Bridges of Misunderstanding

William of Orange in Nazi Era Literature and its Aftermath (1933-1953)

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Abstract: Because the 400th anniversary of the birth of William of Orange coincided with the beginning of the Nazi regime in 1933, a small surge of publications raised awareness in Germany of the history of the Dutch rebellion against Spain. For two decades, German writers across the ideological spectrum appropriated motifs from the life of William of Orange in order to represent and reflect on German-Netherlandic relations during the Nazi era. This article focuses in particular on the deployment of 'Das Niederländische Gebet' and the bridge motif, with an emphasis on works by Fritz von Unruh.

Keywords: Willem van Oranje / William of Orange – Tachtigjarige Oorlog / Eighty Years War – Nederlands-Duitse betrekkingen / German-Netherlandic relations – brugmotief / bridge motif – Fritz von Unruh

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In Königsberg, in the week leading up to the turn of the twentieth century, the young Friedrich von Uhle—stand-in for the German exile author Fritz von Unruh (1885-1970) in his autobiographical novel *Der Sohn des Generals* [The General's Son]—is feeling particularly steeped in Prussian history. This is not surprising. He is a cadet at the Prussian military academy in Plön, where he has the fraught honor of being one of the select companions of the Kaiser's sons. At home for the holidays, he accompanies his father, a Prussian general, to the *Schlosskirche*, where the first Prussian king crowned himself in 1701. The point of their visit is to attend a rehearsal of the festive song planned for the occasion and to hear their father address the choir. The song in question is 'Das Niederländische Dankgebet' [The Dutch Prayer of Thanks]. The General offers the choir a rousing account of the rebellion of the Dutch provinces against Spain. Drawing on their familiarity with the historical events thanks to Goethe's *Egmont* and Schiller's *History of the Revolt of the United Netherlands*, the General insists that the most important figure in this history is William of Orange. '200 Jahre vor der amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitserklärung und 200 Jahre vor der Verkündigung der Menschenrechte in Paris, hatte nämlich dieser Wilhelm von Oranien schon am 29. Januar 1579 den Niederländern in der Union von Utrecht die freieste Verfassung der Welt geschenkt'[2] [200 years before the American Declaration of Independence and 200 years before the Declaration of Human Rights in Paris, William of Orange had already in the Union of Utrecht on 29 January 1579 blessed the Netherlands with the most liberal constitution in the world]. The General invites them 'es doch einmal ganz nachzuempfinden, *was* die Niederländer damals fühlten, als sie dieses Gebet zu Gott dem Gerechten in ihrem Verzweiflungskampf gegen die Tyrannei aus ihrem innersten Herzen heraus sangen!'[3] [once again to really feel what the Netherlanders felt when, in their desperate battle against tyranny, they sang this prayer to the Just God with all their hearts]. With the third triumphant verse and its emphatic conclusion—'Herr mach uns frei!' (Lord, liberate us!)—the General pushes the emotional identification a step further: 'Auch wir Deutsche, wir wollen frei bleiben! Frei von Zersetzern und Nörglern. Frei von all denen, die uns dieses höchste Gut wieder rauben wollen, das Wilhelm von Oranien nicht nur für die Niederlande, sondern für jedes die Knechtschaft hassende Volk erkämpft hat'[4] [We Germans also want to remain free! Free of dissidents and complainers. Free of all those, who would rob us again of this highest good that William of Orange won not only for the Netherlands, but for every servitude-hating people]. Later that evening, in conversation with his wife, the General's preoccupation with William of Orange continues. He marvels at the ability of the Dutch 'diesen Sand- und Schlammboden endlich urbar zu machen. [...] Aber noch viel erstaunlicher ist's mir, daß ihnen dann die Vorsehung im kritischsten Augenblick ihrer Geschichte solch einen Deutschen, wie den Wilhelmus von Nassau gesandt hat! [...] Also morgen beginnt nun . . . das 20. Jahrhundert! Wer wird unserm Volk solch einen Mann wie den Oranier schenken?'[5] [to make this sandy, swampy soil productive. Indeed! But it's even more astonishing to me that, in the critical moment of their history, Providence sent them a German

[2] Fritz von Unruh, *Der Sohn des Generals* (Nürnberg: Verlag Hans Carl, 1957), p. 383.

[3] Unruh, *Sohn des Generals*, p. 383.

[4] Unruh, *Sohn des Generals*, p. 385.

[5] Unruh, *Sohn des Generals*, p. 388.

like William of Nassau. Tomorrow the 20th century begins. Who will bless us with a man like Orange?].

