



Adriaan van der Hoop's adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Han d'Islande*. A Dutch (melo)drama?

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Abstract: In research on early nineteenth-century Dutch literature, the idea predominates that genres such as the gothic novel and melodrama did not feature, or only seldom featured, in the Netherlands. Only much later would this change, and Dutch melodrama has thus been described as a 'belated phenomenon'. However, is this really the case? We know already that these genres were discussed and read in translation and the example of Van der Hoop's *Han van IJsland*, a theatrical adaptation of Victor Hugo's debut novel, shows that gothic and melodramatic traditions can also be traced in original texts. Applying Peter Brooks' concept of the 'melodramatic mode' (a mode of 'excess') can be useful when understanding theatrical texts like Van der Hoop's adaptation, but possibly also for other genres.

Key words: melodramatic mode / melodrama; gothic novel / griezelroman; theatrical adaptation / theateradaptatie; Victor Hugo; Adriaan van der Hoop

Introduction

In 1830, an Amsterdam-based publisher released *Han van IJsland of de laatste afstammeling van Ingholphus den verdelger*. The translator, J. de Keijzer, was listed on the title page, but there was no mention of the author's name. By way of an appetizer, the reader was treated to an illustration of a key scene from the story: a short man, primitively dressed, stands in front of a tribunal that is presided over by a prelate. With a dramatic gesture, the man points at himself: 'I've drunk enough blood; I'm not thirsty anymore'.¹ Another preview was provided in the translator's preface:

This novel is offered to fans of the cruel and horrible, as well as to lovers of the mild and tender. A novel in the style of the famous W. Scott, as far as the form and the intentions of the author are concerned.²

As to what those intentions might be, De Keijzer was unclear: connoisseurs would already be aware of them, whereas those 'who only read for pleasure' would not be interested. He briefly touched upon the historical and ethnographical background to the story, which is set in Scandinavia, but because of the romantic character of the *couleur locale*, the novel had been so obscure that his investigations had proven rather unhelpful.³ This lack of respect for the original and its author was manifest in the translation strategy as well: De Keijzer dryly mentioned that he had deleted parts of the text, especially the 'many tedious conversations'.⁴

In 1831, the periodical *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* dedicated a short review to *Han van IJsland*. The critic appreciated the descriptions of the Norwegian landscape and customs, but he detested the representation of the bloodthirsty protagonist. He suspected that the novel would be appreciated above all by fans of 'the cruel and horrible'.⁵ The disgusting and overly graphic depiction of 'cannibal meals' was condemned with a then-common reference to Horace's *Ars Poetica*: just like Medea's infanticide and Atreus' preparation of human flesh, the cruelties of *Han van IJsland* were not considered appropriate for a play or novel.⁶

¹ Anonymous, *Han van IJsland, of de laatste afstammeling van Ingholphus den verdelger, vrij vertaald door J. de Keijzer* (Amsterdam: Gebroeders van Arum, 1830), title page: 'Ik heb genoeg bloed gedronken; ik heb geen dorst meer'. The translations in the main text are mine unless indicated otherwise.

² Anonymous, *Han van IJsland*, p. I: 'Den Liefhebber van het wreede en akelige, en den Beminnaren van het zachte en teedere wordt hier weder een Roman aangeboden, en wel een, die geheel in den smaak der Romans van den beroemden W. Scott valt, zoo, wat den vorm, als wat het doel van dien schrijver betreft'.

³ Anonymous, *Han van IJsland*, p. I. De Keijzer failed to acknowledge that Hugo had borrowed much of the plot and characters from Scandinavian history, via Paul Henri Mallet's *Histoire de Danemarch*. See Victor Hugo, *Han d'Islande. Édition présentée, établie et annotée par Bernard Leuillot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 16.

⁴ Anonymous, *Han van IJsland*, p. II: 'vele langwijlige gesprekken'.

⁵ Anonymous, 'Recensie *Han van IJsland* [...] Vrij vertaald door J. de Keyzer', *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1831), I, p. 472: 'het wreede en akelige'.

⁶ Anonymous, 'Recensie *Han van IJsland*', p. 472.

Neither the critic nor the translator seems to have been aware of the identity of the author of this horror story.⁷ The author of the novel, which was published anonymously in France in 1823, was Victor Hugo. It was only in 1833 that *Han d'Islande* appeared under Hugo's name, although the Parisian inner circle had of course been aware of its creator beforehand. Hugo's colleague and sympathizer, Alfred de Vigny, reacted enthusiastically: 'Vous avez posé en France les fondements de Walter Scott [...] Je vous remercie au nom de la France'.⁸

Han d'Islande is indeed a historical novel: the story is set in Norway at the end of the seventeenth century. It has a complicated plot, in which political and romantic storylines are interwoven. The title character is a macabre monster, who lost his son and successor during the collapse of a mine. Han wants to get revenge on some soldiers stationed in Norway, because one of them seduced his son's fiancée. The novel's romantic hero, Ordener Guldenlew, launches a quest for Han, because the monster is said to possess a casket containing important documents. Ordener wants to use these documents to save his future father-in-law, Griffenfeld, who is unjustly imprisoned in a castle near Trondheim. Griffenfeld, the former 'grand-chancelier', is the victim of a conspiracy: his successor, 'le comte d'Ahlefeld', is trying to blame him for leading a rebellion by the mine workers. With this evil plot, Ahlefeld hopes finally to be rid of Griffenfeld, who is still popular with the Norwegian people. At the end of the novel, the conspiracy comes to light in a trial and Griffenfeld is rehabilitated. As a reward, Ordener is permitted to marry Éthel, Griffenfeld's daughter. Han is finally imprisoned, but gets his revenge by setting fire to the barracks and taking many soldiers with him to his death.

The historical novel, regardless of whether it was based on the works of Scott, was not Hugo's sole source of inspiration: *Han d'Islande* lies at the intersection of various literary trends. The mottos that Hugo cited in each chapter speak for themselves. Apart from the novels of Walter Scott, the quotes are drawn from the works of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Sterne, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kotzebue, Chateaubrand and De Staël. Together, these authors form a sample card of Hugo's 'romantic' or at least 'non-classicist' taste. Four mottos originated from Charles Maturin's *Bertram*, a melodrama that caused a furore in Paris in the period when Hugo was working on *Han d'Islande*. The Irish Maturin, nowadays best known for his Faustian novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, is a typical example of the gothic literature of that time.⁹ Apart from the references to the historical novel, melodrama and gothic literature, *Han d'Islande* also anticipated Hugo's fascination for the grotesque and his reflection on this aesthetic concept. Five years after his debut novel was published, the grotesque would play a key role in Hugo's 'Préface de Cromwell', a manifesto for French Romanticism.¹⁰

The Dutch translator did acknowledge the importance of Scott, but he more or less ignored the other influences on Hugo's novel. Although the mottos were not excluded in their entirety from the translation, they were cut, and, more importantly, so were the source references. Little was left of Hugo's tribute to his literary heroes. Yet it was De Keijzer's translation that spurred

⁷ The translator did not mention that the original was French, and the reviewer even seems to have thought that the novel was originally German or Scandinavian.

⁸ Kathryn M. Grossman, *The Early Novels of Victor Hugo: Towards a Poetics of Harmony* (Genève: Droz, 1986), p. 21.

⁹ Hugo, *Han d'Islande*, pp. 19-20; Hendrik van Gorp, *De romantische griezelenroman (Gothic Novel). Een merkwaardig rand-verschijnsel in de literatuur* (Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 1998), pp. 89-95.

¹⁰ For the relation between the 'Préface' and *Han d'Islande*, see Karen Masters-Wicks, *Victor Hugo's Les Misérables and the Novels of the Grotesque* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 45-46.

the Dutch 'romantic' Adriaan van der Hoop to adapt Hugo's novel for the theatre. In his preface to the publication of this adaptation, Van der Hoop wrote about his reading experience:

However terrible the substance, however barbaric sometimes the style and however irregularly it was developed, it was unmistakably a novel by a genius showing authentic poetic feeling and boundless imagination.¹¹

It was not for many years after he had read De Keijzer's translation that Van der Hoop discovered that Victor Hugo was the author of *Han d'Islande*. In 1837, he used Hugo's novel for a first experiment with the genre of romantic drama, and in doing so, Van der Hoop claimed, he was following in the footsteps of Lessing, Schiller and Hugo.

In this article, I will analyse Van der Hoop's adaptation against the background of the literary traditions and genres that Hugo was exploring, with a focus on melodrama. Before discussing Van der Hoop's adaptation, I will address the history of these traditions (section 2) and Van der Hoop's rather polemic paratexts (the mottos and preface) to the publication of his play *Han van IJsland* (section 3). The adaptation itself will be compared to two French melodramas based on Hugo's debut novel (section 4).

