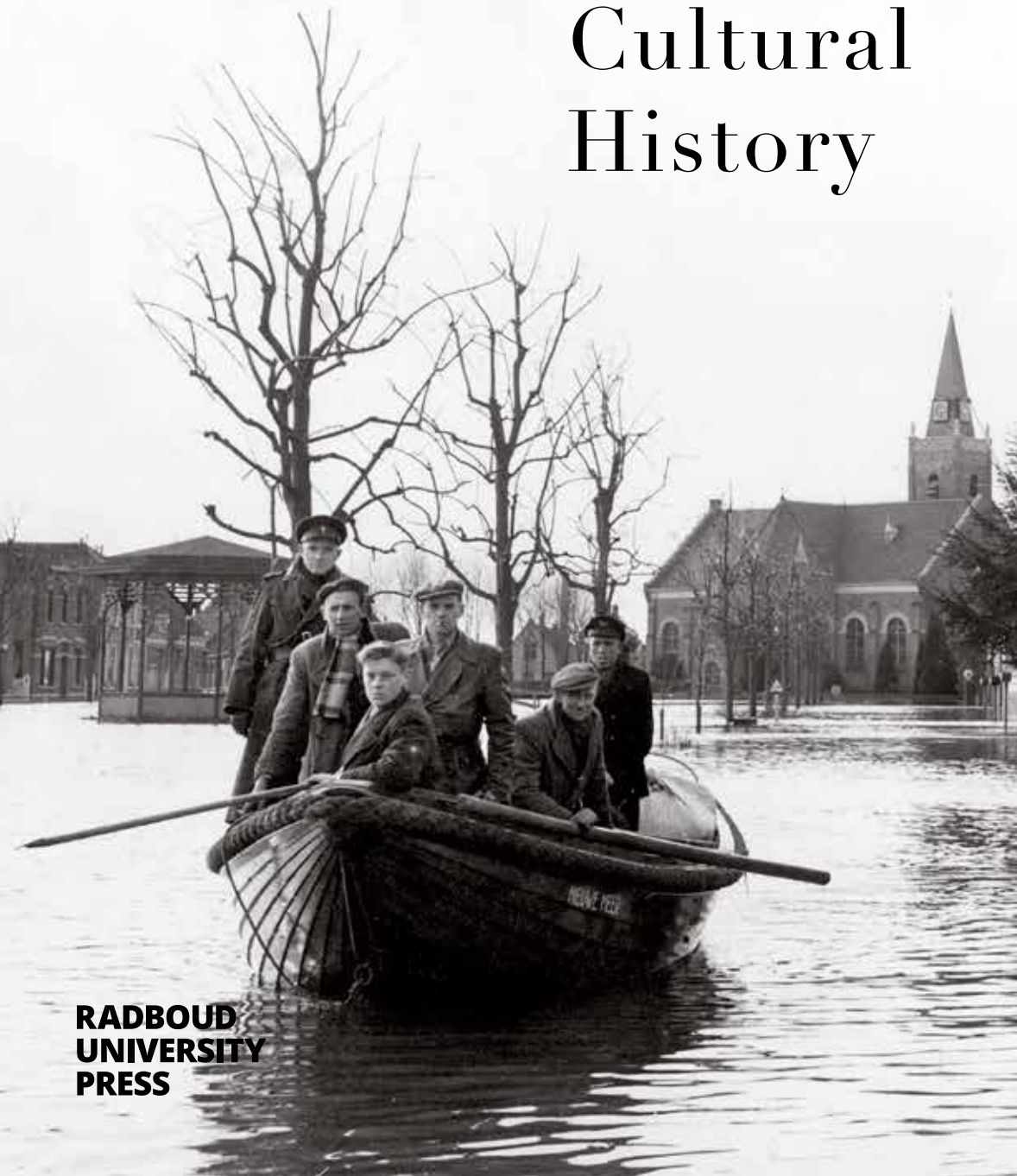
Lotte Jensen

Water

A Dutch Cultural History



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A Dutch Cultural History

Lotte Jensen

translated by Nancy Forest-Flier

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Water: A Dutch Cultural History

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Prologue

When I told my father a few years back that I was working on a study of Dutch flood disasters, he straightened up and responded excitedly, "Did you know that your grandpa was deeply involved in the emergency help that Denmark offered the Dutch in 1953?" No, I didn't, so my father continued: "He had a newspaper clipping on his desk with a photo of a convoy of trucks carrying relief supplies. And he was in charge of that convoy." I was eager to see the photo, of course, but a great many personal documents had been lost in a fire in my grandma's house. Thus began a long search for that one photo of my grandpa.

Over the years my father and I made all sorts of attempts to accumulate evidence. We foraged through digital data bases, called Danish archivists and kept trying new Google search strings. Without results. When my father died on 1 January 2020, I decided to give up the quest.

