⁴ Phillips, *Well-being*, 27.