Anti-classicist traditions and genres

In an article about the early French historical novel – 'novels like *Han d'Islande*' – Stephanie Dast claims that from the very beginning of French Romanticism, both the drama and the novel were characterized by a 'hybridization of genres'.¹² In this respect, she notes of Walter Scott's influence on Hugo:

What the young Hugo admires in [Scott is the] manner of blending truth and fantastic legend, realistic historical narratives and melodramatic devices. He finds in Scott's scenes, populated with shadows and ghosts, a source of inspiration for his novels as well as his dramas. However, whereas the Scottish author regrets having devoted too much time in his youth to the sublime, novelists like Hugo or Balzac, while recognizing the errors and excesses contained in some of their first works [...], never completely do away with the *roman noir* or the melodrama. As such, and despite the rigor introduced by the assimilation of the historical genre into their novels, the most well known and successful novels of the romantic period that are 'at once drama and epic' also contain the excesses of melodrama.¹³

Of these three genres – the historical, gothic and melodramatic novel – the first received ample attention from Dutch literary scholars. The spread of so-called 'Scottomania' in Europe did not

¹¹ Adriaan van der Hoop Jr., *Han van IJsland. Dramatisch tafereel* (Dordrecht: J. van Houtrijve Jr, 1837), p. V: 'Hoe verschrikkelijk ook van inhoud, hoe barbaarsch hier en daar van stijl, en hoe ongeregeld ook uitgewerkt, was het onmiskenbaar, dat die roman uit de pen van een genie moet zijn gevloeid, dat aan echt dichterlijk gevoel eene teugellooze verbeelding verbond'.

¹² Stéphanie Dast, "At Once Drama and Epic". The Historical Novel in 1830s France', in *Novel Stages. Drama and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Pratima Prasad and Susan McCready (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 70-90 (p. 81).

¹³ Dast, "At Once Drama and Epic", p. 81.

bypass the Netherlands, and the works of Scott are a standard ingredient of Dutch literary history.¹⁴ Yet little is known about the role of the gothic novel in the Netherlands, and even less has been said about the melodramatic genre. This lack of attention is remarkable when compared to the flow of publications on gothic and melodramatic culture in English-speaking countries.

Nonetheless, a trace of this scholarly interest did reach the Netherlands, as evidenced by studies by Meijer, Buikema, Wesseling and Andeweg.¹⁵ These scholars are less interested in the genres and their histories than in the so-called ‘gothic’ or ‘melodramatic mode’: a post-revolutionary sensibility that still survives today, stemming from scepticism about the optimism of the Enlightenment and the associated philosophy of perfectibility. The definitions of the gothic and melodramatic are hereby stretched to encompass what is perhaps more a way of reading than a definition of a genre. A leitmotif in this type of study is the power to undermine that is attributed to the gothic and melodramatic: these ‘modes’ challenge the established discourse and give a voice to oppressed groups in society. In English and American studies, one finds this critical approach not only in essays about modern literature, but also in research on early gothic and melodramatic literature. The established discourse of the years around 1800 is said to have been classicist culture, with its elitist taste. Whilst contemporary critics used ‘gothic’ and ‘melodramatic’ as pejorative terms, these labels grew in retrospect into positive qualities, and nowadays they refer to literary innovations.¹⁶

As for Dutch literature in the decades before and after 1800, scholars agree that gothic and melodramatic traditions did exist, but almost never in an original form. Systematic research is scarce, however, with one exception being Van Gorp’s study on the history of gothic literature in the Netherlands. He notes that the English gothic novel, the German *Schauerroman* and the French *roman noir* mostly received critical reviews. The critics attacked what they considered to be the overstrained imagination, tasteless nature and obscenity of the genre. After the ‘French period’, this disdain also assumed nationalistic connotations: the gothic novel was ostracized as an ‘undutch’ phenomenon. Nevertheless, Van Gorp acknowledges that the gothic novel was widely read in the Netherlands in the form of translations and adaptations.¹⁷ Furthermore, one might question whether the stridency of Dutch criticism differed fundamentally from the response in neighbouring countries. The limited indigenous production might reflect the smaller scale of Dutch literature, rather than the typically Dutch taste that differed from French, English and German preferences. After all, it was not only the gothic novel that was rare: on the whole,

¹⁴ See J.R. van der Wiel, *De geschiedenis in balkostuum: De historische roman in de Nederlandse literaire kritiek (1808-1874)* (Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 1999), Chapter 4, ‘De “Scottomanie” (1824-1832)’, pp. 127-190.

¹⁵ Maaïke Meijer, ‘The Return of Melodrama: After the Great Divide: the Dutch Case’, in *New Trends in Modern Dutch Literature*, ed. by Gillis J. Dorleijn (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 105-124; Agnes Andeweg, *Griemelig gewoon. Gotieke verschijningen in de Nederlandse romans, 1980-1995* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2011); R.L. Buikema and E. Wesseling, ‘Contesting Consensus Culture: The Case of Dutch Gothic’, *Journal of European Studies*, 41 (2011), 2, 124-141.

¹⁶ See for instance: David Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Carolyn Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁷ H. van Gorp, ‘De receptie van de Gothic Novel (griemelroman) in de Nederlandse literatuur (1790-1850)’, *Tydskrif vir Nederlands & Afrikaans*, 3 (1996), 1, 1-23. Van Gorp pays less attention than Anglo-Saxon scholars to the social-critical function of the genre, although he does label the gothic novel, referring to Jauss, as a ‘provocation to the centre of literary life’ and of ‘canonized literature’. See Van Gorp, *De romantische griemelroman*, p. 108.

originally Dutch novels were scarce throughout the nineteenth century, due to limited market opportunities.¹⁸

Unlike Van Gorp, in their studies on 'gotieke romans' in the Netherlands, Buikema and Wesseling only discuss examples published after World War II.¹⁹ Yet in an article from 2011, they also examine the early history of the genre, concluding that the gothic novel should be seen as a 'belated phenomenon in Dutch literature'.²⁰ Like many Anglo-Saxon studies, Buikema and Wesseling view the gothic novel as a genre in which the tension between modernity and tradition became manifest; a tension that reached its peak after major revolutions, such as the French, the agricultural and the industrial revolutions. The gothic novel was a form of commentary on social and political crisis; commentary that, depending on the author's ideology, could be progressive or conservative. As attractive as this thesis about the genre's societal function might be, it is also speculative. In the early gothic novels, such social criticism is seldom explicitly formulated.²¹ Even more problematic is the explanation that Buikema and Wesseling give for the assumed 'belatedness' of the genre in the Netherlands: around 1800, they argue, there was no need for the gothic novel, because the Netherlands was in a different phase of modernization than, for instance, England. Industrialization, individualization and secularization took longer to arrive, and moreover, the Dutch middle class, with its culture of sociability, played a more decisive role than elsewhere:

The literary circles held that literature was to cultivate the socially constructive emotions of empathy and sympathy in the reader. The enlightened, utilitarian frame of reference of the literary societies could not possibly accommodate the morally ambivalent, conflict-ridden Gothic novel, with its morbid fixation on a dark past which had supposedly been left behind.²²

One could argue, of course, that the Netherlands was certainly not the only country to have a flowering culture of literary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but even more fundamentally, it seems to me that Buikema and Wesseling pay little attention to the relative autonomy of literary developments. How else could one explain the popularity of gothic novels translated into Dutch? One should not confuse the critical discourse of this period with the taste of the reading public.

¹⁸ See Toos Streng, 'De roman in Nederland, 1790-1899. Een boekhistorische verkenning', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 127 (2011), 2, 153-155. In fact, in the first half of the nineteenth century some originally Dutch novels were published that met the now-customary definitions of the 'gothic novel'. See Dennis Schouten, *Duivelse boeken. Twee eeuwen griezelliteratuur in de Lage Landen* (The Hague: Stichting Bibliographia Neerlandica, 1997), p. 22.

¹⁹ Buikema, Wesseling and Andeweg prefer 'gotiek' to 'gotisch', because the latter term is easily associated with the architectural style. In my opinion, this is actually a good reason for choosing 'gotisch': the phenomenon partly stemmed from a fascination with the Middle Ages and its architecture. See Andeweg, *Griezelig gewoon*, p. 12.

²⁰ Buikema and Wesseling, 'Contesting Consensus Culture', p. 124.

²¹ Perhaps this is also the reason why Buikema and Wesseling connect their interpretation with Mathijssen's definition of literature as 'transvestisms of social conflicts'. Societal obsessions are thought to manifest themselves in literature through an encoded form. The question, of course, is how one can trace these 'codes' and how they can be 'cracked'. See Buikema and Wesseling, 'Contesting Consensus Culture', p. 138.

²² Buikema and Wesseling, 'Contesting Consensus Culture', p. 117.