But one Sunday evening in April 2021 the unexpected happened. While watching a TV program about the water problems in the province of Zeeland, I flipped open my iPad and scrolled to the central Danish newspaper archive of the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Then I typed in my grandpa's name: "Andreas Kai Eilskov Jensen." And lo and behold, as large as life, the photo that we had been searching for all those years suddenly appeared. Apparently, more newspapers had been digitized in the intervening time.

Featured on the front page of a local Danish daily, the *Thisted*

Amtsavis, is a group of Danish soldiers lined up in a long row in front of their trucks on 23 February 1953 on the Malieveld in The Hague. Passing down the row and shaking their hands are the director of the Dutch Red Cross, G.M. Verspijk, and the head of the General Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, E.O. Baron van Boetzelaer. The accompanying article tells the story of how thirty-five men from the *Civil Forsvar* (Civilian Protection Corps) had traveled to the disaster area two weeks before with trucks packed with supplies. They assisted the Red Cross in transporting clothing, medicines and foodstuffs. Upon returning to Denmark the soldiers were greeted with a warm welcome. On hand to receive them were a representative of the Red Cross and several officials, including convoy supervisor Eilskov Jensen, who, while he hadn't traveled with the soldiers him-

The Danish relief convoy takes its leave on 23 February 1953 on the Malieveld in The Hague. (ANP, Dutch National Archives, The Hague)

self, personally thanked every single one. The command of the troops was then transferred back to him.

The historical thrill was overwhelming. Finally, here was that one photograph that my father had talked about so often. Hunting for this image had grown into a shared and cherished ritual for both of us, even though we had tacitly accepted the fact that we would never find any tangible proof of our deeper kinship with the Netherlands. Yet we kept talking and writing about it, because you never knew. It was an emotional discovery as well, since I could no longer let my father know that our search had finally come to a successful conclusion. The Netherlands had become his second fatherland and my home. This book, then, is written in memory of my father.

Introduction

"Whose heart does not wince in dismay to read about how a son, who had seen his father, his mother and his six brothers and sisters drown, spent nineteen hours lying on his stomach on a small pile of hay, his hands and feet dangling in the water, and driven about by turbulent waves, while a married couple, after having lost a mother and a sister, were subjected to forty-eight similar hours on the same sort of raft?"[1] That was the question pondered by Johannes ter Pelkwijk, a teacher from Zwolle, in his report on the flood of 1825. The newspapers were full of such misery. Particularly hard hit was the province of Overijssel: "Further reports from Overijssel regarding the flood are extremely tragic. Large numbers of people are still being brought to Zwolle after having been rescued by boat from their makeshift dwellings. Twenty-five bodies have already been recovered and taken to that city."[2]

On the 4th and 5th of February a severe storm raged across the Netherlands, with disastrous results: entire areas around the Zuiderzee were flooded. The national death toll was 380, and 16,700 cattle were drowned.[3] Overijssel was the most severely impacted, with at least 305 dead.[4] In his *Description of the Overijssel Flood of February 1825*, Ter Pelkwijk described the dramatic scenes that had taken place town by town. One scene was more heart-wrenching than the next: many people saw their loved ones drown before their very eyes. In a ditch near Zwartsluis, five bodies from the same family were found. The mother had been in labor; the head of the infant was already crowning. Yet Ter

Pelkwijk was also able to report scenes of consolation, such as the members of one family whose lives had been preserved "by a miraculous act of Providence,"[5] or the visit to the disaster area by the crown prince of Orange.

The flood of 1825 is one in a series of major floods that have struck the Netherlands over the centuries. Ter Pelkwijk reminded his readers of the Christmas Flood of 1277, the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood of 1421, the All Saints' Flood of 1570, the storm surge of 1686, the Christmas Flood of 1717 and the floods of 1775 and 1776.[6] That list could easily be expanded to include hundreds more: the inhabitants of the Dutch coastal provinces and the river region often learned the hard way that they lived on a vulnerable delta. Anyone browsing through the historian Elisabeth Gottschalk's classical study of the river floods and storm surges that took place in the Netherlands in the period before 1700 will be amazed by the sheer numbers.[7] The standard work on extreme weather conditions in the Netherlands compiled by historian Jan Buisman also speaks volumes.[8] Storm surges and floods were more the rule than the exception. Many inhabitants lived with the awareness that the next calamity was just a matter of time. As the poet Hendrik Marsman so aptly expressed it in 1936: "and in every region / the voice of the water / with its endless disasters / is feared and heard."[9]

Flood disasters and the history of the Netherlands are inextricably linked. Within the national cultural memory, floods make for a fascinating paradox. On the one hand, these are traumatic events from the past that expose the vulnerability faced by people living in this country: all too often they have lost the battle with the natural elements.[10] Ter Pelkwijk's commemoration book is emblematic of the attention that surviving relatives and later generations have focused on the suffering caused by such disasters. Another example is the impressive commemoration book compiled by journalist Kees Slager on the disaster of 1953. As an alternative to the lists of dates that children once had to learn at school, Slager enumerates all the floods that have struck the