What interests me about this passage in Fritz von Unruh's 1957 novel is what it reveals about the German appropriation of Dutch history and national myth. That appropriation may often be unacknowledged and its origins forgotten. This was certainly the case with 'Das Niederländische Dankgebet,' which, in the 1877 translation of Joseph Weyl that was published with the *Wilhelmus* in *Sechs Altniederländische Volkslieder* [Six Old Netherlandic Folksongs], was popular in conservative circles.[6] The song was deployed in Nazi rallies, for example, immediately following Hitler's speech in Vienna declaring the *Anschluss*.[7] It featured in Nazi films with Prussian historical content such as *Fridericus* (1936) and *Kolberg* (1945). In general, the cultural mediation of Dutch history and legend runs through Goethe and Schiller, often resulting in disproportionate attention to Egmont and insufficient regard for Orange. It is, after all, the German birth of William of Orange that is prominently mentioned in the first lines of the *Wilhelmus* ('van Duitsen bloed'/'von teutschem blut'/of German blood.) Such German appropriation of Dutch national history is politically volatile precisely because of the assertions about William's blood. A section on 'Holland und Preussen' [Holland and Prussia] in Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher* [Rembrandt as Educator] underscores the filiations of blood and culture, arguing that 'die Beziehung des holländischen Stammes zum preußischen Staat […] eine so starke und so fest mit den innersten Daseinsbedingungen verknüpfte [sei], daß sie nie aufhören und jederzeit wieder stärker nach außen sich bethätigen kann'[8] [the relationship of the Dutch tribe to the Prussian state is so strong and tightly linked to the inner conditions of existence that it will never end and can at every moment be re-activated). A 'Deutsch-Holländischer Abend' (German-Dutch Evening) celebrated in Duisburg, Germany in 1933, featured a lecture by Nikolas Japikse, director of the Royal Dutch Archive, on William of Orange as an ideal 'Führer' and a rendition of the *Sechs Altniederländische Volkslieder*. As a reporter for the *Duisburger General-Anzeiger* claimed, the event and Orange himself served as a means 'die Brücken zu unserm artverwandten Nachbarvolk auch in unsern Tagen zu befestigen'[9] [also in these days to reconfirm the bridges connecting us to the similarly-natured people next door]. Whether that was Japikse's intention is an open question. Even if he was active in exculpating Germany for the Great War, he stopped short of endorsing Pan-German expansion, preferring the model of a 'Grootnederland' [Greater Netherlands]. The borders between the Netherlands and Germany should remain intact. What kind of bridges might be required was subject to debate.

1933 was a momentous year, also for the German-Netherlandic imaginary. Against the background of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany and the Reichstag Fire, a small surge of publications commissioned to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the birth of

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6 Martin Kronenberg, *Kampf der Schule an der Heimatfront im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Disserta Verlag, 2014), p. 202.

7 Heinz Arnberger, et al (eds.), *'Anschluss' 1938. Eine Dokumentation* (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchive des österreichischen Widerstandes, 1988), pp. 495-526.

8 Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld, 1909), p. 147.

9 *Duisburger General-Anzeiger*, 18 Januar 1933, #18.

Orange took on new meaning. Foremost among them were four historical novels,[10] but also a play performed in Dillenburg[11] and an illustrated children's book.[12] Ideologically, these publications were rightwing in tendency, but included conservative Protestant perspectives. Published more abruptly and pointedly was a treatise on the personality of William of Orange by a professor of theology at the University of Münster, Karl Bauer, a member of the *Bekennende Kirche* [Confessing Church].[13] Compared to the rate at which books about William of Orange were published in prior decades, the 1933 yield is unprecedented. And it would continue with a relatively steady output of publications lasting through 1953, when Fritz von Unruh premiered *Wilhelmus* on the Frankfurt stage, a tragedy about the assassination of Orange. What is remarkable about the entire corpus (27 items on my count) is its ideological range.[14] For a period of twenty years, William of Orange functioned as a symbolic nexus—a bridge and a border—for a wide array of cultural negotiations and appropriations between Germany, the Netherlands, and even Flanders, concerning the connections between the Eighty Years War and the Third Reich.

Sorting through this material is not easy. Some of the authors are well known: the German-Jewish writer Hermann Kesten, for example, who not only published a historical novel on Philipp II with an oversize role for William of Orange, but also directed Allert de Lange's series of German language publications; or Reinhold Schneider, a Catholic member of the inner emigration. Others are infamous for their Nazi affiliations, primary among them the prolific Wilhelm Kotzde-Kottenrodt, whose William of Orange novel of 1933 completed what was regarded as a *völkisch* trilogy. Fritz von Unruh was already mentioned. Nico Rost's *Goethe in Dachau* belongs to the corpus because of the prominence of Goethe's *Egmont* in the account of his incarceration; his book contrasts with Werner Schendell's quite brilliant if cagey 1935 biography of William of Orange, which stands in striking relation to the recuperative biography of Philipp II by the historian Ludwig Pfandl. But what about authors whose traces are scarce and require considerable detective work. Is it worth it? I think so. They include the likes of Ernst Schreiner, who published with the Evangelischer Presseverband für Deutschland, and the

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[10] Wilhelm Kotzde-Kottenrodt, *Wilhelmus von Nassauen. Ein Mann und ein Volk* (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1933); Ernst Schreiner, *Wilhelm von Oranien. Geschichtliche Erzählung* (Giessen und Basel: Brunnen, 1933); Hugo von Waldeyer-Hartz, *Mein Volk, mein Land. Der Roman des Volksbefreiers Wilhelmus von Nassauen* (Leipzig: Verlag Strauch und Krey, 1933); Wilhelm Wittgen, *Unter der Fahne des Prinzen von Oranien. Geschichtliche Erzählung* (Arnstadt i. Thür.: Verlag von Otto Böttner, 1933).

[11] Gisbert Walter Kühne-Hellmessen, *Wilhelm Prinz von Oranien. Dramatisches Spiel in vier Aufzügen anläßlich der 400-Jahrfeier Wilhelms von Oranien in Dillenburg* (Dillenburg: Buchdruckerei E. Weidenbach, 1933).

[12] Johannes Lehrmann (ed.), *Der Vater des Vaterlandes. Wilhelm I von Oranien: Ein Heldenleben in 163 Bildern* (Leipzig: Helingsche Verlagsanstalt, 1933).

[13] Karl Bauer, *Wilhelmus von Nassauen. Zum Verständnis seiner inneren Entwicklung* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1933).

[14] In lieu of a complete bibliography, which I will reserve for a planned book publication, allow me to list a few examples: Wilhelm Kotzde-Kottenrodt, *Wilhelmus von Nassauen. Ein Mann und ein Volk*. Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1933; Werner Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien. Befreier der Niederlande. Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1935; Hermann Kesten, *König Philipp der Zweite. Roman*. Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1938; C. G. Harke und Joh. Klöcking, *Wilhelmus von Nassauen. Das Heldenlied eines niederdeutschen Freiheitskampfes. Neue Text-Dichtung zu Georg Friedrich Händels Freiheits-Oratorium „Judas Maccabäus"*. Hamburg: Hermann Kampen, 1940; Fritz von Unruh, *Wilhelmus. Drama*. Köln: Heinrich Comel, 1953.