In an article about the melodramatic mode, Meijer takes this discrepancy between elite tastes and the preferences of a broader circle of readers as her starting point. She sees both the gothic novel and the melodrama as manifestations of ‘popular culture’. Although they may have been rejected by critics, ‘[o]ld forms live on within popular culture, only to be rediscovered and restored to prominence at a later point in history’.²³ The melodrama has made such a comeback in recent decades, according to Meijer, and she likewise interprets this in culture-critical and subversive terms: ‘The current return and ready acceptance of this cultural mode can be read as a “return of the repressed”’.²⁴ Unlike Buikema and Wesseling, Meijer does not discuss the existence and function of the early melodrama in the Netherlands and elsewhere. In Anglo-Saxon studies, however, the melodrama around 1800 is linked, like the gothic novel of that period, to ‘stories of power struggles and [...] enactments of socio-cultural processes of marginalization or stratification’.²⁵ It was precisely this marginal and crushed genre that would have a great impact on the discourses on gender, class and race.

The recent popularity of the melodramatic as a critical concept can be traced back to Peter Brooks’ *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976). Brooks, though, did not interpret the function of the melodramatic in subversive terms, but more neutrally, as a ritual confirmation of a morality that, after the French Revolution, was no longer the exclusive domain of the authoritarian state or church. When the morality of the *ancien régime* was weakened, the melodrama developed into ‘the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era’.²⁶ In almost every melodrama, virtue is challenged by evil, but after several trials, good triumphs and the status quo is restored. Meijer believes that the more recent upsurge in melodramatic literature is also a reaction to the (apparently still ongoing) secularization of society: whilst the distinction between good and evil may have become less evident, ‘the unsettling effects of an ongoing individualization and loosening of social coherence’ have led to the return of melodrama ‘in a new jacket’. Unlike in the nineteenth century, with its belief in a universal morality, today’s melodrama is about a ‘fruitless and tragic battle for human fulfilment in an indifferent universe’.²⁷ Following in the footsteps of Brooks, Meijer places the melodramatic in the framework of individualization, secularization and modernization; a connection that reminds us of the function that Buikema and Wesseling give to the gothic novel: it is in this type of literature that the downside of modernity becomes manifest.

Thanks to Van Gorp’s study, we know about the development of the gothic novel in the Netherlands, but no research has been conducted on the melodramatic content of nineteenth-century Dutch literature; that is, if we are looking for research, following Brooks, on the influence of the melodrama on the novel. The melodrama as a theatrical genre has received some attention by historians of theatre, albeit in the margins of official history. In 2007, Frank Peeters listed the

²³ Meijer, ‘The Return of Melodrama’, p. 110.

²⁴ Meijer, ‘The Return of Melodrama’, p. 124.

²⁵ Frank Kelleter and Ruth Mayer, ‘The Melodramatic Mode Revisited: An Introduction’, in: *Melodrama! The Mode of Excess from Early America to Hollywood*, ed. by Ruth Mayer, Barbara Krah and Frank Kelleter (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007), p. 9.

²⁶ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 15.

²⁷ Meijer, ‘The Return of Melodrama’, p. 123.

ways in which this 'orphan' had been addressed in Dutch theatre histories.²⁸ Well into the twentieth century, the latter adhered to the so-called 'discourse of decline' that was formed in the nineteenth century: in the first decades after 1800, following the slow disappearance of classicist tragedy, Dutch theatre entered a period of crisis; a decline that lasted until approximately 1870, when the 'Tooneelverbond' was founded and the foundations for modern theatre were laid. According to the theatre historian J.A. Worp, melodrama, together with vaudeville, was to blame for the 'degeneracy' of Dutch theatre. In the historiography, melodrama seems to have become synonymous with what Peeters calls the 'romantic folk drama', an umbrella term used to cover much of the repertory.²⁹ As a result, the immensely popular plays by Kotzebue were also described as melodramas.³⁰

In the nineteenth century, the term was anything but unambiguous. In a neutral context, it signified a mixture of text and music, but used in a more negative fashion, it denoted a 'draak' (an overly sentimental play). Obviously, the French term *mélodrame* was sometimes translated as 'melodrama', but this practice was not consistent. As early as 1927, Van de Panne showed that the genre, translated from the French, formed an important part of the Dutch theatrical repertory. Hence, he was one of the few historians to discuss the content of the melodramas that were popular in the Netherlands, particularly in Rotterdam.³¹ More recently, researchers have found evidence of similar popularity in Leiden and The Hague.³² The Amsterdamse Schouwburg (Amsterdam theatre) seems to have banished the genre in 1820, but it lived on in the smaller theatres in the Dutch capital.³³

The thesis that melodramatic and gothic literature were 'belated phenomena' in the Netherlands deserves critical examination. Van der Hoop's adaptation of Hugo's *Han d'Islande*, in itself an amalgamation of all kinds of literary traditions, is a good starting point for a first exploration. Before analysing Van der Hoop's interpretation of Hugo's text, I will first discuss the mottos in and preface to *Han van IJsland*, in which Van der Hoop took a position in the literary and, more specifically, theatrical debate of that period.

²⁸ Frank Peeters, 'Apologie voor een weeskind, of het melodrama gewroken: Plaatsbepaling en herijking van een populair theatergenre in de Nederlandstalige theatergeschiedenis', in *Ornamenten van het vergeten*, ed. by Lucia van Heteren et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 29-42.

²⁹ Peeters, 'Apologie voor een weeskind', p. 36.

³⁰ See Klaartje Groot, *Geliefd en gevreesd. Duits toneel in Nederland rond 1800* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), p. 146.

³¹ M.C. van de Panne, *Recherches sur les rapports entre le Romantisme français et le Théâtre hollandais* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1927), pp. 102-133.

³² Cobi Bordewijk et al., *Wat geeft die Comedie toch een bemoeijing! De Leidse Schouwburg 1705-2005* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2005); Ton van Kalmthout, 'De Hollandsche Schouwburg 1804-1876', in *De koninklijke schouwburg 1804-2004: Een kleine Haagse cultuurgeschiedenis*, ed. by Paul Korenhof (Zuthphen: Walburg Pers, 2004) pp. 48-79; Jan Hein Furnée, *Plaatsen van beschaafd vertier: Standsbesef en stedelijke cultuur in Den Haag, 1850-1890* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012), chapter 7.

³³ See Henny Ruitenbeek, 'De Amsterdamse Schouwburg in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw: egalitair of elitair?', in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 120 (2004), 132-141.

Han van IJsland: a pamphlet

Like the young Victor Hugo, Adriaan van der Hoop made careful use of paratexts in his publications. In addition to lengthy prefaces, he frequently employed mottos, and not just on the title page. In *Seuils*, Gérard Genette suggests that the use of mottos became fashionable in English gothic novels and the historical novels of Walter Scott. This practice remained popular in the historical and fantastic genres until the mid-nineteenth century, whilst mottos in the somewhat later realistic novels were scarce.³⁴ Over the centuries, mottos were obviously used to clarify the title and substance of the text, but in the decades around 1800, writers also used quotations from the works of established masters, such as Shakespeare and Milton, to place the new genre of the novel in a prestigious cultural tradition. This must have played a role in Hugo's choice of mottos for *Han d'Islande*. Primarily, however, he seems to have deployed mottos strategically: by quoting Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Lessing, Schiller and Goethe, he was positioning himself in a non-classicist tradition.

In much of his poetry and prose, Van der Hoop's use of mottos was as lavish as Hugo's. Yet in the theatrical adaptation of *Han d'Islande*, he confined himself to four – three of which were placed at the beginning of the acts. They were derived from the works of Byron, Vondel and Hugo himself, and they could more or less be linked to the substance of Van der Hoop's play. The Byron motto – 'My hair is grey, but not with years' – is connected to the title and content of the first act, 'De staatsgevangene [The state prisoner]'. It is the first line of Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon*, a narrative poem from 1816 about a man who has lost his family and now pines in a Swiss prison cell. To a certain degree, his fate is similar to that of Van der Hoop's character Griffenfeldt, once the Danish grand chancellor, but now fallen out of grace. Embittered, he spends his days with his daughter in the gloomy castle of Munkholm, where much of the first act takes place.³⁵ The second act features a motto from Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*.³⁶ The quote is taken from a long monologue by a servant in the fifth act of Vondel's tragedy. The servant describes the gruesome fate of Bishop Gozewijn and the nuns of the Clarisses cloister, as they were murdered and raped by Witte van Haemstede. The title of this act of *Han van IJsland* is 'The fight', and the connoisseur would have recognized the parallel between Haemstede's misdemeanours and Han's rape of his son's mother. The motto of the third act, ominously entitled 'The fall of the wicked', is a line from Victor Hugo's notorious prose drama *Lucrèce Borgia*: 'Take these gentlemen to the adjoining room that's been prepared, make them confess and let them profit from the few moments left to save what can be saved from each of them'.³⁷ The passage comes from the third and last act of Hugo's scandalous play, when Lucrezia's son Gennaro and his friends have been poisoned by her jealous husband. Lucrezia enters the stage and offers the poisoned men a chance

³⁴ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), pp. 136-138.