Anonymous, *The Flood Disaster at Wolvega*, 1825
(Fries Museum collection, Leeuwarden)

Meuse and Scheldt delta region. This, however, is not a summary "of victories and conquests," writes Slager, but "a list of nothing but defeats."[11]

On the other hand, floods appeal to a national mood that goes hand in hand with a certain sense of pride. At least as firmly anchored in the collective memory is the idea that the Dutch are better than anyone else at controlling water, thanks to their pioneer spirit, cooperation skills, and technological innovations. It was owing to major land reclamation projects that the Dutch managed to subdue the ferocious "water wolf." After the flood disaster of 1953 the Delta Works were constructed, widely known as a "modern wonder of the world" and commanding admiration both at home and abroad.[12] Multitudes of tourists come to the Netherlands to marvel at the two Dutch showpieces on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the windmills and pumping stations of Kinderdijk and the Beemster Polder, which was reclaimed in 1612. The Maeslant Storm Surge Barrier at Hook of Holland and the bypass channel at Lent are favorite destinations for trade delegations. And if you ask the Dutch what they're most proud of, the battle against water wins hands down.[13]

The combination of vulnerability and pride is a thread running through the water history of the Netherlands. These two basic attitudes may also explain why the Dutch have come to re-

gard the battle against water as a key aspect of their identity: they have given an enormous boost to the national sense of solidarity over the centuries. Thus the notion of vulnerability, represented by the perennial threat of the "water wolf," made cooperation an ongoing necessity. And when calamity did strike, there also arose the widely supported desire to help others by organizing large-scale relief efforts. Once the crisis was overcome and the dikes were raised, new national sentiments were unleashed, but this time in the form of pride: rescuers were rewarded, monarchs were celebrated, and technical ingenuity was applauded.

The role of media and culture

Throughout the centuries, the media have played an important role in stimulating community spirit. Following a flood, writers could be counted on to take up their pens and record the recent events with essays, poems, sermons, stories, commemoration books, songs, and plays. Visual impressions also emerged in the form of prints, paintings, and photographs.

In the academic discipline known internationally as "disaster studies," more and more attention has been focused over the last two decades on the role that media and culture play in the way societies deal with catastrophes.[14] After all, stories and images have a great deal of influence on our perception and how we interpret it. Take the recent floods in Valkenburg in July 2021, for example. Most people followed the news via traditional and online media. Discussions of the causes of the floods, such as the influence of climate change, influenced their interpretation. Something similar is true of disasters from the more distant past. Authors and printmakers were constantly promoting the importance of solidarity based on a largely Christian worldview. That will have influenced the perception of disasters in general and stimulated people to donate to fund-raising efforts. Since the late eighteenth century, the enormous sums of money that the Dutch

have raised in response to disasters has partly been the result of media campaigns.

"Media" refers to a wide range of genres such as songs, stories, prints, sermons, poems, paintings, exhibitions, monuments and commemoration books. Not only did these things meet the need for information, but they also served an important social function.[15] Writers and artists offered consolation by reflecting on the grief of bereaved relatives. They provided a moral and religious framework that could reduce anxiety by placing traumatic events within a broader context. They also contributed to community resilience in a practical sense by encouraging people to contribute money and goods and to organize relief efforts.

The media spread the news to all the living rooms in the country. As a result, the sense of involvement was not confined to those who had experienced the disaster firsthand, and national identity was greatly enhanced. In the nineteenth century and in 1953 the sense of national solidarity reached a high point.[16] Members of a community did not have to know each other personally to still feel interconnected. They were part of the same "imagined community," as political scientist Benedict Anderson has so aptly expressed it.[17]

The term "imagined" conveys how important the role of the cultural imagination was in the process of community formation. That the battle against the water was perceived as typically Dutch had everything to do with the permanent circulation of the same images, motifs and clichés. The national sense of usness was based not only on this repertoire of standard images but also on role models (heroes and monarchs), charity and the cultural memory. In the following chapters, these four pillars will be considered in turn. Together they established the national narrative, with its stress on solidarity and pride, and they still do. If the media just keep repeating it often enough – that the battle against the water is typically Dutch – it will influence our perception of reality.[18]

Such a national narrative can easily drown out the many dis-

The Maeslant Storm Surge Barrier (https://beeldbank.rws.nl, Rijkswaterstaat/Henri Cormont)

senting voices that were simultaneously being raised. Flood disasters could also function as catalysts, whereby the borders between communities within the Netherlands were more sharply delineated.[19] There was never one single representative community; indeed, throughout history individual groups have seized on disasters to strengthen their own identity or to exclude others. In 1825, for example, there was a fierce clash between moderate and orthodox Protestants and the colonies. When disaster struck, the acceptance of the colonies as part of the national community was only partial at best. So national calamities were invariably accompanied by processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Luctor et emergo

