

2 Phlegmatic Aquatic Philistines

The Netherlands Described in Nineteenth-Century French and German Travelogues

Kim Andringa

In the following pages, we will explore some stereotypical themes and motifs that are commonly found in German and French nineteenth-century non-fiction travelogues about the Netherlands, but have spread into fictional accounts as well. By describing and analysing points of convergence and, more intriguingly, divergence between French and German texts and situating them in the socio-political context of the time, this chapter seeks to provide some elements of explanation as to how such variations in the stereotypes used might have arisen. Even before the birth of modern tourism, the Netherlands enjoyed a long tradition as a popular travel destination. To give a brief impression of just how popular it was, for nineteenth-century France alone, the catalogue of the French National Library indicates over ten different tourist guides for Holland, including the Guide Richard, which was already in its twenty-fourth edition by 1853. Guides were also translated from German or English by Baedeker and by Murray. If we look at literary production, including both fiction and travel writing, we find over 50 titles in French for this same period. For Germany, the picture appears to be much the same. The catalogue of the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* alone contains about 30 travelogues, but its collection is far from complete. An interesting title in this catalogue is the *Freundliche Erinnerung an Holland und seine Bewohner: Zugleich ein Wegweiser für Reisende* [*Pleasant Reminder of Holland and Its Inhabitants: Also a Guide for Travellers*] by Friedrich Wilhelm Dethmer, published in 1838 by Baedeker. This publishing company belonged to the father of Karl Baedeker, who would launch his famous series of travel guides for tourists the following year with *Holland: Handbüchlein für Reisenden* [*Holland: A Small Guide Book for Travellers*], perhaps inspired by Dethmer's book and by the success of an even earlier travel guide, the *Handbuch für Reisende am Rhein von Schaffhausen [sic] bis Holland* [*Handbook for Travellers along the Rhine from Schaffhausen to Holland*] (1816, with several subsequent editions over the next decades) by Aloys Wilhelm Schreiber. In 1900, the Baedeker guide for the Netherlands (then called *Belgien*

und Holland nebst dem Großherzogtum Luxemburg [Belgium and Holland together with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg]) had reached its twenty-second edition.

While many researchers have recognised the potential of this rich corpus of travel literature, most of them have concentrated on the period preceding the nineteenth century: Madeleine Van Strien-Chardonneau and Gustave Cohen have, for example, drawn on it to discuss French travellers to Holland, and Anja Chales de Beaulieu and Julia Bientjes for German ones, and three of these studies have used 1795 or 1800 as the end-date of their research.¹ This preference for earlier centuries can probably be explained by the fact that Holland as a thriving state in its Golden Age seems a more interesting subject than the somewhat sleepy country it had become in the nineteenth century, having lost its political and economic importance. As far as German travellers and writers are concerned, most authors are in agreement that the image of the Netherlands changes around 1750, becoming more negative, more static, and more stereotypical. Taking the image of the Netherlands in nineteenth-century French prose, it seems much harder to identify such a clear break from the French side. Previous research has, however, shown the importance of stereotypes in France as well, though not necessarily the same ones as in Germany.² This leads me to support the claim made by Ruth Florack in her work on "sagacious Germans and frivolous French", *Tiefsinnige Deutsche, frivole Franzosen*, that stereotypes do transgress national borders but may re-appear in different arrangements in different countries.³

Stereotype and Myth

What exactly is a stereotype? Klaus Fiedler speaks of observation samples, expressing "eine subjektiv erwartete Korrelation zwischen Eigenschaften und Gruppenmitgliedschaften" [a subjectively expected correlation between the possession of certain qualities and the belonging to a group].⁴ In spite of the term "observation samples", which one might consider evocative of objective, empirical facts, stereotypes are fictitious constructions, simplistic, biased, and culturally determined.⁵ This definition does not necessarily confer a negative charge on stereotypes, and we will indeed see that the French in particular convey an overall primarily positive image of the Netherlands. Why are travelogues so pervasive, so receptive to stereotypes? One reason would be that the travellers find themselves in direct contact with the strange or the "Other", and that in the face of an abundance of "Otherness" they resort to simplification in an attempt to master this situation. Another reason, pointed out by Peter J. Brenner in his seminal work on travel writing, is that travel literature is connoted as deceitful, or, as he formulates it, has an "Affinität zur Lüge" [affinity to lies].⁶ Not only are the authors under pressure

from the expectations of recipients, who demand a consistent representation of the other culture from one travelogue to another. They also set out on their journeys with their own mental representations, which inevitably confer a subjective colouring on their observations. I have elsewhere described this phenomenon using the terms "pre-perception" and "post-perception".⁷ In such a context, the stereotype becomes a kind of moral justification for the impressions and observations of the author, relating the narrative to a group identity, to an idea of nation built upon auto- and heterostereotypes.