Austrian *Heimat*-author Rudolf Kremser, whose novel *Der stille Sieger*[15] [The Quiet Victor] was published in Vienna in 1941—against a decidedly changed military-political background—and was unexpectedly[16] translated into Dutch in Antwerp in 1944, the same year that Kotzde-Kottenrodt's *Wilhelmus von Nassau: Ein Mann und ein Volk* [Wilhelm of Nassau: A Man and a People] appeared in Dutch translation in Voorburg.

Further complicating the interpretive enterprise are the numerous contexts and frameworks that have to be considered. These include:

1) The literary and historical sources consulted by individual authors, foremost among them the American writer John Lothrop Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* (1856). Motley was a friend of Bismarck and inclined to see the story of Orange as a narrative of liberty. His work is considered biased.[17]

2) The status of the historical novel, one of the favored genres of the period, whether authors are living in exile (e.g., Heinrich Mann), in inner emigration (e.g., Jochen Klepper), or comfortable accommodation with the Nazi regime (e.g., Kotzde-Kottenrodt). While Nazi authorities fretted about the analogical subterfuge historical novels allowed, Georg Lukacs wrote a comprehensive theory of the historical novel while in exile in Moscow and Menno ter Braak took German authors to task for their historical diversions in urgent times.[18]

3) Styles of historiography and historical analysis, which necessarily underlie the narratives of novels and biographies. Do authors recognize large historical movements? A dialectic of ideas and values (e.g., absolutism vs. democracy, Catholicism vs Protestantism)? Evolving class structures and economic relations? Or do they focus solely on oversize individuals as the drivers of history?

4) Pan-German geopolitical agendas that assimilate debates about the potential relation of the Dutch provinces to the Reich and see an analogy between 'Groß-Deutschland' vs. 'Klein-Deutschland' and the Netherlands (including Flanders) vs. Holland.

5) The use of William of Orange and his relationship to the people of the Netherlands as a way to reflect on and represent what is known both critically and approvingly as 'das Führerprinzip.' Relevant texts would include Ernst Forsthoff's *Der totale Staat* (1933,

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15 Rudolf Kremser. *Der stille Sieger. Der Roman eines fürstlichen Rebellen*. Wien: Wiener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1941).

16 I say 'unexpectedly' because in the Flemish conception, the Protestant William of Orange is not accorded an oversize role.

17 See, for example, David Levin's chapter on *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* in *History as Romantic Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 186-209.

18 Ter Braak specifically mentions Heinrich Mann, Ludwig Marcuse, and Alfred Neumann as examples of what he regards as a mass phenomenon. See Menno ter Braak, "Koningin Christina. De emigranten vluchten in de geschiedenis," In: *Het Vaderland*, 29 September 1935. Accessed online at http://www.mennoterbraak.nl/tekst/braa002vade04_01/braa002vade04_01_0138.php on 1 October 2018.

The Total State), Carl Schmitt's *Staat, Bewegung, Volk* (1935, State, Movement, People), and Heinrich Mann's 'Das Führerprinzip' (1934, The Führer Principle).

6) Semantic preferences and patterns: What vocabulary sets do authors use? Do they identify Orange as a 'Führer'? When he flees Antwerp for Dillenburg, is he an emigrant? An exile? A refugee? Do echoes of Nazi discourse purposefully or unintentionally find their way into novels and biographies?

To these six challenges, let me add a seventh that is specific to the character of William of Orange: the ambiguity and appeal of a historical figure whose enduring epithet is *de Zwijger—der Schweiger*, even if present-day historians are agreed that this designation is misleading.[19] As Schendell writes, 'Was er verschwieg, war nicht zu erraten, und was er sagte, war nicht zu durchschauen. Deshalb erwuchs ihm der Beiname le taciturne, der Schweiger, der Schweigsame, aus dem unruhigen Respekt seiner Gegner vor dem unenträtselbaren Diplomaten'[20] [What he concealed in silence could not be guessed and what he said was inscrutable. For that reason, he was called *le taciturne*, the Silent, the discreet]. During the Eighty Years War as well as in the Nazi era, indiscreet speech was risky and dangerous. Orange's *Schweigen* could be enticing as a model for strategic survival, even resistance in a fraught world. It is difficult to overestimate the appeal and challenge of William of Orange, a master of discretion as well as politically efficacious speech in the critical moment (in the *Apologie*, for example), to the broad range of positions during the Nazi era. Only one writer privileges Egmont over Orange and precisely in terms that condemn Orange's silence in favor of incautious speech. That writer is Nico Rost, whose political indiscretions in Belgium landed him in Dachau, where in the long night before Allied troops liberated the camp, he re-read Goethe's *Egmont* to the sound of firefights. 'Goethe hat doch wohl den wahren Charakter des historischen Egmont, so wie den des achtzigjährigen Krieges, gut und scharf gesehen und auch gezeichnet'[21] [Goethe precisely grasped and represented the true character of the historical Egmont, as well as that of the Eighty Years War, after all].