Although there is evidence of multiple identities and exclusionary loyalties, one underlying theme can be perceived that binds all the stories and images together. I would like to call it the *luctor et emergo* narrative. The literal translation of this Latin expression is "I struggle and emerge," which served as the motto of Zeeland during the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish (1568–1648).[20] As time passed, the central message adopted by writers, journalists and artists was that the Dutch could triumph over every calamity, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

That resilience came to be expressed in standard motifs, such as the baby in the cradle who survives the flood or the taming of the water wolf – or the countless photos showing Dutch expertise in the field of water management. The sense of doggedness was also a main theme in the heroic stories of ordinary citizens who helped others despite the danger to their own lives, or the charity campaigns that were organized across the country. A sense of community was the key to resilience and recovery. This appeal to solidarity was not only religiously motivated; the sense of being interconnected with one's own countrymen also played a role.

Throughout the centuries, the luctor-et-emergo narrative became powerfully embedded in the Dutch cultural imagination. Even so, writers and artists never shied away from calling attention to human vulnerability. Disasters resulted in unutterable misery and personal suffering, which is represented in a variety of ways. Take for example the popular genre of flood songs, which spread the news of a disaster across wide swaths of the population. The extent of the losses was described in great detail. The author of a song from 1825, which told of the great North Holland flood, described the bodies floating in the water, and how no one was spared:

> And many a family brave,
> Plunged into deep lament,
> Were swallowed in the waves,
> Both man and wife they went.[21]

No one, insisted this poet, was equal to the violence of the water. Think also of the countless monuments that were raised after the various floods, or the graves of the victims.

In the past, the notion of vulnerability often went hand in hand with a religious lesson, since in the eyes of most writers the floods were punishments sent by God. Ultimately, the fate of each human being lay in God's hands. The prevention of future disasters was a matter of improving one's life, and especially of praying more fervently. Ter Pelkwijk did so, too, after having seen firsthand the devastating impact of the flood on Zwolle, where he lived and worked. He prayed "that it might please the Merciful God never to let our region and homeland undergo such disasters again, and that He may grant the most salutary effects to those who are now suffering, to the true joy of the Dutch nation!"[22]

The cultural imagination pertaining to flood disasters is indicative of how the Dutch saw themselves and wished to be seen through the centuries.[23] There is no question that the history of

the Netherlands has been shaped by the fight against the water and the need to live with it, but it's been the recurring stories and visual depictions – in short, the cultural imagination – that have made this fact a national concern. That us-feeling was, and is, pervaded not only by a sense of resilience and pride but also by the notion of vulnerability and solidarity.

1
The Baby in the Cradle

In 2009, the film *The Storm* played to packed theaters. Within a month, 450,000 viewers had seen the film about the Zeeland flood of 1953. Its success was owed not only to the cast of famous actors and the title song by Bløf, a Zeeland band, but also to the plot, which really captured the imagination. A baby in a wooden crate is saved from drowning during the disaster and grows up with a woman who has lost her child. When the woman meets the biological mother, she refuses to admit that this child is not her own. Eighteen years later, during a commemoration of the disaster, the truth is revealed and the biological mother is reunited with her son. The film was based on a book by Rik Launspach, which had come out that year.[1]

Both the film and the book make use of a visual motif that has been around for centuries, that of the baby in the cradle. Stories, paintings and films about cataclysmic floods invariably feature infants in wooden crates, trunks and cribs. Animals such as cats or dogs are often traveling with them. The baby always miraculously survives the disaster.[2] Such scenes were not always the products of fantasy, by the way: there are plenty of eyewitness accounts of floating baskets or cradles. In 1825 a brave sergeant from Kampen fished a cradle out of the water that was holding two babies barely two weeks old. Both of them survived.[3]

The motif of the baby in the cradle goes all the way back to the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood of 1421. A baby was said to have survived the disaster because of a cat, who kept the wobbly cradle

from tipping over. The scene was documented in an altarpiece made by an anonymous artist for the Great Church in Dordrecht in around 1490.[4] Since then, the story has been depicted and described in countless ways. According to a book from 1514, it's all about a baby boy who was washed ashore in Dordrecht along with his cat.[5] In later versions, the infant was a girl who ended up in Kinderdijk (one of the possible explanations for the name of this village). She went on to become the matriarch of an illustrious lineage. Over the centuries, the story became embedded in the Dutch collective memory after having been portrayed in innumerable prints, paintings and building plaques and retold in many chronicles, poems and children's books.[6] Whether there's even a grain of truth to the story is impossible to say.

The scene of the baby in the cradle has grown into a symbol of hope and resilience in times of catastrophe. It also had religious poignancy because of its biblical associations: in Exodus 2 we read that all newborn Jewish boys are to be drowned in the Nile by order of the pharaoh. The mother of Moses manages to save him by hiding him in a basket and setting him afloat in the bullrushes. He's fished out of the water and raised by the pharaoh's daughter.