Brenner adds, partly borrowing from Gerhard Huck's 1978 article "Der Reisebericht als historische Quelle":

Es ist einleuchtend, daß zu den Wahrnehmungsbedingungen des Reisenden die "ideologischen Fesseln" gehören, "denen ganze Epochen, ganze Nationen oder soziale Schichten unterlagen"; und nicht minder einleuchtend ist, daß deshalb die Reiseberichte zumindest im gleichen Maße Auskünfte über die Ausgangskultur der Reisenden und ihr "kulturelles Selbstverständnis" wie über die Kultur der bereisten Regionen geben können.⁸

[It is clear that the conditions under which travellers observe include the ideological bonds which underlie whole epochs, whole nations or social classes, and it is no less evident that as a consequence, travel writing can teach us at least as much about the travellers' own culture and the way they see it, as about the culture of the regions they travel.]

According to Herman Meyer, it is due to this indirect reflection on one's own culture, on "das Eigene" [the own], that stereotypes tend to be depreciatory: he considers that people (in the collective sense of the term) project on one another characteristics they find undesirable in themselves, putting the blame, as it were, on the negative mirror image thus created. It is not surprising, then, that a certain proximity between the observer and the observed provides a favourable ground for the development of stereotypes or, as Meyer phrases it, "[d]ies ist besonders stark unter Nachbarvölkern der Fall, wo überhaupt die Unangemessenheit des jeweiligen Bildes sehr groß zu sein pflegt" [this is especially true for neighbouring people, among whom the invidiousness of prevailing images is, as a general rule, very strong].⁹

With regard to nineteenth-century travelogues, this appears to be true for the relationship between Germany and the Netherlands, but less so for French perspectives on the Netherlands. Of course, from the 1830s onwards, as Belgium gained its independence, the Netherlands and France were no longer direct neighbours, and shortly before that both countries had even been united for some time in the Napoleonic

Empire. Another, more satisfactory, explanatory factor may be the fact that France and the Netherlands are culturally more different or at least do not consider themselves to be culturally very close. The comparison, then, is not between the "better" and the "worse" manifestation of a given cultural feature but between two features too different to compete with each other. Last but not least, the socio-political context has an important role to play, which we will discuss later. In summary, though, in the French writings, the mythical dimension of the stereotype appears to prevail, while in the German texts it is the relationship to national character that is more important. Myth and national character are therefore two further terms to discuss before turning to the actual stereotypes.

A literary myth is basically defined as a narrative scheme borrowed from classical mythology, recurring in literature in different times and places and dealing with a fundamentally human issue, which gives it some sort of symbolic value. This universal dimension can be easily reduced to a somewhat smaller scale, such as the occidental world. Another concession can be made as to the time of origin of a myth, as shown by the example of the myth of Don Juan, which does not reach back as far as antiquity. As I have concluded in previous research, a stereotype or conglomerate of stereotypes can evolve into a myth, if we accept a broader definition of the latter. One might also use the term coined by Michel Cadot to refer to a not-quite-finalised or structured myth as an *agrégat mythoïde* [mythoid aggregate].¹⁰

The transformation from mere stereotype into myth is a literary process, as Herman Meyer writes:

Erst die Dichtung macht den Holländer, über seine sachliche, partielle Bedeutung hinaus, zum allgemeinen, lebenswichtigen Symbol für etwas Allgemein-menschliches. Dies verleiht dem Holländerbild einen legendarischen, mythischen Anstrich. Das geschieht im Wesentlichen erst in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts.¹¹

[It is only through literature that the Dutchman, beyond his factual, partial significance, can become a general, essential symbol of something universally human. This gives a legendary, mythical varnish to the image of the Dutch. Substantially, this takes place only in the second half of the eighteenth century].

More generally speaking, it is their enduring symbolic value that accounts for the persistence of images that no longer correspond to a valid reality: they become part of a "mythical hyper-reality".