³⁵ An allusion to this quote can be found in the text: when Ordener asks Griffenfeldt whether he is still the same person, Griffenfeldt answers: 'I am, noble youngling, though grief made my hair turn grey'. Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 40: 'Dat ben ik, edele jongeling, schoon de smart mijne hairen grijs deed worden'.

³⁶ 'En vat hem by den baerd met d'eeene, met den degen / Gereed in d'ander hand'. See Joost van den Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. by Mieke B. Smits-Veldt (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), p. 90.

³⁷ 'Emmenez ces gentils hommes dans la salle voisine qui est préparée, confessez-les, et profitez du peu d'instant qui leur restent pour sauver ce qui peut être encore sauvé de chacun d'eux'. See Victor Hugo, *Lucrèce Borgia* (Paris: Eugène Renduel, 1836) p. 142.

to confess their sins in their final hour. The connection between this motto and the content of Van der Hoop's adaptation seems less evident; perhaps Van der Hoop was alluding to the revenge motive.

Nowadays, Byron, Vondel and Hugo are prestigious members of the literary canon, but in 1837, a tribute to the 'romantics' Byron and Hugo was unusual in the Netherlands. It is unlikely that Van der Hoop wanted to drop names. The mottos should be seen as strategic positioning in the debate about the future of literature in general and of drama in particular. The Byron quote can be read as a tribute, although Van der Hoop also used the reference to the prison of Chillon to accentuate the gothic atmosphere of the Norwegian fortress in which Griffenfeldt and his daughter were held captive. Quoting Hugo's *Lucrece Borgia* was provocative: the *drame* in which a mother was murdered by her son, the offspring of an incestuous relation, was viewed by Dutch critics as an absolute low-point in the already immoral French theatrical repertoire.³⁸ Compared to this, the Vondel quote might seem quite innocent, were it not that it stems from the bloodiest episode in the Gijsbrecht story. The fact that the murder of the bishop and nuns was 'only' depicted by a witness fitted into a classicist tradition in which showing atrocities was considered a violation of good taste. Since the seventeenth century, however, it had become customary in performing practice to include the murder as a *tableau vivant* in the fourth act, a form that became very popular in nineteenth-century melodrama.³⁹ Notably, the Vondel and Hugo quotes contain a pronounced anti-classicist message, whereby Van der Hoop was reflecting the strategic character of the mottos used by Hugo in *Han d'Islande*.

This agenda is also manifest in the preface to *Han van IJIsland*. Van der Hoop was aware that he would spark resistance by writing a prose drama about a bloodthirsty and vindictive monster, inspired by Victor Hugo. Plays in prose had been relatively common in the Dutch theatres since the second half of the eighteenth century, but the practice had fallen into disrepute amongst neo-classicist critics around 1800. The attacks on this so-called 'middelding' by authorities such as Bilderdijk and Wiselius seem to have been very effective, at least among critics. As an alternative, they pleaded for a national theatre in the classicist tradition.⁴⁰ Amongst theatremakers, their influence may have been limited – with the exception of the Amsterdamse Schouwburg, which presented a neo-classicist programme after 1820 – but Bilderdijk and Wiselius seem to have enjoyed major influence over the critics who wrote for periodicals.

Van der Hoop did not name names in the preface, but he explicitly addressed those people 'who attack the so-called romantic theatre of our days' and 'those who [...] themselves, when writing plays, followed the old French school as legislator until now, and who called themselves classicists'.⁴¹ These classicists mistakenly believed that writing a 'play in prose' in the spirit of 'Lessing, Schiller and Victor Hugo' was easier than rhyming a tragedy in alexandrines. According to Van der Hoop, the current 'classicist school' consisted of epigones who were only shades of the

³⁸ See Wim van den Berg, 'Les horreurs de romantisme français', in *George Sand lue à l'étranger*, ed. by Suzan van Dijk (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1995) p. 122.

³⁹ See Ben Albach, 'De vertoning van de kloostermoorden in "Gijsbrecht van Amstel"', *Literatuur*, 4 (1987), 328-335.

⁴⁰ See Lotte Jensen, 'In verzet tegen "Duitschlands klatergoud": Pleidooien voor een nationaal toneel, 1800-1840', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 122 (2006), 289-303.

⁴¹ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJIsland*, p. VII: 'die tegen de zoogenoemde romantische tooneelpoezij onzer dagen te velde trekken' [...] 'die genen [...] die zelf de dramatische poezij beoefenende, tot hier toe de oude Fransche school als wetgeefster volgden, en zich classici noemen'.

original geniuses, amongst whom he included Shakespeare, Schiller and Müllner, and also Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides: ‘a standstill in art [means] decline’, and this also applied when sticking to the classicist tradition.⁴²

The stigma of immorality clinging to romantic theatre (and thus to Van der Hoop) had arisen from a lack of knowledge, and could be countered easily:

In his glorious creations, Shakespeare preaches virtue as well as Racine in his neat art. In proud gothic halls, with their impressive arches, corridors and galleries, the hymn often sounds more majestic and solemn than in the graceful temple halls embellished with their Corinthian and Ionian pillars.⁴³

By using these architectural metaphors, Van der Hoop implicitly clarified that to him, as to Hugo, the romantic tradition was synonymous with the non-classicist one, and that this counter-culture was not restricted to the nineteenth century.

Not without rhetoric ingenuity, Van der Hoop defended his view by quoting unlikely sources. When opposing those critics who might consider Van der Hoop’s Han an inappropriate hero, he did not refer to Hugo’s plea for the grotesque, but to the poetics of the classicist authority Boileau: ‘Il n’est point de monstre odieux / Qui par l’art imité ne puisse plaire aux yeux’.⁴⁴ And when arguing that his drama offered both the useful and the agreeable, he did not allude to Boileau or Horace, but to Victor Hugo, the ‘Byron of French literature’:

Be charmed by a play, but let it also contain an important lesson, a lesson, that beams through the sensuous performance, however lively, terrific, passionate or beautifully dressed up in gold, silver and velvet it may be. Every truly beautiful play needs a serious notion, as much as the prettiest woman contains a skeleton.⁴⁵

Illustrating a Horatian rule with a macabre and grotesque image matched this plea for romantic drama remarkably well.

⁴² Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, pp. VII-VIII: ‘stilstand in de kunst [is] achteruitgang’. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the name Müllner may come as a surprise. Van der Hoop was well acquainted with the works of this German writer of popular ‘Schicksalstragödien’. See Jan Konst, “‘Waar ik gedwongen word als moordenaar te handelen’: Adriaan van der Hoops *Hugo en Elvire* (1831) en *Die Schuld* (1813) van Adolf Müllner”, *Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 11 (2006), 23-43.

⁴³ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. VIII: ‘Shakespeare preekt zoo wel de deugd in zijne reuzige scheppingen, als Racine in zijne keurige kunstgewrochten. In de trotsche Gotische hallen, met indrukwekkende boogen en gangen en gallerijen des eersten, klinkt de hymnus, dikwerf statiger en plechtiger, dan in de nette, met Corintische en Jonische zuilen versierde tempelzalen des anderen’.

⁴⁴ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. IX. In a somewhat extended version, the quote can also be found on the title page. ‘There’s not a Monster bred beneath the Sky / But, well dispos’d by Art, may please the Eye’ (Translation from Dryden, 1683).

⁴⁵ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. X: ‘Laat u vrij door een tooneelspel wegslepen; maar dat het altijd eene groote les bevatte, eene les, welke men altijd kan zien doorstralen in de zinnelijke voorstelling, hoe levendig, hoe verrukkelijk, hoe dichtelijk, hoe hartstochtelijk, hoe prachtiglijk in goud, zilver en fluweel die ook zij opgetooid. Elk waarachtig schoon drama moet een ernstig begrip ten grondslag hebben, even zeer als de schoonste vrouw in zich een geraamte bevat’. The French original is found in: Victor Hugo, *Angelo, tyran de Padoue* (Paris: Librairie Ollendorff, 1905), p. 6.

Van der Hoop placed his own 'dramatic tableau' in a non-classicist and hence romantic tradition, but the labelling of the genre to which his adaptation belonged shows the confusion that surrounded plays that did not fit into the classical tradition of tragedies and comedies. Van der Hoop had written a 'drama', he stressed:

A drama, I repeat; but not a play along the lines of Iffland's meritorious family scenes full of knowledge of man, or the witty characterizations and *tableaux de genre* of the clever Kotzebue; nor a play by the melodramatist Pixericourt or the unbridled Alexandre Dumas, but a performance I would have liked, had I been permitted, to give a French name, and then I would have called it *le roman en action*.⁴⁶

Van der Hoop was thus explicitly distancing himself from the melodramatic genre à la Pixericourt. Was this justified and if so, does this also mean that *Han van IJsland* lacked a melodramatic mode?

Han van IJsland: a melodrama?