The motif also circulated in other contexts. It appears in the history of Sargon of Akkad, the first ruler of the Akkadian Empire (twenty-fourth century BC) and the story's protagonist. His mother, a high priestess, bore him in secret and placed him in a basket in the river. He was saved by a water carrier.[7] We also find it in the ancient *Mahabharata*, a philosophical-religious epic from India. There, the newborn son of Kunti and the sun god Surya is placed in a basket.[8] In short, this is a very widespread motif that acquired enormous expressive power in the context of Dutch flood disasters.[9]

The Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood

The oldest Dutch depiction of the baby in the cradle with a cat dates from the late fifteenth century and can be found on the altarpiece dating from circa 1490, as mentioned above. Pictured on the outside is the area around Dordrecht at the time of the disaster, and on the inside are scenes from the life of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231), after whom the flood was named. She led an exemplary life that was devoted to *caritas*, or charity.

The outer and inner panels must be viewed in relation to each other: the artist did not paint the area around Dordrecht realistically but placed the emphasis on scenes of brotherly love.[10] He also alluded to depictions of the Last Judgement in which the holy city of Jerusalem is usually situated at the end of a winding road, just as Dordrecht lay at the end of a meandering river. So the painter's aim was not to convey a realistic picture of the flood but to emphasize Christian charity.[11]

The story then appeared in a book by the humanist Martin

Detail of the altarpiece by the Master of the Saint Elizabeth Panels (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

Dorpius, published in 1514, after which other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars copied the tale.[12] In the meantime, depictions of a baby in a cradle circulated in other sources. In the *Augsburger Wunderzeichenbuch*, which was compiled in around 1550 in the region of Augsburg, there are two illustrations featuring a baby in a cradle. In the first, a baby in a cradle along with a small black cat can be seen in the center of the picture. The picture shows the flooding of the lake near Merano in 1418, and the baby was supposedly saved by Bolzano.[13] The other illustration shows the flooding of the Rhine near Heidelberg in 1529. In the lower right a man is pulling a cradle with a baby in it onto the bank. According to the caption, the vessel had traveled six miles before the baby was rescued. There is no cat to be seen.[14]

Fol. 75, "Überschwemmung bei Meran 1418" (*Augsburger Wunderzeichenbuch*, Borchert & Waterman, eds., 2013)

Besides the *Augsburger Wunderzeichenbuch*, the motif can also be found in an English pamphlet that deals with a storm surge near Bristol on 20 January 1607.[15] Adorning the title page is a baby in a cradle. A Dutch translation of the pamphlet still survives with the title *Een Warachtig verhael van de schrickelike springhvloedt in het Landtschap van Somerset, Norford, ende verscheyden andere plaetsen in Enghelandt geschiet* (A True Story of the Terrible Spring Flood that struck the Landscape of Somerset, Norford, and Various Other Places in England).[16] The cover illustration is exactly the same as the one on the English original and bears no direct relation to the contents of the work: a meticu-

The pamphlet *Een Warachtig verhael van de schrickelike springhvloedt of 1607* (Knuttel pamphlet catalogue, 1353)

lously reported account of the catastrophe that befell the southwest coast of England, placed in a religious context (God punishing people for their sins), but without any rescue story of a baby in a cradle.

The same is true of a pamphlet concerning a dike breach in 1624: *Newes from Holland, true, strange, and wonderfull. A true Relation of the strange floating of Ice; and the great Inundation which hath broken downe many Dikes, and Dams in Holland; and about Herwynen, in January 1624, as pitifull in the Relation, as it was fearfull in the Execution*.[17] The publisher of the pamphlet was


S.T.C. 13574

(8)

1624.

Newes from Holland, true, strange, and wonderfull.

A true Relation of the strange floating of Ice; and the great Inundation which hath broken downe many Dikes, and Dams in Holland; and about Herwynen, in January 1624. as pitifull in the Relation, as it was fearfull in the Execution.

Also a remarkable Discourse of a Child found in Geyland, about a Village called Soest, in the Bishopricke of Vtrecht, holding in his hands two pieces of money: and uttering strange Speeches, to the admiration of many hearers.

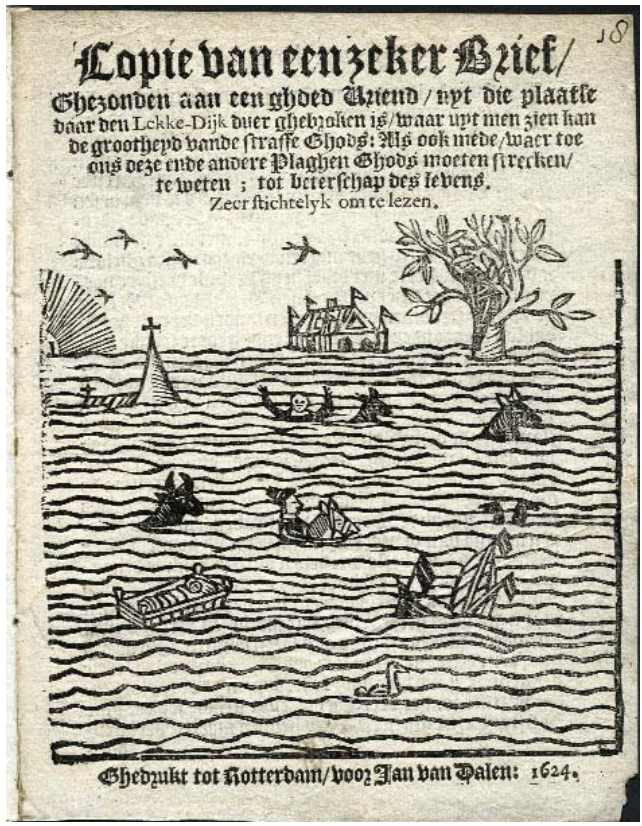
Printed at London for Nathaniel Butter. 1624.