National character, *Nationalgeist* [national spirit] or *Volksgeist* [spirit of the people], often associated with *Eigentümlichkeit* [characteristic features], are popular concepts during the Romantic era, evolving later into folk psychology. The idea that all populations have distinguishing

features can be traced back at least as far as Julius Caesar and Tacitus, though, which prompts Ruth Florack to say that it is this essentialist concept of a whole people sharing the same nature, that is to say, "the concept of national character, that forms the basis, as an implicit or an explicit assumption, of the national stereotypes that have been transmitted throughout the ages as commonplaces".¹² For Florack, today's commonplaces are often the same as those encountered at the beginning of modern history. National prejudices are of a permanent nature, which does not mean they cannot reflect the changing relations between nations, because of the possibility of varying configurations mentioned earlier. On this point, Florack's view opposes that of Herman Meyer who contends that Dutch stereotypes and more specifically the cliché of the *Philister* [philistine] came into being in the Romantic era, as a response to the Romantic need for negative symbols, in order to define its own positive ethos. According to Florack, not only can stereotypes not be delineated in time: they also transgress spatial limits. Such a thing as a national stereotype does not actually exist: all images come from some sort of international pool of stereotypes. Instead of distinguishing between autostereotypes and heterostereotypes, we should concentrate on the positive or negative attributions allocated to them, which reveal the values an author wishes to see his group adopt or abandon.

The Netherlands as an Anachronism

There is a widespread persistence in the nineteenth-century collective imagination of outdated visions of the Netherlands. As far as the French are concerned, it is easy to establish the prolific and sometimes plagiaristic use they make not only of tourist guides, but also of travelogues and works by other predecessors. These can go back as far as the sixteenth century: the *Description de tous les Pays-Bas* [*Description of All the Low Countries*] by Guicciardini was first published in 1567 but is still widely read and cited in the nineteenth century. It is hardly surprising, then, that in the eyes of the French the Netherlands above all gained a reputation of offering the traveller a change of epoch rather than a change of scenery. Fleeing their own country carried along on the whirlwind of industrialisation, French travellers turned to the unreal, as (seemingly) materialised by the inaccessible mirror world of the Dutch genre paintings and the toy-like little houses:

Les maisons de ce Brouk merveilleux, avec toute leur élégance et leur propreté, ont un défaut commun, c'est leurs petites dimensions: tout approche trop de la miniature dans ce village brillant; c'est aussi le défaut de toute la Hollande, si cependant c'est bien un défaut, car c'est peut-être affaire purement de goût. On trouve, je crois, plus facilement le bonheur dans les petits compartiments que dans le grandiose et la splendeur.¹³

[The houses in this wonderful village Broek, in spite of all their elegance and cleanness, have a flaw in common, that is their small dimensions: everything is too close to miniature in this shiny village; and that is also the flaw of Holland as a whole, if it even is a flaw, because it may well be just a matter of taste. I believe it is easier to find happiness in small compartments than in grandeur and splendour.]

Up to a certain point, Germans share this viewpoint in the nineteenth century and thus seem to support the apocryphal words of Heinrich Heine, namely that in Holland, everything happens 50 years later. The country seems somewhat anachronistic, now that its commercial and colonial glory has worn off. Still, the dominant feature that characterises the German image of the Netherlands, although not unrelated, is not this time lag experience. Maybe as a result of this, the German authors also appear to be more moderate when it comes to intertextual borrowing, although they too have read other writers, including Goethe and Schiller, of course, but also renowned French art critics such as Théophile Bürger-Thoré and Théophile Gautier. By contrast, Schiller's *Geschichte des Abfalls der vereinigten Niederlande* (1879) [*History of the Decline of the United Netherlands*] is frequently mentioned by the French as well. Indeed, historical episodes play an important part in the perception of Dutch national character. Their heroic past shows the Dutch as prone to act and fight for their freedom and independence, also embodied in the struggle over many centuries against the invading sea. French and German travellers alike appreciate this aspect of the Dutch *Volksgeist*, as they see it.

The sources of anachronistic images are not only textual but also pictorial, especially where the French are concerned. They cannot fail to mention the Dutch Masters throughout their writings, and during their travels they admire the realism of the master paintings in the museums of Amsterdam and The Hague. More often than not, however, what interests them is not how these paintings represent reality, but how the contemporary nineteenth-century everyday represents – one might almost say reproduces – the scenes from the seventeenth-century masterpieces. They know the famous paintings by heart and rejoice when they see them come alive as they view particular townscapes and rural scenes:

A la station d'Esschen, une fille accoudée à une de ces hautes fenêtres encadrées de plantes grimpantes à la façon hollandaise me présente mon premier Miéris ou mon premier Gérard Dow. Même façon d'appuyer les coudes, d'avancer la tête, que chez les servantes rendues immortelles par le pinceau de ces peintres.¹⁴

[At the railway station of Esschen, a girl leaning out of one of those high windows surrounded by climbing plants, presents me with my

first Mieris or my first Gerard Dow. The same manner of leaning on her elbows, of putting her head forward, as the servant girls immortalised by the brush of these painters.]