Two French adaptations

The story of Victor Hugo's *Han d'Islande* takes place against a background of sinister 'premodern' locations, including an isolated fortress, a mortuary and gothic ruins. Along the lines of the early gothic novel and melodrama, the heroes of the novel are tormented by immoral villains. The gothic novel was very popular in English and French theatre circles, and the texts – from Walpole's *The Caste of Otranto* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – enjoyed a second life as melodramas.⁴⁷ It is, hence, not surprising that Hugo's debut novel was also adapted. *Han d'Islande* was given its premiere on 25 January 1832 in the French temple of the genre, the Parisian Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique.⁴⁸ The title page of the printed version of this adaptation features three writers (Palmir, Octo and Rameau), along with a composer, stage designer and choreographer: it was clearly a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. From the text alone, this is not immediately obvious. At second glance, however, one notices that the second act begins with a village fair, including a ballet. And at the end of the play, we encounter a macabre drinking song: a soldier sings about travellers' relief that the monster Han has finally been captured and awaits execution. In terms of form, it is striking that the play consists of three acts, like most melodramas of that time, and that four crucial moments of the drama are highlighted as *tableaux vivants*.

⁴⁶ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. VII: 'Een drama, zeg ik; maar geen tooneelspel in den trant van de verdienstelijke familie-tafereelen van den menschkundigen Iffland, of de vernuftige karakter-schilderingen en tableaux de genre van den geestigen Kotzebue; maar eene voorstelling, die evenzeer verwijderd van den Mélodramatist Pixericourd [sic], en den teugelloozen Alexandre Dumas, door mij, indien het mij vergund ware, haar een Franschen naam te geven, le roman en action zou genoemd worden'. An adaptation of Balzac's *La peau de chagrin* also appeared as 'roman en action'. See Simonnin and Théodore N., *La peau de chagrin, ou le roman en action, extravagance romantique, comédie-vaudeville en trois actes* (Paris: Quoy, 1832).

⁴⁷ Jeffrey N. Cox, 'English Gothic Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 126.

⁴⁸ Palmir, Octo and Rameau, *Han d'Islande, mélodrame en trois actes et en huit tableaux* (Paris: J.N. Barba, 1832).

As far as the content of the play is concerned, *Han d'Islande* fits the melodramatic genre due to the quick succession of scenes. The public is treated to a thunderstorm, sensational fights and scenes with bloodthirsty predators (a wolf and a polar bear). Dramatic scenes full of sublime exclamations are alternated with farcical conversations. As one would expect, the plot of Hugo's lengthy novel has been compressed: various characters have disappeared and the title character, Han, has become the protagonist. Almost every scene features Han, sometimes in disguise; in itself, typical of melodrama. As in the novel, the young Ordener is trying to free Harald, the former grand chancellor, and his daughter, Ordener's fiancée, from their imprisonment. He pursues Han as the latter wanders through the Norwegian mountain landscape, believing that Han is in possession of a casket of documents that can prove Harald's innocence. Harald is accused by 'le comte d'Alefeld', his successor, of encouraging the mine workers to rebel against the Danish king. The highlight of the plot – the fight between Han and Ordener – ends in an anticlimax: Han no longer has the casket. In the penultimate scene of the melodrama, Han comes forward with the now-retrieved casket, thus preventing Harald's execution; and it is also Han who sensationally avenges himself upon Alefeld, the evil genius behind the conspiracy against Harald.

In melodrama, even more so than in other theatrical genres, the emphasis is on 'showing' rather than 'telling'. This is clearly evident in the 1832 adaptation of *Han d'Islande*: Han appears on stage with ominous claws, an unruly beard and dressed in animal skins. The thunderstorm, the strangling of a wolf, armed clashes and the burning down of a gaol are not described, as in a classicist tragedy, but staged, undoubtedly with the aid of the newest theatrical techniques. Precisely because of this, it is striking that the revolt by the mine workers, an important episode in Hugo's novel, is only superficially discussed by one of the soldiers involved: the depiction of a rebellion was probably considered too explosive so soon after the July Revolution.

The plot of the 1832 melodrama differs only slightly from the narrative of the novel. As indicated, Han plays an even more central role than in Hugo's novel, which may reflect the fact that one of the authors – Francisque Hutin, alias Palmir – was playing Han. Likewise, the *tableaux vivants* only concern Han's mischief. The level of horror is high: Han roars and laughs loudly, and shocks the other characters by appearing unexpectedly or dropping his disguise. As is fitting in a melodrama, virtue ultimately triumphs. In this play, however, this happens in the penultimate scene, while the finale is reserved for Han, who drags the hated soldiers of Munckholm with him to their deaths. The political conflict (between Alefeld and his predecessor, Harald) and the romantic plot (Ordener's love for Esilda, Harald's daughter) are overshadowed by this premodern monster's quest for revenge.

A rather different approach was taken in the poet Gérard de Nerval's 1829 adaptation of Hugo's novel. Like the 1832 play, Nerval's play is a 'mélodrame en trois actes'.⁴⁹ Nerval offered the play to the same Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique, which would stage the premiere of Palmir, Oco and Rameau's melodrama. Jacques Bony suspects that Nerval foresaw that his adaptation would not make it past the censors in the tense situation on the eve of the July Revolution. Unlike the 1832 play, the revolt of the mine workers is central to Nerval's melodrama. The miners are sincere in their struggle for freedom and their indignation at the high taxes imposed on them in name of the Danish king. Here, they are the victims of Machiavellian administrators trying to extend their power over the workers. Unlike the 1832 play, those involved in the conspiracy

⁴⁹ Gérard de Nerval, *Han d'Islande (d'après Victor Hugo)*, ed. by Jacques Bony (Paris: Édition Kimé, 2007).

against Tonsberg – the name that Nerval used for Griffenfeld – all appear on stage: Ahlefeld, his secretary Musdoemon (the archetype of the malicious adviser), and a pseudo Han, who leads the rebels because the real Han refused to do so.

In addition to this political storyline, Nerval also developed the romantic plot: soon after the beginning of the play, there is a long and touching love scene between Gustvave (Ordener) and Ethel, and near the end, Ethel proves to be a true heroine when she abandons her claim to Gustave in order to rescue him from execution. All in all, Nerval's play is an ensemble piece, and the title character is less omnipresent than in the 1832 version.

With this more thorough characterization, Nerval gave his version of *Han d'Islande* a psychological depth that was uncommon in melodrama. Aside from this, however, Nerval's play contains many ingredients typical of the genre. Nerval also added a song: during a village fair – a group scene with miners, hunters and villagers – a peasant sings a ballad about Han, in which every verse ends with the line 'Han! Han! Han! Han!'.⁵⁰ It is the cry uttered time and again by Nerval's Han, thereby becoming a leitmotif and an identification mark. In this version, the scenes likewise end with a moment of suspense, and at the end of every act there is a *tableau vivant*. There is also a lot of spectacle: apart from the fight between the soldiers and the miners, the final scene in particular stands out, with a fire and even an explosion at the prison and barracks in which the soldiers are locked up. As in the 1832 version, Han, climbing to the top of the tower, has the final say:

Han! Han! Han!.. These keys ensure me that nobody can open the gates to the barracks.. and from here, I can watch them perish,.. Yes, all of them.. Until the last one!.. Oh, my son, you're avenged now!... (*a violent explosion is heard and the tower tumbles into the flames.*)⁵¹

Nerval also combined sublime scenes full of exclamations with the grotesque and burlesque, albeit in his version, the farce is limited to a scene in an old tower, where an executioner lives with his family. In particular, the opportunism and pedantry of the gravedigger Spiagudry, who in both French adaptations plays the role of the *niais* or simpleton, makes for comic situations. Compared with the 1832 version, Nerval paid more attention to appropriateness: the macabre scene near the morgue was omitted (Spiagudry only reports Han's violation of his son's corpse), and this was also the case for the scenes with wild animals.

The two French adaptations of *Han d'Islande* may contain disparities, but both serve as illustrations of melodramatic theatre practice in Paris around 1830. The question is, to what extent did Van der Hoop's adaptation relate to these *mélodrames*? When, in 1902, the Groningen professor Van Hamel became one of the first scholars to study the Dutch reception of the works of Victor Hugo, he assumed that Van der Hoop's *Han van IJIsland* was probably a more or less free translation of the melodrama by Palmir, Octo and Rameau.⁵² An initial analysis of Van der Hoop's play immediately shows that this is not the case: the Dutch text is much longer, Van der

⁵⁰ Nerval, *Han d'Islande*, pp. 40-41.

⁵¹ Nerval, *Han d'Islande*, p. 103: 'Han! Han! Han!... Ces clefs m'assurent qu'on ne pourra ouvrir les grilles de la Caserne.. et d'ici, je vais donc les voir tous périr,... Oui, tous... Jusqu'au dernier !... O mon fils te voilà vengé !... (*Une violente explosion se fait entendre et la tour s'abîme dans les flammes.*)'

⁵² A.G. van Hamel, 'Navolgingen en vertalingen van Victor Hugo in Nederland', in *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde* (1902), pp. 60-61.