Newes from Holland. English news pamphlet concerning the flooding of the Lek at Vianen in 1624 (Marsh's Library collection, Dublin)

Nathaniel Butter, and a copy can be found in Marsh's Library in Dublin. The anonymous author says his account is based on a Dutch pamphlet published by Cornelius Martensen of Rotterdam. He describes the breach in the bank of the Lek River at Vianen in the night of 10 to 11 January 1624 as the result of drifting ice. The surrounding countryside was inundated as far as Delft, Gouda and Leiden.[18] The writer places the events within a broader European perspective having to do with floods and a moral-religious framework.

An original Dutch version of the pamphlet must exist somewhere, but so far I have not been able to find it. What makes the pamphlet especially fascinating, apart from its intriguing contents – including numerous statements about the Dutch battle with water – is the illustration on the title page. It features a flood scene with horses and cows bobbing about in the water, a floating dead body and people calling for help with their arms in the air. Others seek refuge on the roofs of houses and in trees, and two people are floating around in a barrel. In the middle of this scene we see a floating cradle with a baby *and* a cat. There is no direct connection between this and the contents of the pamphlet, however. This link with reality is also missing from another pamphlet concerning the same flood of 1624. The illustration with the floating cradle was used on the cover of a printed letter written by Gerrit Huygensz van Nes, who interpreted the breach in the Lek as God's punishment: "Very edifying reading" was the endorsement on the cover.[19]

These news pamphlets clearly show that the image of a baby in a cradle does not necessarily have to have any bearing on the text itself. In the early modern period, publishers often used the same generic illustrations.[20] What is also striking is that we see cradles with and without cats early on in the dissemination of these images. That raises the question whether the cat may have some symbolic meaning. Medievalists have shown that cats could evoke a whole range of associations because they fell somewhere between wild animals (felines) and domesticated animals. Cats



Copy of a certain letter by Gerrit Huygensz van Nes concerning the breach near 't Waal in 1624

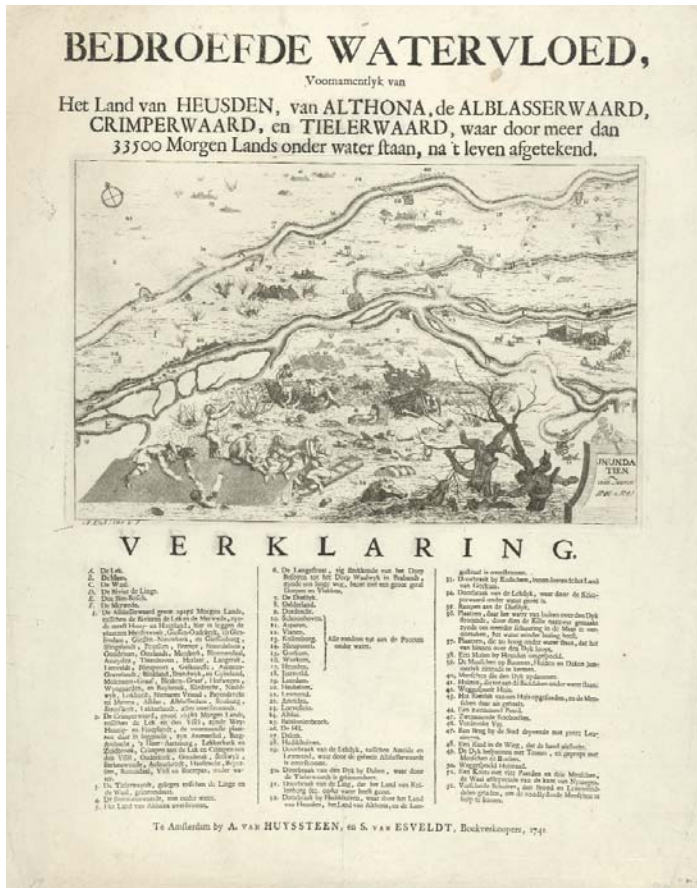
were identified with negative ideas such as heresy, but in the case of the baby in the cradle the cat seems to have been added mainly as a friendly animal. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period cats were already being kept as beloved pets. They are not terribly fond of water as a rule. Perhaps their presence emphasizes the danger that water imposes: the waves threaten to swallow up a scene of perfect domestic security – a baby in a cradle with a friendly cat.[21]

The brave poodle

In the centuries after 1421, the image of the baby in the cradle appeared in all sorts of different contexts, both pictorial and literary. In 1677, for example, the etcher and artist Romeyn de Hooghe produced a print of the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood. There, the baby in the cradle (sans cat) is only a minor detail.[22] In the famous print made by Jan Luyken of the Groningen flood of 1686, however, the image is central. The baby in the cradle immediately draws the attention of the viewer because it's been placed in the foreground.