Considering the multitude of factors in play, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive account of the complex cultural and political appropriations of William of Orange and the history of the Dutch rebellion in the period stretching from 1933 to 1953. To that end, it seems to me appropriate to resort to the concept of the motif as way to identify, compare and analyze the recurring patterns of appropriation in the works in question. By motifs I understand units of information (anecdotes, legends, events, images, songs, phrases, locations) that originated in relation to the life of William of Orange and that were re-activated, appropriated and altered in the literary and medial networks of the Nazi era. On this account, *Schweigen*, for example, would be a motif and it would make sense to explore the resonances of Orange's silence in relation to the Third Reich. Other motifs include: the Inquisition, the *Geuzen*, exile, the Reich, tolerance, espionage, Philipp II and Orange as *Führer*, *Bildersturm*, Calvinism, and the

[19] See Anon, "Waarom heeft prins Willem van Oranje de bijnaam De Zwijger gekregen?", https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/spreuken/Pages/zwijger.aspx. Accessed on 1 October 2018.

[20] Werner Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien. Befreier der Niederlande* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1935), p. 14.

[21] Nico Rost, *Goethe in Dachau. Ein Tagebuch* (Munich: List Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), p. 317.

Wilhelmus. Less obvious motifs include: birds (a recurring motif, most extensively developed by Kotzde-Kottenrodt in relation to the *Blauwvoetlied* [Song of the Bluefoot] of the *Katholieke Vlaamse Studentenbeweging* [Catholic Flemish Student Movement], dikes and floods, oaths, infidelity, etc. For the present article, I will continue the exploration of the motif of bridges and borders, since it affords the best opportunity to reflect explicitly on the relationship between the Netherlands and Germany, the Eighty Years War and the Third Reich.

Let's recall the German reporter's characterization of William of Orange in Japikse's 1933 commemorative lecture as an outstanding means 'die Brücken zu unserm artverwandten Nachbarvolk [...] zu befestigen.' While that may sound like a friendly overture, Japikse, for all his sympathy for German nationalism and National Socialism, may have detected threatening undertones. In a lecture on 'Nederland en Duitschland in XVIIe Eeuw' (the Netherlands and Germany in the 17th Century) given in 1935 and reported on in *Het Vaderland,* Japikse argues that 'Germaansch was Nederland, maar niet Duitsch. [...] Juist door dien eerbied voor de zelfstandigheid zou men het echte Germaansche versterken'[22] (The Netherlands were Germanic, but not German. It is precisely by respecting independence that one would strengthen what is really Germanic). Bridges are fine, but not if they serve the purpose of military invasion. By the same token, bridges may as easily be destroyed as constructed. If in 1933 Dutch and German bridges were intact and others planned, by 1945 many of them had been destroyed, whether by the Dutch during the invasion, by the Allies seeking to interfere with German military provisioning or by the German military as it retreated from the advancing Allies. Insofar as the period in question begins in 1933 and ends in 1953, the motif involves the construction, reinforcement, and destruction of bridges.

In the German corpus, there is one persistent version of the bridge motif. It occurs in every account of the final meeting between Egmont and Orange in Willebroek before the latter's departure for Dillenburg (where motifs relating to exile, Heimat, being a refugee, etc., come into play) and the former's arrest by Alba, regardless of the author's political orientation. Here are three versions:

> Die alte Freundschaft brach im persönlichen Abschied durch: 'Lieber Graf, Ihr Vertrauen wird Sie ins Unglück stürzen. Ein drückendes Vorgefühl—wollte Gott, daß es mich trügt—sagt mir, daß Sie die Brücke sein werden, über welche die Spanier in die Niederlande eindringen werden!'[23] [The old friendship showed in their leave-taking: 'Dear Duke, your trust will be your downfall. A pressing premonition—God willing, but a delusion—tells me that you will be the bridge the Spanish cross when they invade the Netherlands.]

> Er [Oranien] kommt ihnen [Egmont und Mansfeld] nach dem Dorf Willebroek bei Mecheln entgegen. Er erklärt, er wittere schon den Blutgeruch, er werde seine letzten Ämter niederlegen und sich nach Deutschland zurückziehen. Oranien warn Egmont, dem König zu vertrauen. Er fragt ihn, ob er die Brücke sein wolle, auf der die Spanier ins Land drängen, um sie nachher abzubrechen.[24] [Orange meets Egmont and Mansfeld in the Village of

[22] Nicolas Japikse, 'Nederland en Duitschland in XVIIe Eeuw, *Het Vaderland*, 16 March 1935.

[23] Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, p. 210.

[24] Kotzde-Kottenrodt, *Wilhelmus von Nassauen*, p. 170.

> Willebroek near Mecheln. He explains that he already senses the smell of blood, he means to lay down his last official functions and retreat to Germany. Orange warns Egmont not to trust the king. He asks him if he wants to be the bridge over which the Spanish will invade, only to later destroy it.]
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> 'Wohlan!' rief Oranien, 'wage es denn auf diese königliche Dankbarkeit. Aber ich ahne, du wirst die Brücke sein, worüber die Spanier in unser Land setzen, und die sie abbrechen werden, wenn sie darüber sind!' 'Umarme mich,' bat Egmont, 'O Wilhelm, wann sehen wir uns wieder?'[25] ['Okay, then,' Orange rejoined, 'take your chance on this royal gratitude. But I have a foreboding that you will be the bridge across which the Spanish enter our land and that they will destroy it once they've crossed.']