The German authors are much less sensitive to the charms of the realistic painters. They prefer the idealism of the Italian or the French school and criticise the Dutch genre painting for failing to have a poetic and picturesque dimension. Many French travellers see mystery and dream-like imagination in the works of Rembrandt, something magical even; his paintings are examples *par excellence* of a view into another reality. To Alois Meßmer, on the contrary, even though he is not blind to this dimension of the paintings, Rembrandt's chiaroscuro is merely the dark



Figure 2.1 "A Girl with a Basket of Fruit at a Window". Etching by Willem Steelink (II), after Gerard Dou (1866–1928). (Reproduced by permission of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, reference number RP-P-1937-1793.)

glow of Calvinist rage, oppressive and repulsive.¹⁵ Julius Langbehn, who published *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) [*Rembrandt as Educator*], is one of the rare Germans to defend Rembrandt, and even make an example of him. He concedes that the art of Rembrandt is barbaric when one confronts it with the aesthetic notion of what constitutes beauty in ancient Greek art but asserts that as such, it ought to be “ein Muster deutscher Bildnerie und Bildung” [a model of German artistry and education] for the Germans, who are, and always will be, barbarians themselves. Rembrandt’s “feinste Barbarei” [most delicate barbarism] represents a German kind of harmony, considered by Langbehn as a remedy against many a disease.¹⁶ This, of course, illustrates how Langbehn’s book is an attempt to steer the German national character towards a more West German type, free from the Slavonic, French, and Jewish influences that dominate in Berlin, as Jürgen Link has demonstrated.¹⁷ In contrast to the aesthetic appreciation of French authors such as Gautier and Du Camp, Rembrandt’s art thus becomes the vehicle of a socio-cultural or even racial ideology.

Industrial Revolution

Another factor relating the Netherlands to another era, but from a different angle, is the extremely belated, almost reluctant, development of the industrial revolution in this country, beginning after 1850, and not fully developing until the 1890s. The country remained largely agricultural up to the end of World War I, whereas France and Germany had started following the English example much earlier, around 1815 and 1850, respectively. To this must be added the economic and scientific decline of the Netherlands since the end of the Golden Age, clearly implicated by Niebuhr in 1808, when he deemed the Dutch to have been lacking genius, inventiveness, thirst for knowledge, and good taste for over a century.¹⁸ Even though France and Germany were both ahead of the Netherlands, the difference in degrees of industrialisation between both these countries was relatively great as well – almost a half-century. This might explain, at least in part, their different reactions to the contrast between pre-industrial Holland and their own society. As time goes on, faith in progress tends to wane and loses ground to the fear of the devouring machine and a questioning of what place man may still occupy in this new age. We see this reflected in the works of several French writers who describe harbour cranes and steam-powered pumping stations as monstrous ghoulish polyps or giant mosquitos. Thus, Alphonse Esquiros writes about the steam-powered pumping station Leeghwater near Leyden: “Le Leegh Water ne fonctionne pas; il travaille, il vit, tant une économie intelligente préside à tous ses mouvements. Onze pompes, vastes et puissants suçoirs, fixées au flanc de la tour, lui donnent l’air d’un polype gigantesque occupé à boire les eaux du lac” [The Leeghwater

does not merely function; it works, it lives, with intelligent economy presiding over each one of its motions. Eleven pumps – huge, powerful suckers, attached to the side of the building – make it look like a giant polyp, drinking the water of the lake].¹⁹

Wulf Wülfing explains how this rather absurd *Naturisierung* [naturation] – that is, the metaphorical changing of an artificial element that disturbs nature into a natural element – is a form of mythisation.²⁰ Other elements linked to this myth of pre-industrialism are trains and houses. The attitude of the French towards trains is ambivalent: although they enjoy the speed and comfort of them, trains sometimes seem to cut their passengers off from the countryside they ride through. The land they cross on elevated dikes stays out of reach and almost becomes unreal, even when faster transportation was supposed to reduce distances. The aforementioned motif of the miniature house, inaccessible and reminiscent of past childhood innocence, is closely related to this.²¹ For the German Alois Meßmer, on the contrary, the train is a symbol of progress, and he mocks the slowness of the Dutch, who could not bring themselves to build railways until it became clear that they were falling behind on Belgian competition. This seems somewhat fallacious, since the Netherlands inaugurated their first track only four years after the Belgians (1835 versus 1839), but a direct line between Amsterdam and Germany was not opened until 1856, and Meßmer may well resent this. His positive outlook on modern industry is globally representative of the German view, undoubtedly because industrialisation in their country is more recent than in France, and their enthusiasm is still fresh.