Hoop included many more characters and episodes from Hugo's novel, and he adapted the novel more freely. But can *Han van IJsland* nevertheless be considered a melodrama?

Van der Hoop's adaptation

The main lines of Hugo's novel are maintained in Van der Hoop's *Han van IJsland*: in a savage landscape, Ordener van Guldenleeuw pursues the 'monster' Han, because he believes the latter to possess a casket of documents proving the innocence of his future father-in-law, Griffenfeldt, the former Danish chancellor driven to disgrace by a conspiracy, and now imprisoned in the castle of Munckholm, near the Norwegian city of Drontheim. The current chancellor, the Count of Ahlfeldt, feels threatened by Griffenfeldt's continued popularity. He tries to get rid of his enemy by accusing him of instigating a miners' revolt against the Danish king. Ordener fails to find the casket, but eventually, during the trial of Griffenfeldt and the insurgents, the casket emerges as a sort of *deus ex machina*. Han, Ahlfeldt and his accomplice Musdoemon are caught, while Griffenfeldt regains his old status.

When comparing the Dutch *Han* to the French *mélodrames*, one immediately notices that Van der Hoop's play contains more figurative language: it is written in prose, but the author has added an ample number of tropes and similes. The sublime stylistic register is seldom varied with comic or grotesque passages. As mentioned above, in both *mélodrames* the pedantic gravedigger Spiagudry plays the role of the *niais* or simpleton. The most farcical scene (in the novel and in the French adaptations) takes place in the household of the executioner, where Spiagudry's cowardice is exposed. None of these features in Van der Hoop's play, however; the scene is simply left out.

Compared to the French adaptations, the Dutch play contains fewer spectacular scenes: the miners' revolt is not staged and Han's ultimate revenge, setting fire to the prison, is absent. There are no *tableaux vivants*, either: the six 'parts' end in relatively restrained fashion, sometimes even with a monologue. There is no village fair with a ballet in *Han van IJsland*. There is music, though: Aleide, Griffenfeldt's daughter, sings a song accompanying herself on the harp, there is a miners' choir at the end of the second act, and in the third act, the bier of Frederik, Ahlfeldt's son, is brought on stage to the sound of a funeral march. Unlike the French playwrights, Van der Hoop made very few cuts to the number of characters in Hugo's novel, which was of course only possible because his play was more extensive. Even more so than Nerval's adaptation, *Han van IJsland* is an ensemble piece. The shock element, typical of the gothic novel and melodrama, is not lacking, but Van der Hoop was more interested in dramatic confrontations between the characters than in 'cliffhangers' or spectacle.

One example of this is the role that Van der Hoop gave to the wife of the traitor, Ahlfeldt: the countess is a tragic, Lady Macbeth-like figure who does not fit into the black-and-white scheme of melodrama. As a young woman, she was seduced by Musdoemon, Ahlfeldt's secretary and the evil genius behind the political plot. Her son Frederik, an officer in the Danish army, is probably the fruit of this extramarital relationship. Frederik has become a dandyish beau, a spoilt boy who cares little about his mother. The countess initially supports her husband in his devious plans, but she also has doubts, all the more so when her son has to fight the miners. When Ahlfeldt promises her a future at his side in which she will be 'the most distinguished lady in the land', she contradicts him:

All these magnificent images of greatness cannot shut out of my soul the idea that we are showing a play in which people's lives are put at risk, including that of our son.⁵³

She fears that 'eternal justice' will thwart their future plans. When her husband cynically brushes this aside, she lashes out at him:

Unfeeling man! Your doubting mockery cannot destroy the feelings of motherly care in my bosom. The frosty breath of your politics is not that mighty.⁵⁴

At the end of the play, when she receives the message that her son actually died – Frederik is killed by Han – she collapses. Van der Hoop's countess is a lost woman whose conscience tells her that she and her husband are wrong; no less remarkable because the countess in Hugo's novel shows no sign of repentance.

In addition to the countess, Musdoemon, her former lover, is also given a larger role in Van der Hoop's adaptation; a noteworthy development, because this *traître* is absent from the Parisian melodrama of 1832. In Hugo's novel, Musdoemon is the archetypal intriguer: he feeds his master's lust for power and helps him to plot against 'le comte Griffenfeld'. They try to outdo one another in their villainy:

A private interview between two scoundrels is never long, because all that is human in their souls quickly takes alarm at the infernal qualities revealed. When two depraved spirits mutually display their naked vices, each is disgusted by the other's iniquity. Crime itself revolts at crime; and two evil-doers conversing, with all the cynicism of intimacy, of their pleasures and their interests, are like a fearful mirror, each reflecting the other's monstrous features.⁵⁵

Musdoemon is the executioner's brother, and his humble background proves a hindrance to his career. Ironically, at the end of the novel he ends up in a prison cell, where he is killed by this same brother, who reproaches him for ignoring his poor family. This social motive is extended in Van der Hoop's adaptation. Ahlfeldt, for instance, leaves us in no doubt about his disdain for Musdoemon and his origins:

Musdoemon, your brother is a hangman in Skongen, and your father was a groom in Sleswijk, while your mother was acquainted with the iron necklace on the market field. You

⁵³ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 122: 'Al die schitterende beelden der grootheid kunnen het denkbeeld niet uit mijne ziel weren, dat wij een tooneelspel vertoonen, waarin door onze eerezucht menschen levens op het spel worden gezet, waaronder dat van onzen Zoon behoort'.

⁵⁴ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 123: 'Gevoellooze! uwe twijfelende spotternij kan het gevoel der moederlijke bezorgdheid in mijnen boezem niet vernietigen. Zoo almachtig is de ijsskoude adem uwer staatkunde niet'.

⁵⁵ Hugo, *Han d'Islande*, pp. 178-179: 'L'entretien intime de deux scélérats n'est jamais long, parce que ce qu'il y a d'homme en eux s'effraie bien vite de ce qu'il y a d'inferral. Quand deux âmes perverses s'étalent réciproquement leur impudique nudité, leurs mutuelles laideurs les révoltent. Le crime fait horreur au crime même ; et deux méchants qui conversent, avec tout le cynisme du tête-à-tête, de leurs passions, de leurs plaisirs, de leurs intérêts, se sont l'un à l'autre comme un effroyable miroir'. The English translation: Victor Hugo, 'Hans of Iceland' (translated by A. Langdon Alger), in Victor Hugo, *Complete Works* (Delphi Classics, 2011) p. 509.

imagine all too easily that time threw a veil over the jewellery of your pedigree: that veil is as transparent as the haze of flattery that you use to embellish your insolence against me!⁵⁶

This contempt is also manifest in the way Musdoemon is treated: when he enters the stage for the first time, he is offended in turn by his master Ahlfeldt, the son Frederik and the countess, his former mistress. Left to his own devices, he decides:

[...] war has started: I will fight with deceit and violence [...].

(he takes a booklet to write in it.)

The moment I strike out these names on this parchment, a bloody game for heads will have come to an end.⁵⁷

When Frederik is killed by Han, Musdoemon can cross out the first name in his booklet. The countess can be crossed off his list when she loses her wits. And when Musdoemon's misdeeds finally come to light, he does not hesitate – unlike at the end of Hugo's novel – to drag Ahlfeldt with him. Han van IJsland's rancour is mirrored, at least in Van der Hoop's version of the story, by Musdoemon's thirst of revenge.

The most drastic transformation is that of Widow Stadt, the mother of Han's son. This character is absent from both French *mélodrames*. Van der Hoop, on the other hand, expanded her role, and it will have been no coincidence that he gave her an extra name, Norna, thus referring to the Scandinavian Norns or Fates. This Norna is already prominent in the opening scene near the morgue, 'dressed in a mantle [...] meditating on a rock near a lamppost'. A fisherman fails to recognize her, he says, because after the death of Carroll, her husband, she never left home. Norna reacts in a fury:

Never left home? – Who tells you so? Did you witness how often after Carroll's death I wandered on the beach, fantasizing, unbridled as a seagull, whose wild flight and hoarse screeching predicted a storm? Were you there when at dawn I climbed the rocks hand in hand with my young Gill, showing him the tower of Drontheim, and making him look at the black roof of this house, in which he is now displayed, cold and covered in blood, in front of the tearless eyes of an insensitive mob?⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 76: 'Musdoemon, uw broeder is beul te Skongen, en uw vader was rijknecht te Sleswijk, terwijl uwe moeder te Bergen met den ijzeren karkant op het marktveld kennis maakte. Gij verbeeldt u lichtvaardig, dat de tijd een sluier over deze sieraden van uwen stamboom heeft geworpen: die sluier is even doordringbaar als het waas der vleierij, waarmede gij uwe onbeschaamdheid te mij waarts opsiert!'