For comparison sake, let's consider two non-German biographies, C. V. Wedgwood's *William the Silent* (1944, translated into German 1949) and Henriette L. T. de Beaufort's *Willem de Zwijger* (1950, translated into German 1956). Although both dramatize the leave-taking of Egmont and Orange, there is no mention of Egmont being the bridge that enables Spanish invasion. A. A. van Schelven's 1933 revisionist study of *Willem van Oranje* likewise omits all mention of the bridge motif, but does state that: 'Van de gevleugelde woorden, die in verband met zijn uitwijking verteld worden, heeft hij er waarschijnlijk geen enkel gesproken. Voor pathetische phrases was het nu allerminst de tijd'[26] [With regard to the winged words, which have been used in connection with his retreat, he probably didn't say a single one of them. There really wasn't time for pathos-laden phrases]. Where does the motif originate? We find it in Motley and in Schiller's dramatic account of their last conversation in the *History of the Revolt of the United Netherlands*.[27] Motley specifically references Famiano Strada's 1643 *De bello belgico*, which is probably the original source. Regardless of the proximate source, the evidence indicates that its twentieth-century prevalence was limited to German-language authors. Kotzde's rendering of the motif in indirect speech is rote almost to the point of parody, while it is Kesten, surprisingly, who cites it most faithfully from Schiller. In every other respect, Kesten is more innovative in developing novel ways to present Orange to his readers.

The bridge motif would not warrant sustained attention if it were limited to variations in citing Strada's invented conversation between Egmont and Orange. Near the conclusion of his 1935 biography of Orange, Schendell inserts an account of Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma's plan to cut off the besieged Antwerp by building a fortified bridge across the Scheldt that would block any provisioning of the city. By this time, Orange is in Delft and being visited by his old friend Marnix, the mayor of Antwerp. 'Oranien,' writes Schendell

> hatte Kenntnis von einer neuen genialen Belagerungstechnik, mit der Alexander von Parma die ungeheure, durch Wasser und Mauern geschützte Stadt zu bezwingen plante und entwickelte auch Marnix St. Adelgonde als dem Bürgermeister von Antwerpen den Verteidigungsplan, der Parmas Anschläge vereiteln mußte. Es war Parma zuzutrauen, daß

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[25] Hermann Kesten, *König Philipp der Zweite* (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1938), p. 330.

[26] A. A. van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam, Uitgeverij W. ten Have, 1948), pp. 137-8.

[27] John Lothrop Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1880), p. 329.

> er den Versuch, eine Brücke über die Schelde zu schlagen, wagen würde. Ein phantastisches Unterfangen!'[28] [Orange was aware of an ingenious new siege technique with which Alexander of Parma planned to subdue the mighty city, protected by water and walls, and laid out for Marnix St. Adelgonde, mayor of Antwerp, his defensive plan devised to thwart Parma's assault. It was characteristic of Parma that he would dare to attempt to build a bridge across the Scheldt. A fantastic undertaking!]

Orange advises Marnix to use the same strategy he had used to liberate Leiden: break the dikes. But, as Marnix finds out upon his return to Antwerp, 'die Fleischerzunft hatte 12000 Rinder auf den Weiden, und die Obersten der Schuttery machten sich anheischig, die Durchstechung der Deiche mit Gewalt zu verhindern. Das Rindvieh siegte, während Parma handelte, die Schelde mit Schanzen spickte und die wichtigsten Positionen um Antwerpen zielbewußt in seine Hand brachte, so daß er die Stadt immer enger umschloß'[29] [The butchers' guild had 12,000 head of cattle in the meadow and the heads of the civil guard vowed to prevent the breaching of the dikes. The cattle triumphed while Parma was busy digging trenches and strategically laying claim to the most important positions around Antwerp, encircling the city ever more tightly]. The siege of Antwerp and Marnix's failure to prevail over the self-interest of the citizens is only one of many concerns pressing upon Orange. Their outcomes are left hanging in the balance when he is assassinated. The fate of Antwerp is not disclosed.

This is where Schendell leaves the motif and, for the duration of the Third Reich, no other writer picks it up. Thanks to the detail of the 12,000 oxen, we can be relatively certain that Schendell's main source for the story of Parma's bridge is Motley again, although he may also have been aware of an 1844 novella by Ladislaus Tarnowski called *Prinz und Mechanikus*. Motley develops the story at great length and provides the conclusion, which becomes the primary focus of Tarnowski's novella. After the assassination of Orange and the completion of the bridge that spans the mighty Scheldt, an Italian engineer by the name of Gianibelli enters the story. 'Gianibelli was no patriot,' writes Motley. 'He was purely a man of science and of great acquirements, who was looked upon by the ignorant populace alternately as a dreamer and a wizard. He was as indifferent to the cause of freedom as of despotism, but he had a great love of chemistry. He was also a profound mechanician, second to no man of his age in theoretic and practical engineering.'[30] Gianibelli presents the desperate city council of Antwerp with a plan involving 'floating marine volcanoes,' barges packed with gunpowder and destructive objects such as 'mill-stones, cannon balls, blocks of marble, chain-shot, iron hooks, plough coulters, and every dangerous missile that could be imagined.'[31] The scheme is brilliant and partially succeeds, blasting a major breach in the bridge and killing 1,000 soldiers. Had the Flemish admiral executed the plan precisely, the breach would have been larger and Dutch troops would have overwhelmed Parma's forces. Due to the fickleness of the citizens of Antwerp and the feckless admiral, who fails to report the partial success to waiting troops, the opportunity is squandered and weeks later Antwerp surrenders. In both Motley and Tarnowski, a humane and

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[28] Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, p. 366.

[29] Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, p. 367.

[30] John Lothrop Motley, *History of the United Netherlands*, Vol 1 (London: John Murray, 1860), p. 190.

[31] Motley, *History of the United Netherlands*, pp. 191-2.

resourceful Farnese takes the day. The fortified bridge withstands subsequent attacks and is crucial to Farnese's success. The sources leave no doubt that Orange was dead before the bridge's completion and had no knowledge of Gianibelli. His instructions to Marnix about piercing the dikes strictly concerned Farnese's plan to choke off the city with the bridge.