Wulf Wülfing also provides a political explanation related to the strong contra-revolutionary censorship established after the Holy Alliance in 1815: “The touristic opposition ‘speed versus slowness’ one cannot be forbidden to speak of, is a precise reproduction of the political opposition ‘Revolution versus Restoration’.”²² Speaking of the other in stereotypes is therefore not only a way of defining one’s own national identity, but also an indirect means to criticise political opponents. Overall, though, industrial development, and especially railroads, will change the nature of travel, overcoming not only geographical, but also mental, distances in a process of “Entfremdung” [estrangement] that will inevitably impact the way the Netherlands are seen from abroad.²³

Prose and Poetry

The perception of the Dutch windmill is another aspect revealing conflicting views between French and German travel writers. The French adore them: each mill reminds them of the painted landscapes of Albert Cuyp or Aert van der Neer. To German eyes, they are repulsive, or at least ridiculous, and bring to mind a fat woman or a drunkard hopping about. Lenau even describes the mills of Amsterdam “ein schändlicher

Anblick", an outrageous sight.²⁴ Herman Meyer speaks of a literary "Philistersymbol", or symbol of philistinism, and links this negative image of the windmill to some other typically Dutch devices, canals and *treckschuite* (horse-drawn boats commonly used for public transportation). All these have in common that they harness the forces of nature, wind or water. To put them to use is considered to be worse than prosaic: it is downright philistine.²⁵

For many Germans, the Dutchman himself is also "überhaupt die personifizierte Prosa in allen seinen Verrichtungen" [the personification of prose in everything that he does], as Meßmer puts it.²⁶ That is not entirely his fault, though. It is also the inevitable consequence of his flat and wet country that, for instance, will not even allow for a good historical painting, as historian and geographer Johann Georg Kohl writes: "Wie unmalerisch und unpoetisch sind schon die im Wasser ertrinkenden Verwundeten im Vergleich mit denen, die auf dem Rasen ihr Leben aushauchen!" [How unpicturesque and unpoetic they are, the wounded drowning in the water, when compared to those exhaling their last breath in the field!].²⁷ Overall, though, the German travellers do not go in search of the picturesque or the poetic as much as the French do. When going to the town of Haarlem, for instance, the French go to see the former centre of tulip-mania, whereas the Germans go to visit the Teyler museum with its scientific instruments. In Leiden, Delft, and Amsterdam, they are also drawn to attractions of scientific interest like the university, or a factory for optical instruments, where quite a few French travellers prefer to go and admire the fake stuffed mermaids in the Leiden museum, for instance. Although they do not believe in the authenticity of these creatures, they *want* to give in to the poetical illusion they represent.

Character and Climate

What is there to say about the prosaic Dutch themselves? The French and Germans agree on their physiognomy: it is "oysterishness of eye" (to use William Beckford's term), "waterish", or "froggish".²⁸ In short, they are an aquatic species. The Goncourt brothers even describe them as "des castors dans un fromage", that is, like beavers living in a cheese. Franz Dingelstedt even considers them to be plants: "Der Holländer ist ein Vegetabile, wie diese in seiner Erde eben wachsen und gedeihen können; er treibt dick, schwammig und wässrig auf" [The Dutchman is a vegetable, like those that will grow and thrive in his earth; he develops to become fat, spongy and aqueous].²⁹ The women, all pink, white, and blonde, are slightly more favourably judged, but their faces lack expression and all too often, they are fat like Heine's hostess at the Red Cow.

For some Germans the physical condition of the Dutch, so tall, healthy, well-fed, and strong, mirrors their free existence as people not oppressed

by tyranny. Such positive sounds are rather rare, though. We have already mentioned that the Dutch are commonly considered by the Germans to be philistines. From outstanding traders in the Golden Age, they have now become greedy misers whose only point of interest is what is useful and profitable. In his article about the *Bildungsphilister* [cultural philistines], Herman Meyer has shown how the philistine represents the opposite of the free development of personality the romantics aspire to.³⁰ He can also be seen as an incarnation of the Biedermeier spirit, conservative and narrow-minded, rejected by the authors of *Junges Deutschland* [*Young Germany*] movement during the Vormärz period, preceding the 1848 revolution. At first, the term is used as a literary symbol to refer to certain Germans, but it soon crosses the border and becomes associated with the Dutch, probably, once again, to avoid censorship.