The motif reappears in visual portrayals of other floods, such

Jan Luyken, *Flood in Groningen*, 1686. Etching published as a book illustration by Pieter van der Aa, 1698
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)



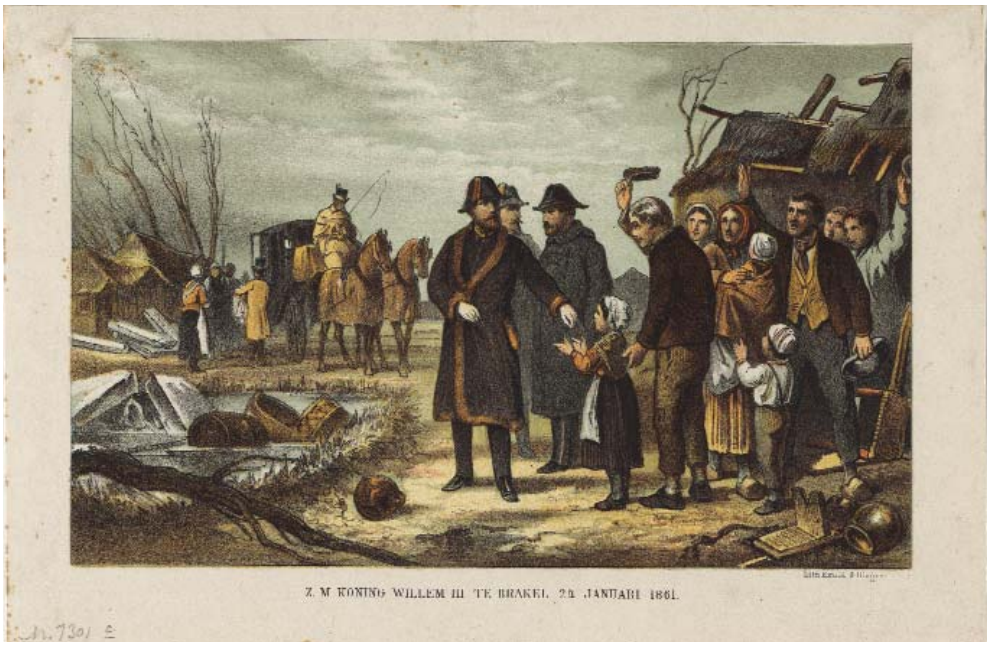
Jan l'Admiral, *Breach of the Dike at Elden*, 1741
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

as a print of the flood of 1741 made by the etcher and engraver Jan l'Admiral. He drew a map of the affected area as it appeared after the breach of the dike near the village of Elden. Each detail on the map is explained in a legend at the bottom of the page. In the middle of the print is a baby in a cradle; he reports that the baby is sticking out its hand. We see a similar cradle in a print of the flood of 1825 depicting the harbor of the village of Buiksloot. Pictured in the middle is the bridge in the Buiksloot dike, with

J.F. Oltmans, *Flood in Buiksloot*, February 1825
(North Holland Archive)

the transit channel of the North Holland Canal. Two little boats with passengers are shown, and a floating cradle can be seen on the right.[23] Another example concerns an illustration of the visit of King William III to Brakel, in the province of Gelderland, in 1861. He's surrounded by grateful villagers, and next to the king is an empty cradle that's been washed ashore. In the above examples, the cradle motif had become entirely detached from the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood.

There are also a great many songs, poems and stories in which an infant in a cradle plays a prominent role. Often the motif functions within the context of a miraculous rescue that demonstrates God's providence. An example of such use is a play writ-



King William III in Brakel, 24 January 1861 (Atlas van Stolk collection)

ten in 1808 by the Haarlem publisher and writer Adriaan Loosjes in support of the victims of the Zeeland floods. At a certain point the protagonist, Willem, rescues a wicker cradle from the waves while crying out, "What is floating on that wave? Oh! My eyes deceive me not / It is a wicker basket. – No, it is a cradle, blessed be God!" It turns out to be his own child, whom he had given up for dead. He praises God for this miraculous turn of events: "He was kept in his cradle, spared from disaster and death!"[24]