For Schendell, the story of the bridge is a means to impress on his readers the difficulties Orange faced in managing a recalcitrant and self-serving people. In summing up Orange's signal accomplishment, Schendell writes:

> Er ging wie eine weiße Flamme durch die triebtrunkene Welt fanatisierter Massentumulte und ekstatischer Tyrannei. Er sprach als Genius der Vernunft in den Sitzungen zu geschwollenen Besserwissern, und es war stets, als ob ein klarer Morgenwind die Nebel von den schweren Gehirnen fortwehte. Sie sahen ein. Selten, vielleicht nie ist die dämonische Macht über Menschen so—fast mütterlich von einem großen Magier und Propheten zum Guten angewendet worden.[32] [Like a white flame, he passed through the instinct-ridden world of fanatic mass tumults and ecstatic tyranny. As the genius of reason, he spoke to the puffed-up know-it-alls, and it constantly seemed as if a clear morning wind cleared the fog from heavy brains. They saw reason. Seldom, perhaps never did a great sorcerer and prophet wield demonic power over people--almost like a mother and for their benefit.]

In 1935, Schendell sees Orange as the better *Führer*, in whom the contradictory qualities of genius, reason, demonic power, and motherly concern that are required for times characterized by fanatic masses and ecstatic tyrants are combined.

No other German language writer takes up the bridge motif during the period that concludes with the end of the war. It comes as a surprise, therefore, when Fritz von Unruh returns from exile in the United States upon the invitation of the mayor of Frankfurt and prepares a play for a grand comeback on the stage in which the destruction of the Antwerp bridge plays a key role. The play is called *Wilhelmus* and, for the first time ever in a literary work about Orange, focuses entirely on his last days and the assassination in the Prinsenhof in Delft. It's an odd choice. Why would he choose to stage the assassination of a figure that has sustained hope and modeled defiance during the Third Reich now that West Germany is refashioning itself and embarking on the *Wirtschaftswunder*? As becomes evident, Unruh's allegorical target is the 'new' Germany in a way that calls into question the rupture with the old, specifically the remilitarization of Germany that the Adenauer government had set in motion. As a committed pacifist, however Prussian, Unruh could not accept this.

Von Unruh makes the bridge motif central to his drama, interweaving the assassination plot with the bridge plot. The efforts to spare Antwerp by breaching the dams are still foiled by the self-interest of Antwerp's merchants and farmers. At a meeting in Delft between Orange and his friend Marnix, the mayor of Antwerp, the latter reports on his inability to convince the city council to execute Orange's plan.

> Oranien: Da sollen also 12.000 Ochsen ruhig weiter auf den Wiesen grasen? Und Holland kann untergehen?

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[32] Schendell, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, p. 378.

> Bürgermeister: Ich bin ja kein Diktator—wie der Faranese! Wir haben ja schließlich die älteste Volksregierung![33]
>
> [Orange: So, 12,000 oxen should simply continue grazing on the meadow? And Holland can perish?
>
> Mayor: I'm no dictator—like Faranese! After all, we have the oldest government of the people!]

Later the mayor confirms that 'der grössere Teil meiner Bevölkerung … eben nur theoretisch zur Demokratie [neigt]. Daher müssen meine Kollegen und ich dauernd aufspielen, um das Interesse für die Freiheit nicht absterben zu lassen. […] Das Wort 'Freiheit' ist keine Zauberformel mehr.'[34] [the larger part of my population is only theoretically inclined to democracy. That is why my colleagues and I constantly have to play it up so that their interest in freedom doesn't die out. 'Freedom' isn't a magic word anymore]. Both Orange and Unruh see themselves confronted with the paradox of democratic complacency. Sabotage is required.

The preoccupation with the bridge motif continues. Farnese's troops joke about 'eine Brücke der Verständigung'[35] [a bridge of understanding]. When Farnese unexpectedly shows up in Delft under false pretenses with a scheme to entrap Orange (an event entirely invented by Unruh) and Orange defies him with a declaration of independence from the Spanish crown, Farnese states, 'Zwischen uns gibt es keine Brücke mehr'[36] [Between us there is no longer a bridge]. Since the foolhardy citizens of Antwerp won't budge, Orange finds another solution. He enlists Gianibelli who is (contrary to the historical record) also in Delft to shop his plan to blow up Farnese's bridge. Minutes before his assassination, Orange describes the plan to his daughter, calling the bridge Farnese's 'Brückenmonstrum'[37] [monstrous bridge]. In the penultimate scene, Orange is shot by the fanatic assassin sent from Spain just as he completes his account of the future explosion—one explosion substituting for the other. In the final scene set in Antwerp, Gianibelli's plan unfolds. Farnese and his officers are unnerved by the sight of lights floating down the river, in which they recognize the ghostly figure of Orange, and even more by the singing of the townspeople, who intone the first verse of the *Wilhelmus* and then break dramatically into *Das Niederländische Dankgebet*. 'Dies verfluchte Lied! Dies Teufelslied!'[38] [This accursed song! This song of the devil!]. As the Spanish frantically abandon the bridge, an ecstatic and dying Mareiken, a chamber maid from Orange's court in Delft, invented by Unruh and baptized with the name of the despoiled Madonna from the *Bildersturm* in Antwerp, appears as the terrifying new allegory of freedom in contrast to Clärchen's visionary appearance in the last scene of Goethe's *Egmont*.

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33 Fritz von Unruh, *Wilhelmus. Drama* (Cologne: Comel Verlag, 1953), p. 36.

34 Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 73.

35 Unruh, *Willhelmus*, p. 46.

36 Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 56.

37 Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 76.

38 Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 85.