⁵⁷ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 73: '[...] de oorlog is begonnen: ik wil dien voeren met list en geweld [...]. (Hij neemt een zakboekje en schrijft er in.) Wanneer ik deze namen op het perkament doorhaal, dan zal er een bloedig spel omhoofden hebben plaats gehad.'

⁵⁸ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, pp. 5-6: 'Nooit verlaten? - Wie zegt u dat? Zijt gij getuige geweest, hoe dikwerf ik na het verscheiden van Carroll aan het strand heb gezworven, met denkbeelden, even teugeloos als de zeemeeuw, wiens wilde vlucht en schor gekrijsch mij storm voorspelde? Waart gij er bij, als ik in den morgenstond, met den jeugdigen Gill aan de hand de rotsen beklom, en hem den toren van Drontheim wees, en den blik deed vestigen op het zwarte dak dezer woning, waar hij thands koud en bloedig ten toon ligt voor het tranenlooze oog eener ongevoelige menigte?'

After this opening scene, Norna decides to seek refuge with a hermit, thereby disregarding Spiagudry's warning that Han van IJsland was said to be lingering in the neighbourhood. How, Norna ripostes, could this 'demon in human shape' dare to wander near such a 'good spirit'? In the second act, in the most horrifying scene of Van der Hoop's play, Norna reaches the hermitage, and in a long monologue tells how several omens had frightened her, but they could not prevent her from confessing to the hermit. Norna tells this recluse how, 25 years ago, just after her marriage to Carroll, she was attacked in a valley by a 'man with a stupendous appearance, draped in a lion skin', who then raped her: 'the mysterious criminal easily conquered the quivering nerves of a seventeen-year-old and triumphed diabolically'.⁵⁹ The son, to whom she gave birth 'forty weeks' after this calamity, frightened her. In the following years, the rapist appeared in her dreams,

and conceived flames of lust as well as an icy disgust in my burning blood. Then it felt as if, (oh God, forgive a weak sinner!) his infectious breath haunted me with the balminess of sulphur, and his lips pressed the disgraceful sign of instinct on my forehead.⁶⁰

Great is the shock when Han suddenly appears from under the recluse's habit. With the help of a crucifix, she keeps the monster away:

Norna
beside herself
 Phantom of my Carroll, defend me against this monster!
(she takes a crucifix from her bosom and shows it to Han van IJsland)
 In the name of my Saviour, leave me alone!

Han van IJsland
wants to grab her, but at the same moment, after a flash of lightning, a sudden crash of thunder echoes against the rocks, and he screams
 Norna, are you in contact with mighty ghosts?

Norna
stately and encouraged
 Son of the abyss, it is Heaven that spoke. Now I no longer fear your influence.
*(She leaves with measured steps and a noble posture)*⁶¹

⁵⁹ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 82: 'Den geheimzinnigen misdadiger viel het niet zwaar op de sidderende zenuwen van een zeventien jarig meisje eene helsche zegepraal te bevechten'.

⁶⁰ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 84: 'en verwekte in mijn brandend bloed beurtelings vlammen der lust, en ijsstroomen der afschuwing. Dan was het vaak, (ô God, vergeef het der zwakke zondares!) als of zijn besmettende adem, mij nog met zwavelzoelte omwaasemde, en zijne lippen het schandmerk der driften op mijn voorhoofd drukten'.

⁶¹ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 86: 'NORNA, *buiten zich zelve*. Schim van mijn CAROLL, bescherm mij tegen het monster! (*Zij haalt een crucifix uit haren boezem en houdt het HAN VAN IJSLAND voor.*) In naam van mijnen Heiland, laat af van mij! HAN VAN IJSLAND, *wil haar aangrijpen, op hetzelfde oogenblik doet een plotselinge donderslag de rotsen weêrgalmen, nadat een heldere bliksemstraal den omtrek verlichtte, waarop hij krijsschend uitroept*. Norna, staat gij met machtige geesten in verband? NORNA, *plechtig en bemoedigd*. Zoon des afgronds, de hemel heeft gesproken. Thands vrees ik uwen invloed niet meer. (*Zij vertrekt met afgemeten treden en eene edele houding.*)'

Without doubt, this is the most melodramatic scene in the play. After this brave performance, Norna appears only twice more: as a prophetess and as a sort of guardian angel to the hero Ordener.

As a result, the shocking and emotive character of Van der Hoop's play results less from staged violence or disasters, than from the 'sex offences' in his adaptation: Musdoemon insensitively reminding the countess of the way he seduced her, and Han cruelly confronting Norna with the night when he raped her. Both scenes are absent from the French *mélodrames*. In particular, the countess, with her tragic motherly love and conscientious scruples, reminds us of Lucrezia Borgia, the eponymous heroine of Hugo's play from which Van der Hoop derived one of his mottos. In this respect, but also in terms of form, Van der Hoop's *Han van IJsland* resembles Hugo's *dramas en prose* more than the melodramas of Nerval and Palmir, Octo and Rameau.

If *Han van IJsland* cannot be considered a *mélodrame* in the French tradition, however, does this also mean that we cannot identify a 'melodramatic mode' in this play? Brooks has already observed that French romantic theatre had much in common with the melodramatic tradition of the early nineteenth century: in the plays of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, the Manichaean struggle between good and evil is just as central.⁶² Compared to a melodramatist such as Pixierécourt, the romantics perhaps granted their characters more psychological profundity, but the essence of melodrama – according to Brooks, the ritual confirmation of morality, by staging the victory of a virtuous hero or heroine over an immoral villain – can be found in many *dramas romantiques* as well, and as such designates the breach with classicist tragedy in which the hero is confronted with a depersonalized, transcendental fate. This Brooksonian essence is undeniably present in Van der Hoop's *Han van IJsland*, not only in the unambiguous reckoning with evil at the end of the play, but also in the melodramatic confrontation between Han and Norna: the way she resists the monster by holding up a crucifix is more or less a melodramatic cliché. It is in this scene that the melodramatic 'mode of excess and overstatement' is most apparent, including the crash of thunder that underlines Han's moral defeat.

With this clear triumph of virtue, *Han van IJsland* fits into the melodramatic tradition. This motif is derived in part from Hugo's novel, but Van der Hoop accentuates this triumph because, unlike Hugo, he has the villains Han, Ahlfeld and Musdoemon arrested by soldiers, while the assembled people cheer. The monster Han, the last descendant of a barbaric race, is actually an ambiguous character: there can be no doubt as to his treachery, but his villainy is of different nature from that of Ahlfeld and Musdoemon, the *traîtres* of the story. Unlike them, Han is a victim of the doom that haunts his race, and he is exclusively driven by misanthropy and revenge. The count and his servant strive for wealth and power, an end that they believe to justify every means. Musdoemon's misconduct shocks even Han, who with his last words distances himself from his kind:

Monster! You justify the rage with which I pursued your race. While I as a child of fate made victims, you tried to ruin body and soul. No, you have not earned the honour of kneeling at

⁶² Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Chapter 4, 'Melodrama and Romantic Dramatization', pp. 81-109.

the same scaffold where I will expand my last breath. I will be my own judge, to save me from this insult.⁶³

One could interpret Han, like most other apparitions and monsters in gothic novels, as representative of a repressed past. Hugo incorporated this motif into his novel by making the dandyish Frédéric, the son of the Count of Ahlefeld, fantasize about the ways in which he could alter the story of Han into a gallant historical novel à la *Clélie* by Madeleine de Scudéry:

It seems to me [...] that the adventures of Hans would make a delicious romance, after the style of Mademoiselle de Scudéry's sublime stories, 'Aramenes' or 'Clelia', only six volumes of which latter I have yet read, but it is none the less a masterpiece in my eyes. Of course we should have to soften our climate, dress up our traditions, and modify our barbarous names. For instance, Throndhjem, which I should call 'Durtinianum', should see its forests converted, by a touch of my magic wand, into delightful groves watered by a thousand streamlets far more poetic than our hideous torrents. Our dark, deep caves should give place to charming grottos carpeted with gilded pebbles and azure shells. In one of these grottos should live a famous magician, Haunus of Thule. For you must own that the name Hans of Iceland is by no means agreeable. This giant, - you must feel that it would be absurd not to make the hero of such a work a giant, this giant - should descend in a direct line from the god Mars (Ingulf the Destroyer affords no food for imagination [...]).⁶⁴

The premodern monster is not easily transformed into a classicist hero, however: in disguise, he emerges everywhere, and ultimately disrupts the Machiavellian schemes of Griffenfeld's enemies. The civilized villains, who represent classicist culture, are beaten by a barbaric, grotesque being. This gothic motif is given a strategic connotation by Frédéric's reference to *Clélie*. By including Frédéric's reference, a scene left out by the French adaptors, Van der Hoop once again stressed his 'romantic' kinship with Hugo.