The French certainly do not consider the Dutch a particularly refined people, especially when it comes to the arts – painting being a notable exception – manners or gastronomy. But they hardly ever express the contempt that is manifest in the image of the philistine. They have more affinity with the climate theory that goes so well with nineteenth-century determinism but in fact dates back, as Ruth Florack demonstrates, as far as the sixteenth century (Jean Bodin's climate theory, the *Théorie des climats* of 1576) or even antiquity.³¹ This time, the more severe judgement comes from the French, although all of the following is largely present in German writings as well. Not only has their life between land and water physically transformed the Dutch into amphibians, as mentioned above, but climate has also influenced the national habits, not least their well-known cleaning frenzy. This maniacal preoccupation with cleanliness is indeed a consequence of the humid and unhealthy climatic conditions. Tobacco and brandy seem to warrant the health of its inhabitants – who are less well washed than their houses, as several travellers note. But the climate is also responsible for the character of the Dutch, especially for their being so phlegmatic. If there is such a thing as national character, this is it. For Kohl, this "Nationalphlegma" [national phlegmatism] reflects the nation's waters: no strong currents, no waterfalls.³²

But most Germans give more weight to the past than to climate. For Johann Friedrich Droysen, a physicist and historian, their glorious national history has made the Dutch content, self-satisfied, and home-loving, and this passive attitude is now the reason they are lagging behind the rest of Europe.³³ Only two things, writes Franz Dingelstedt, can shake the Dutchman out of his torpor:

Geld – das ist die allmächtige Triebfeder, welche die Natur in seine Seele gelegt hat, um durch ihren Gegendruck die angeborenen "Kraft der Trägheit" zu überwinden. Geld, und was sich so oft fast notwendig und wie durch eine tiefe Ironie oder weise Führung daneben findet als Gegengewicht: Gott.³⁴

[Money – that is the all-powerful motivating force that Nature has put in his soul, to overcome through its counter-pressure the innate “power of lethargy”. Money, and the thing one so often finds paired with it, by deep irony or wise command, to act as a counterbalance: God].

Some German authors, just as mindful of past times, come to the defence of the Dutch, though, like the anti-French Ernst Moritz Arndt, who writes in 1806:

Man spotte mir nicht über die Holländer und das Kleinliche und Unscheinbare, was sie von jeher an sich trugen. Sie bildeten einst einen herrlichen Staat und sind noch jetzt vor den meisten, die nur über sie lachen können, durch Mäßigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Arbeitsamkeit eines besseren Schicksals wert, als was sie haben. Ich liebe dies Volk, weil ich kein gleicheres und gerechteres unter den Europäern kenne, keines, das durch Arbeitsamkeit, Häuslichkeit und Fleiß so sehr nach Freiheit strebte und sie so sehr verdiente als dieses.³⁵

[I do not wish to hear mockery about the Dutch and the pettiness and inconspicuousness that has always been theirs. They once founded a magnificent nation, and in spite of all those who just laugh about them, they still are worthy of a better fate than they know now, because of their moderation, their rightfulness and their industriousness. I love this people, because they are the most equal and rightful I know in Europe, no other has striven so much for freedom through industriousness, domesticity and diligence, and has deserved it as much as they do.]

Surprisingly enough after the quotation given just above, another positive note comes from Franz Dingelstedt, who was an opponent of Restoration politics and the Biedermeier spirit that went with it. He explicitly points out the Germans' own shortcomings and turns the Dutch into an example to which the Germans should look up: at least, they know how to colonise and trade; they are more German than the Germans.³⁶

Politics

This leads us to an interesting difference between German and French travelogues with regard to the way in which they deal with the contemporary political situation. The Netherlands has more or less been under French domination from 1795 to 1813, first as a vassal state, later as a kingdom under the government of Napoleon's brother Louis Bonaparte, and finally as a part of the Empire. In the numerous French texts studied here, it is very rare to find even the smallest allusion to this political

situation, be they published during or after the period in question. Never a word is spoken about Napoleon. Of course, censorship could probably have made it difficult to express overly critical comments, but no-one seems to have adopted the official point of view and considered the Netherlands as French territory either.

Some of the Germans seem to wonder why the Netherlands are not part of Germany. The Rhine especially is a sensitive subject, even more so after 1840, the period of the *Rheinfrage* [Rhine question], when the French government openly questioned the validity of the frontiers of 1815 and especially reclaimed the left bank of the Rhine. This caused a proliferation of Rhine panegyrics in the German press and a revival of anti-French sentiment. *Vater Rhein* [Father Rhine] is with *Mutter Germania* [Mother Germania] a symbol of German or even Pan-Germanist patriotism. As such, the river deserves respect, and the way the Dutch treat it, changing its course and even its name, reveals a lack of gratitude that is deemed inappropriate, considering that the Netherlands is hardly anything more than the silted-up land of the Rhine estuary, as Alois Meßmer writes.³⁷ Kohl goes even further, asserting that the river should be called the Rhine right down to the sea and that it should belong in its entirety to Mutter Germania or that the Germans should at least have full enjoyment of it. German writers like Meßmer and Dingelstedt do mention Napoleon and criticise the Napoleonic occupation that was founded, as they say, on the same argument of the Netherlands being the Rhine delta.