> Mareiken: *(allein, zu dem immer grelleren Feuerschein der sich nähernden Schiffe)* Du lieve God! . . . Gnädiger Herr! . . . Jetzt mach uns frei! [quoting from the *Dankgebet*] . . . Frei von unserer Sünde! Von unserer Feigheit! Von unserm Haß gegeneinander! . . . Von unserm Haß! . . . (*Während von überall her nun, --aus Antwerpen, von den Schelde-Ufern, ja aus allen Windrichtungen, durch Trompeten unterstützt, das Finale als Massengesang ertönt:*
>
> 'Herr! Mach uns frei!'
>
> streckt Mareiken in diesen Jubel des Niederländischen Dankgebets hinein—ihre beiden Arme dem nun wie eine Flammensäule ankommenden Licht entgegen.)
>
> ENDE[39]
>
> [Mareiken: (*alone, addressing the steadily brighter fiery glow of the approaching ships*) Dear God! . . . Merciful Lord! . . . Free us now! Free us from our sins! From our cowardice! From our hatred towards each other! . . . (*Meanwhile from all directions, --from Antwerp, from the riverbanks of the Scheldt, from all directions of the wind, supported by trumpets, the finale of the song of the masses intones: 'Lord! Deliver us!'*
>
> In the midst of this jubilation of the Netherlandic Prayer of Thanks, Mareiken stretches out her arms toward the light that approaches like a column of fire.)
>
> THE END]

Although the play received polite reviews, the lukewarm response to his literary and political efforts overall confirmed Unruh's concern about the complacency of the German public and their rejection of his pacifist call to resist Adenauer's efforts to re-militarize Germany in the early 1950s. The destruction of the bridge was a historical fantasy. By the time, Farnese began building the bridge, Orange was dead. There were no meetings between Orange and Farnese or Gianibelli in Delft. Gianibelli's efforts were partially successful and resulted in the death of a 1000 Spanish troops, but not the destruction of the bridge. On August 17, 1585, Antwerp capitulated. The fact that Unruh reshuffles history indicates that his prime purpose was to link the fate of Orange with the explosion of the bridge in a manner that is akin to the execution of Egmont and the promise of freedom for the Netherlands in Goethe's play. The function of the 'Dankgebet' in the play's triumphant conclusion is to confirm the extension of that illusory triumph to Germany and the postwar period. But the citizens of West Germany had no ear for Unruh's explicit warnings nor taste for allegories from the Eighty Years War and renditions of 'Das Niederländische Dankgebet.' The curious twenty-year German afterlife of William of Orange had come to an end for everyone but Fritz von Unruh.

Why did Unruh fixate on the exploding bridge as the allegorical connection between the times of William of Orange and the post-war era of the twentieth century? To be sure, Farnese's construction was a bridge only in that it bridged two sides of a river; its intent was to obstruct passage down the river and to starve Antwerp. To blow up the bridge was to restore that

[39] Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 85.

connection. In the normal run of things, bridges are crucial infrastructure for commerce and community. In times of war, as the Antwerp bridge shows, they assume another aspect. In the aftermath of war, bridges, as ruins and as reconstructions, can be sites of reconnection, memory, aspiration, contestation, and commitment.

Unruh refused to let go of the bridge motif. It became an obsession. After writing *Wilhelmus*, the large-scale events of the Eighty Years War and the Third Reich that had preoccupied his historical imagination against the background of a conglomerate of shared Prussian and Netherlandic cultural history resolve into an intensely local and intensely personal campaign against Adenauer's efforts to remilitarize Germany, symbolized by a struggle over a bridge, set now not in Antwerp, but in the town of Diez an der Lahn where Unruh's widowed mother moved in 1916. Diez is located in a territory that had, since the fifteenth century, been associated with the House of Orange and with the Earl of Nassau-Diez, the father of William of Orange. Diez became Prussian in 1866. Unruh's mother purchased and moved with her daughters into Oranienstein, the seventeenth-century estate that originally belonged to Queen Albertine of Nassau-Orange. During the Weimar era, the home in Diez, not far from Frankfurt, offered hospitality to members of the world of theater and film, in which Unruh, as prominent expressionist playwright, played a major part. When he published *Wilhelmus* in 1953, he dedicated it to Robert Heck, mayor of Diez, and 'den Einwohnern des Nassauer Städtchens Diez/Lahn'[40] [the residents of the Nassau town Diez/Lahn].

Having already linked the assassination of William of Orange with the destruction of Farnese's bridge over the Scheldt in *Wilhelmus*, in a subsequent play Unruh brings the story even closer to home. *Dietrich* is set in 1950 and is written in response to the Federal Republic successfully passing legislation authorizing the remilitarization of Germany in November 1955. For the new play, Unruh reshuffles his personal history so that it is the unnamed mayor of Diez (presumably based on Robert Heck) who invites the exiled author Dietrich to return from New York City to help him prevent the *Bundeswehr* from installing detonation chambers in a bridge that citizens had built in express protest against rearmament. 'In diesem kleinen Dorf am Fluß hab'n Bürger eine Friedensbrücke als Protest gegen neue Kriegsrüstung gebaut.'[41] *Dietrich* is the belated completion of Unruh's pacifist trilogy, which started with *Ein Geschlecht* (1917) and *Platz* (1920). Written in a bombastic expressionist style that seems at times an awkward anticipation of Heiner Müller's allegories of Germany's militaristic history and draws on an arcane personal mythology that is tied to his idiosyncratic notion of the deep connections between Prussia and the Netherlands, the play was never performed and not published until after his death. Unruh recognizes the play's untimeliness. At one point, a US major is puzzled by Dietrich's discourse. Someone explains: 'He is 'expressionist.' [...] Chaotischer Ekstatiker!' to which Dietrich replies: 'Expressionismus ist und war und wird / [...] ewig bleiben / der kürzeste Weg zu Gott'[42] [Expressionism is and was and will forever remain the shortest path to God). Dietrich wonders if Adenauer means to resurrect the empire of Charlemagne, to bring back 'Torquemada? / Autodafées? Habsburger Unterlippen?' (Habsburg lower lips). His

[40] Unruh, *Wilhelmus*, p. 3.

