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YANNICE DE BRUYN

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the Dutch Theatre, 1645-1686.*

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ABSTRACT

The subject of siege captured the imagination of many and gave rise to representations across a range of media, including the theatre. This dissertation focusses on the performances of four such plays in the period 1645-1686, analysing how they staged subjects of violence, and to what end. Two of these plays dealt with the subject of the historical siege of Leiden – Reynerius Bontius' *The Siege and Relief of Leyden* (1645) and Jan Vos' design of five enormous tableaux vivants that were to be performed before, during, and after Bontius' play (1660); others were connected with recent peace treaties. In the latter category, I propose a contextualised close-reading of Govard Bidloo's *Pageant Play, on the Peace* (1678) and *Austria Victorious, or Conquest of Buda* (1686) by the same author. For all four case studies I mobilised the neologism "imagineering," a compound of "imaging" or "imagining" and "engineering." This notion allows me to understand how cultural performances in early modern theatre both reflected and affected their Umwelt.

The four central chapters of this study offer a detailed analysis of the material aspects of how siege violence was staged by means of various imagineering techniques. Violence, I argue, could be told (by means of ekphrasis), explicitly shown (by means of proxemics and tableau vivant), or allegorically personified (by means of prosopopoeia). The shared aim of these techniques was to make the audience feel involved with and even witness the violent events that were being staged. The cases studied here reveal an evolution in the way violence was imagineered in the theatre, from suggestion to display. Visual means became increasingly important, as well as the use of auditory techniques and illusory theatrical machinery. Consequently, the audience experience became increasingly spectacular: immersive, highly affective, and overwhelming to the senses. This strategy of attraction catered to as much as cultivated the seventeenth-century desire to be moved and beguiled.

Spectacularly staged violence therefore provides a unique lens on how, in the course of the seventeenth century, the Dutch theatre developed into a commercial enterprise. At the same time, staged violence was employed for its potential to perform as propaganda for the urban political elite. By eliciting either horror or cheer, each performance under discussion was able to generate strong feelings towards contemporary political actors in a way that suited the local authorities. An important emotive technique towards this end was the exploitation of tropes. Imagineering conceptualises the cultural background of the audience as central to how they could make sense of the violence onstage. By reiterating the same themes and narratives that circulated throughout media, the siege plays employed their

ingrained emotional effect on the audience for political ends. The other way around, the performance in its turn left an imprint on the cultural imagination of the audience, on how they could imagine the represented siege as well as how they perceived the actors involved.