A particularly interesting point of view is expressed by the historian Heinrich von Treitschke, who strongly believed in the unification of Germany and in the German race. In 1870, he writes that the Dutch dislike Germany and Prussia. Such antipathy should hardly surprise us, if we consider Treitschke as representative of the German point of view, and as he goes on to argue: "leider ist gerade dieser Kaltsinn gegen das Vaterland ein echt deutscher Zug, der auch in der Schweiz und im Elsass uns begegnet, ein Beweis mehr für das deutsche Blut der Holländer" [unfortunately, it is precisely this coldness towards the motherland that is a typical German trait one encounters in Switzerland and Alsace as well. It is yet another proof that the Dutch have German blood].³⁸ Treitschke also considers the Rhine to be German and the Dutch to have no real "Volkstum" [national character], no folklore of their own. But, given that the nation exists, it has a right to be, and therefore, Treitschke is in favour not of an invasion, but of friendly relations.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, the economy of the Netherlands had fallen behind the rest of Europe, and its political power had declined. This corresponds to a period of cultural florescence and increasing political

dominance in Germany and, in France, to the politically tumultuous period following the French Revolution. By the end of the century, both countries were well on their way into industrialisation, unlike the Netherlands, resulting in a kind of “non-simultaneous simultaneity”, between Germany and France on the one hand and the Netherlands on the other. The dominance of literary Romanticism leaves a lesser imprint on travelogues, but its influence is undeniable. The differences in the way this translates into the travel writings examined here tend to support Ruth Florack’s claim that stereotypes come from a universal reservoir but are combined and valued differently according to the historical moment and socio-political or cultural context. Thus, to the French travellers, the Netherlands appears to be a place where they can try to escape the disenchantment of existence in modern society. It is a land where paintings seem to be magical mirrors, and toy houses offer a virtual refuge. For the Germans, the persistence of the old times in the Netherlands casts a favourable light on their own progress. But when writing about the Netherlands, German authors may also take a stand for or against the French Revolution and implicitly criticise or defend their own society, in search of what Rainer Elkar has termed “the spirit of revolutionary Enlightenment”³⁹ or Jean Paul’s more bourgeois and peaceful “Vollglück in der Beschränkung” [happiness within limitations].⁴⁰

Notes

- 1 Madeleine Van Strien-Chardonneau, *Voyage de Hollande: Récits de Voyageurs Français dans les Provinces-Unies, 1748–1795* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994); Gustave Cohen, *Écrivains français en Hollande dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1920); Anja Chales de Beaulieu, *Deutsche Reisende in den Niederlanden: Das Bild eines Nachbarn zwischen 1648 und 1795* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000); Julia Bientjes, *Holland und der Holländer im Urteil Deutscher Reisender (1400–1800)* (Groningen: Wolters, 1967).
- 2 Kim Andringa, *L’imaginaire des Pays-Bas dans la littérature française du 19e siècle* (Doctoral thesis, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007).
- 3 Ruth Florack, *Tiefsinnige Deutsche, frivole Franzosen. Nationale Stereotype in deutscher und französischer Literatur* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2001).
- 4 Klaus Fiedler, “Die Verarbeitung sozialer Informationen für Urteilsbildung und Entscheidungen”, in Wolfgang Stroebe, Miles Hewstone and Geoffrey Stephenson, eds., *Sozialpsychologie: Eine Einführung (3)* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1996), pp. 143–75 (at 162). If not otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
- 5 See also Florack, *Tiefsinnige Deutsche, frivole Franzosen*, p. 10.
- 6 Peter J. Brenner, “Die Erfahrung der Fremde”, in Peter J. Brenner, *Der Reisebericht: Die Entwicklung einer Gattung in der deutschen Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 14–49 (at 14).