[41] Fritz von Unruh, *Dietrich* in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol 3 (Berlin: Haude und Spenersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1973), p. 181.

[42] Unruh, *Dietrich*, p. 296.

Mephistophelean counterpart, Schleich, whom readers of Unruh will recognize from his autobiographical novels and other plays, confirms: 'Nur modernisiert! / Nicht Alba, sondern General SS! / Nicht Philipp, sondern Konrad [Adenauer]'[43] [But modernized! Not Alba, but rather the General of the SS! Not Philipp, but rather Konrad]. Perhaps only in the context of the present essay with its focus on the afterlife of William of Orange does *Dietrich* warrant renewed scholarly attention.

Early in the play, the mayor is killed by Adenauer's troops. Later, Dietrich and his wife Irene are arrested and, in a sequence that duplicates but reverses the sequence of events in *Wilhelmus*, the Peace Bridge is blown up and Dietrich and Irene are executed. 'Punkt zwölf Uhr Mitternacht wird diese Brücke / als Zeichen des Triumphs gesprengt!' [At precisely twelve o'clock midnight this bridge will be blown up as a sign of triumph!] After the explosion, Adenauer, his generals, and American military advisors come, 'wie Torquemada einst und Philipp's Hof, -- / um Deiner Hinrichtung [...] zuzusehen'[44] [as did once Torquemada and Philipp's court,-- to watch your execution]. This time the consoling vision and transmuted version of 'Das Niederländische Dankgebet' ('Herr, mach uns frei!') is reserved for Irene (occupying the place of Mareiken and Clärchen before her), who shares it with Dietrich before their execution.

> Hier! Hier allein in den vier Herzenskammern,
> hier ist das Ur-Atom! Erst wenn's die Liebe
> *frei macht*, die Energien, die gebundenen
> durch Herzensträgheit, bis zum Kern zersprengt—
> erst solche Explosion befreit die Welt—
> und läßt des Friedens kosmische Gewalt
> wie Weltbeginn neu nach der Sintflut wieder
> im Regenbogenlicht die Brücke bauen—
> von Ost nach West, von Süd nach Nord! Die Brücke,
> die niemand dann mehr sprengen kann! Kein Greis,
> kein Schleich! Soldatenführer! . . . Keiner! Denn
> gesegnet ist der Fuß in diesem Licht!
> Gesegnet ist der Gruß und das Begegnen
> der Rassen, Klassen aller Völker dort . . .
> auf dieser Brücke, deren Steine wir
> und Pfeiler, Bogen, alle sind! Oh Dietrich![45]
> [Here! Only here in these four chambers of the heart,
> this is where the ur-atom is! Only when love
> has made them free, has exploded the nucleus
> of energies bound by the heart's lassitude—
> and the cosmic power of peace is allowed,
> as in a new beginning for the world after the flood,

[43] Unruh, *Dietrich*, p. 308-9.

[44] Unruh, *Dietrich*, p. 365.

[45] Unruh, *Dietrich*, p. 380. Italics mine.

to build the bridge in the rainbow's light—
from east to west, from south to north! The bridge
that then no one can explode. No old man [Adenauer],
no Schleich! Leader of soldiers! . . . No one! For
in this light is blessed the foot!
Blessed is the greeting and the encounter
of races, classes of all people there . . .
on this bridge, whose stones
and pillars and arches we all are! Oh Dietrich!]

One has to admire the futile megalomania of an author who stages the detonation of the entire mythology of his idiosyncratic Prussian-Netherlandic existence in order, through the execution of his avatar, to become himself a bridge of peace that no German, much less a citizen of the Netherlands or Flanders, after 1953 is the least bit interested in crossing. With *Dietrich*, Unruh extends a bridge to irrelevance.

Coda

After one last period of self-imposed exile in France and the United States, where his home in Atlantic City was destroyed by a hurricane in 1962, Unruh returned to live out the remaining years of his life in what his family called the Villa Oranien in Diez an der Lahn. In a final, almost perverse twist of history, the town of Diez cooperated with the *Bundeswehr* to build a new bridge across the Lahn, starting at a point that bordered on his property. The purpose of the bridge was to accommodate military vehicles too heavy and wide for the existing bridges, as a condition for retaining the Freiherr-von-Stein-Kaserne [barracks]. Plans for the bridge were started in 1965, but not officially approved until 1969. Adenauer's government assumed the cost, much to the relief of the town. An article in the *Rhein-Zeitung* reports that: 'Der Bau der Brücke hatte sich über einige Zeit verzögert, weil der Dichter Fritz von Unruh gegen den Bau geklagt hatte. Das Grundstück von Unruhs grenzte damals direkt an die Fläche, die für den Neubau vorgesehen war'[46] [The construction of the bridge was slightly delayed because the writer Fritz von Unruh sued against the construction. Unruh's property bordered directly on the terrain for which the bridge was planned.] By the time the bridge was ready to be christened in 1971, Unruh was dead. The name for the bridge was decided by a reader survey conducted by the local newspaper and approved by the city council. The Oraniensteiner Brücke quietly signals the persistence of the bridge motif as a potential figuration of German-Netherlandic relations, even over Unruh's dead body, even if next to no one cares, and even if no one sang 'Das Niederländische Dankgebet' on the occasion of its opening.

[46] 'Vor 40 Jahren wurde die Oraniensteiner Brücke errichtet,' *Rhein Zeitung*, 2 February 2012, https://www.rhein-zeitung.de/region/lokales/diez_artikel,-vor-40-jahren-wurde-die-oraniensteiner-bruecke-errichtet-_arid,359539.html.

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