In Han's story, as in most gothic and melodramatic literature, the friction between tradition and modernity is implicit: it is a matter of interpretation. But there is a crisis, another motif that literary scholars associate with the gothic and melodramatic: peace in the Danish empire is jeopardized by a vicious conspiracy and, perhaps even more explosively, an insurrection by dissatisfied miners revolting against royal authority. Staging rebellion was a thorny issue in

⁶³ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, p. 152: 'Monster! gij rechtvaardigt de woede, waarmede ik uw geslacht vervolgde. Waar ik als een kind des noodlots offers maakte, zocht gij ziel en ligchaam te verderven. Neen, gij verdient de eere niet met mij voor hetzelfde blok geknield den adem uit te blazen. Ik zal zelf mijn rechter moeten wezen, om mij te bewaren voor dien smaad'.

⁶⁴ Hugo, *Han d'Islande*, pp. 112-113: 'Il me semble, [...] que les aventures de Han pourraient fournir un roman délicieux, dans le genre des sublimes écrits de la damoiselle Scudéry, l'Artamène ou la Clélie, dont je n'ai encore lu que six volumes, mais qui n'en est pas moins un chef d'œuvre à mes yeux. Il faudrait, par exemple, adoucir notre climat, orner nos traditions, modifier nos noms barbares. Ainsi Drontheim, qui deviendra Durtinianum, verrait ses forêts se changer, sous ma baguette magique, en des bosquets délicieux, arrosés de mille petits ruisseaux, bien autrement poétiques que nos vilains torrents. Nos cavernes noires et profondes feraient place à des grottes charmantes, tapissées de rocailles dorées et de coquillages d'azur. Dans l'une de ces grottes habiterait un célèbre enchanteur, Hannus de Thulé... — Car vous conviendrez que le nom de Han d'Islande ne flatte pas l'oreille. — Ce géant... — vous sentez qu'il serait absurde que le héros d'un tel ouvrage ne fût pas un géant — ce géant descendrait en ligne droite du dieu Mars... — Ingolphe l'exterminateur ne présente rien à l'imagination [...]. English translation from: Hugo, 'Hans of Iceland', pp. 463-464.

nineteenth-century Europe, and this was probably why the authors of the 1832 adaptation refrained from doing so; unlike Nerval, whose play was probably rejected by the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique for this very reason. Van der Hoop did not dare to do so either. In his adaptation, although the miners set out for battle with the Danish soldiers, they do not fight, but sing:

To arms, sons of the Norwegian race,
 Controllers of the obscure mines!
 To arms! Thus may in your sombre night
 Freedom's sunlight shine again.
 To arms, to show the King of the Danes
 He reigns now over civilians, not slaves.

[...]

To arms! with my drawbar, spade and pickaxe
 We will defy musket fire and sword,
 And batter as long as possible the offensive harness,
 Until we regain our freedom;
 Then we bow our heads, and honour the monarch,
 Who reigns over brave civilians, not slaves.⁶⁵

As befitting a monarchist, in the final lines of this song, Van der Hoop stressed that the miners were not striving for the king's abdication. It was only due to the ignorance of the king, living far away in Denmark, that power-hungry administrators could threaten the status quo. In Van der Hoop's play, the characters who put their trust in divine providence – Norna and Ordener – disrupt their evil plans.⁶⁶ The tale shows how easily an injustice (the slavery of the miners) and the resulting discontent can be misused by people to provoke rebellion, and thereby strengthen their power. In this sense, Van der Hoop's conservative interpretation of Han's story was actually no different from that of the young Hugo, who was a convinced 'ultra' at the time of *Han d'Islande*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Van der Hoop, *Han van IJsland*, pp. 100-101: 'Te wapen, gij zonen van 't Noorsche geslacht,/ Beheerschers der duistere mijnen!/ Te wapen! zoo moog in uw sombere nacht/ Het zonlicht der vrijheid weêr schijnen./ Te wapen, den Koning der Deenen geleerd,/ Dat hij voortaan burgers, geen slaven regeert. [...] Te wapen! met mijn dissel, spade en houweel/ Weêrstaan wij musketvuur en degen,/ En beuken zoo lang op 't ons knellend gareel,/ Tot dat we onze vrijheid herkgreen;/ Dan buigen wij 't hoofd, en de Vorst wordt vereerd,/ Die moedige burgers, geen slaven regeert'.

⁶⁶ 'Divine providence' is not mentioned as often as in the other works of Van der Hoop, but it is his addition: in Hugo's novel, the term 'providence' is not used. See Konst, "Waar ik gedwongen word als moordenaar te handelen".

⁶⁷ See Pierre Laforgue, 1830. *Romantisme et histoire* (Paris: Eurédit, 2001), '*Han d'Islande*, roman ultra, ou littérature, idéologie et romantisme', pp. 145-166.

The 'melodramatic mode' revisited

In research on early nineteenth-century Dutch literature, the idea predominates that genres such as the gothic novel and melodrama did not feature, or seldom featured, in the Netherlands. Only much later would this change, and Dutch melodrama has thus been described as a 'belated phenomenon'. But is this really the case? We already know that these genres were discussed and read in translation, and the example of Van der Hoop's *Han van IJsland* shows that gothic and melodramatic traditions can also be traced in original texts. Applying the Brooksian concept of the 'melodramatic mode' can be useful when understanding a text such as Van der Hoop's adaptation of Hugo's debut novel.

This is not surprising, in fact, when one acknowledges that the gothic novel and the melodrama were related to, or stemmed from, the cult of sensibility or emotionalism in the second half of the eighteenth century; a phenomenon that also made its mark in the Netherlands. Domestic ('burgerlijke' or 'civil') plays, poems and novels were seen as instruments in the development of this sensibility, and thus of the moral education of citizens.⁶⁸ Certainly when it came to the stage, this emotionalism was at odds with the classicist tradition.

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, this cult of sensibility seems to have come under attack, as illustrated not only by increasing criticism of melodrama, but also of domestic novels and poems.⁶⁹ Emotionalism was associated with infatuation, straining for effect and cliché. In particular, Dutch theatrical criticism of the first decades of the nineteenth century revolved around a reappraisal of classicism: good taste had to be defended against trivialization and popularization.

According to Brooks, French romantic drama can be seen as an attempt to make the emotionalist melodrama of the first decades of the nineteenth century 'salonfähig'; in a sense, Hugo was picking up the threads left by emotionalist theorists of theatre, such as Diderot or Mercier, if only because nineteenth-century melodrama received almost no theoretical attention at all. In the Netherlands, too, anti-classicist tendencies received more attention around 1830, when critics were confronted with Hugo's pamphlets. In this respect, Van der Hoop is important, because he was one of the first mainstream authors – by which I mean writers whose publications were reviewed in established periodicals – to welcome romantic drama and try it himself.⁷⁰ Whilst in the 1820s, when Anton Cramer also criticized classicism in theatrical periodicals, his activities were more or less ignored by the literary elite.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See for instance: Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800: Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (The Hague: SDU Uitgevers, 2001) pp. 503-508.

⁶⁹ See Ellen Krol, *De smaak der natie: Opvattingen over huiselijkheid in de Noord-Nederlandse poëzie van 1800 tot 1840* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), pp. 136-138.

⁷⁰ In the following period, the playwright Schimmel also wrote tragedies in the spirit of Hugo, while the critic Jozef Albering Thijm, in the periodical *De Spectator van tooneel, concerten en kunst* (1842-1850), mainly fell back on the classicist tradition of Bilderdijk and Wiselius. See Pierre van Rijswijk, *Fiksche lui: De Spektator van J.A. Alberdingk Thijm* (Zuthphen: Walburg Pers, 2009), pp. 52-53.

⁷¹ See Henny Ruitenbeek, *Kijkcijfers: De Amsterdamse Schouwburg 1814-1841* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), pp. 293-295.

As far as the term melodrama is concerned, Dutch highbrow theatrical critics wrote about it with such great disdain that the term had only negative connotations; but this does not mean that Brooks' 'mode of excess' was absent in the Netherlands. Particularly with regard to theatrical productions, both original and in translation, it is worthwhile investigating the 'melodramatic mode', and in doing so, we should not be misguided by the confusing multitude of genre denominations used at that time.

It is doubtful that Dutch literary culture was too 'middle class' for the 'morbid fixation on a dark past that had supposedly been left behind', typical of the gothic and the melodramatic. In fact, it was precisely these genres that, as part of an emotionalist culture, appealed to 'the socially constructive emotions of empathy and sympathy' of the reader and theatregoer.⁷² In the Netherlands, this emotionalism seems to have persisted for a relatively long time. When one suspects in these genres, from a post-Freudian perspective, an obsession with a repressed past, this is of course legitimate, but we should remember that this is speculation. 'Repressing' in itself implies that this is not what the writers of gothic novels and melodramas intended, and thus something that the consumers of these texts may not have been aware of; or that if they did notice this subversive content, they did not necessarily sympathize with it. Perhaps it is no coincidence that in most early gothic and melodramatic literature, ghosts eventually turn out to be based on fiction.

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⁷² Buikema and Wesseling, 'Contesting Consensus Culture', p. 117.

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