- 7 Andringa, *L'imaginaire des Pays-Bas* (2007).
- 8 Brenner, "Die Erfahrung der Fremde", p. 15, quoting Gerhard Huck, "Der Reisebericht als historische Quelle", in Gerhard Huck and Jürgen Renlecke, eds., ... *und reges Leben ist überall sichtbar! Reisen im Bergischen Land um 1800* (Neustadt an der Eisch: Schmidt, 1978), pp. 27–44.
- 9 Herman Meyer, "Das Bild des Holländers in der deutschen Literatur", in Herman Meyer, *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), pp. 202–24 (at 203).
- 10 Michel Cadot, "Allocution de clôture", in Jean Marie Grassin, ed., *Mythes, Images, Représentations* (Paris: Didier, 1981), pp. 443–47 (at 445).
- 11 Meyer, "Das Bild des Holländers", p. 210.
- 12 "Es ist das Konzept vom Nationalcharakter, das, sei als explizite oder implizite Voraussetzung, den nationalen Stereotypen zugrunde liegt, die als *loci communes* über die Jahrhunderte tradiert worden sind." Florack, *Tiefsinnige Deutsche, frivole Franzosen*, p. 32.
- 13 Pierre Marie Michel Lepeintre, *Quatre mois dans les Pays-Bas: Voyage épisodique et critique dans la Belgique et la Hollande* (Paris: Delaunay, 1829), p. 341.
- 14 Emile Montégut, *Les Pays-Bas: Impressions de voyage et d'art* (Paris: Baillière, 1869), p. 145.
- 15 "[Rembrandt] in dem die düstere Gluth calvinischen Ingrimms so recht greifbar zum Ausdruck kam". Alois Meßmer, *Reiseblätter gesammelt zwischen Venedig und Amsterdam*, vol. 2 (Innsbrück: Verlag der Wagner'schen Buchhandlung, 1855), p. 349.
- 16 Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher, von einem Deutschen* (1890), quoted in Claus Victor Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland 1725–1925: Eine Sammlung von hundert Berichten, Castrum Peregrini 27/28* (1956), p. 44.
- 17 Jürgen Link, "Anhang: Nationale Konfigurationen, nationale Charakter-Dramen", in Jürgen Link and Wulf Wülfing, *Nationale Mythen und Symbole in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Strukturen und Funktionen von Konzepten nationaler Identität* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), pp. 53–71 (at 63).
- 18 Barthold Niebuhr, *Circularbriefe aus Holland* (1808), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 39.
- 19 Alphonse Esquiros, *La Néerlande et la Vie Hollandaise* (Paris: Lévy, 1859), vol. 1, p. 63.
- 20 Wülfing, "Reiseliteratur", pp. 188–89.
- 21 On this topic, see Andringa, *L'imaginaire des Pays-Bas* (2007).
- 22 "Die dem Touristischen verpflichtete Opposition 'Schnelligkeit versus Langsamheit', von der zu reden nicht verboten werden kann, bildet die politische Opposition 'Revolution versus Restauration' exakt ab." Wulf Wülfing, "Reiseliteratur", in Horst Albert Glaser, ed., *Deutsche Literatur: Eine Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 6; Bernd Witte, ed., *Vormärz, Biedermeier, Junges Deutschland, Demokraten 1815–1848* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1987), pp. 180–94 (at 186).
- 23 Wülfing, "Reiseliteratur", p. 190.
- 24 Nicolas Lenau, *Sein Leben in Briefen, Aufzeichnungen, Gedichte* (1911), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 97.
- 25 See Meyer, "Das Bild des Holländers", pp. 212–13.
- 26 Meßmer, *Reiseblätter*, p. 279.
- 27 Johann Georg Kohl, *Reisen in den Niederlanden*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Arnoldische Buchhandlung, 1850), p. 163.

- 28 William Beckford, *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, vol. 1 (London: Bentley, 1834), p. 31.
- 29 Franz Dingelstedt, *Jusqu'à la mer: Erinnerungen an Holland* (1847), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, pp. 30–31.
- 30 See Herman Meyer, "Der Bildungsphilister", in Herman Meyer, *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), pp. 179–201 (at 180) and Meyer, "Das Bild des Holländers", p. 212.
- 31 Florack, *Tiefsinnige Deutsche, frivole Franzosen*, pp. 32–40.
- 32 "Und wie seine Gewässer, sage ich, so ist auch der Charakter des Holländers selbst, ohne Leidenschaften, wie sie ohne Strudel und Katarakten". Kohl, *Reisen in den Niederlanden*, vol. 2, p. 299.
- 33 See Johann Friedrich Droysen, *Bemerkungen gesammelt auf einer Reise durch Holland und einen Theil Frankreichs im Sommer 1801* (Göttingen: Heinrich Dieterich, 1802), p. 151.
- 34 Dingelstedt, *Jusqu'à la mer* (1847), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 31.
- 35 Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Geist der Zeit 1* (1806), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 37.
- 36 Dingelstedt, *Jusqu'à la mer*, quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 41.
- 37 Meßmer, *Reiseblätter*, vol. 2, p. 271.
- 38 Heinrich von Treitschke, *Historische und Politische Aufsätze*, Neue Folge 2 (1870), quoted in Bock, *Deutsche erfahren Holland*, p. 40.
- 39 Rainer S. Elkar, "Reisen bildet", in Boris I. Krasnobaev, Gert Robel and Herbert Zeman, eds., *Reisen und Reisebeschreibungen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert als Quellen der Kulturbeziehungsforshung* (Berlin: Camen, 1980), pp. 51–82 (at 64).
- 40 Jean Paul, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, Norbert Miller and Wilhelm Schmidt Biggemann, eds. (Munich: Hanser, 1970), p. 258.