The popularity of the motif is also reflected in a school textbook from 1868, in which the story of the baby and the cat in a cradle being washed ashore is told from a religious perspective. The title of the story is "The Wondrous Vessel."[25] A.A. Holst, an Amsterdam headmaster, published the narrative a year later under a different title to make the religious implications immediately obvious: "In God's Hands."[26] The story is supposed to be a

Dutch translation of a work by the German writer Christoph von Schmid (1768-1854), who published hundreds of short stories for children in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The German original, however, has never been found.[27]

This is not the case with his much longer and frequently reprinted story, "The Flood on the Rhine."[28] The German winegrower, Martin Braun, lives with his wife, Ottilie, and their five children in a small village on the Rhine. One day they're struck by a terrible flood. The youngest child, Kaspar, floats away in his cradle, accompanied by their faithful dog. Miles from home, the dog manages to attract the attention of people on the bank, and Kaspar is rescued. He and the dog are taken in by a very prosper-

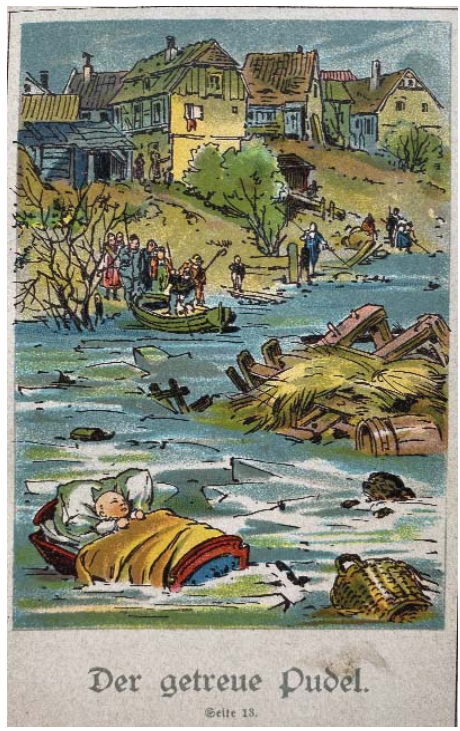


Illustration from "The Flood on the Rhine" by Christoph von Schmid. With five color prints by W. Schäfer, Wesel 1891

ous family. At first they want to name the boy Moses, but finally they decide on Daniel because that was the name of their own child, who had passed away. His real parents assume that Kaspar has died. Years later, the real father is on a trip to Holland when he happens to meet Kaspar's new family. The dog recognizes his old master and all is revealed. An emotional reunion occurs between Kaspar (who is now called Daniel) and his former family. They end up much better off financially owing to the assistance of the foster parents.

The most striking thing about "The Flood on the Rhine" is the lead role played by the faithful dog: thanks to the poodle, not only is Kaspar saved but he is also reunited with his parents. The cat has thus been replaced by another pet, who does not sit in the cradle but swims alongside it. It's also interesting that an explicit link is made with the story of Moses. And the final choice of the Old Testament name "Daniel" is at least as significant: God protected Daniel when he was cast into the lions' den, and He likewise saved this child from mortal danger.[29]

Romanticizing the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood

The number of visual and textual depictions of the baby in the cradle as related specifically to the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood only increased over the course of the nineteenth century. This had to do with the growing interest in the nation's past in the light of emerging nationalism: pride in the past bolstered the self-awareness of the Dutch as a nation. In this regard, Marita Mathijsen, professor of modern Dutch literature, has coined the term *historiezucht* – "history lust" – a general obsession by painters, artists and writers to choose the national past as their main theme.[30]

A fine example of "history lust" is the painting by J.H. Egenberger of the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood, made in about 1850 and titled *Anno 1421: The Miraculous Rescue of a Baby During the*

J.H. Egenberger, *Anno 1421: The Miraculous Rescue of a Baby During the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood*, c. 1850-1854 (Amsterdam Museum collection)

Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood. The work was added to the Historical Gallery of Jacob de Vos. In the mid-nineteenth century, this Amsterdam art collector launched an ambitious project: to build a painting collection that would constitute a complete overview of the nation's history.[31] The romanticizing of the past is quite clear in this work. The eye of the viewer is fully focused on the plump baby, with its little white arms and white blanket. The association with purity as opposed to the dark, threatening surroundings is unavoidable. The cat makes a somewhat fierce impression, as if the animal were trying to protect the baby from every malign outside influence. A young man is attempting to pull the cradle out of the turbulent waves. Several dra-

matic scenes of people carrying out relief efforts are visible in the background.

Egenberger's impressive painting seems to have inspired Lawrence Alma-Tadema in his depiction of *The Inundation of the Biesbosch in 1421*, which he painted in 1856.[32] The soft, pale plumpness of the baby and the threatening demeanor of the cat tend to complement each other. This is an early work from the rich oeuvre of Alma-Tadema, who would go on to achieve international fame as an artist. Two things stand out: the fact that the scene includes only the cradle and the cat, and that now the viewer has essentially taken the place of the rescuer. The cat has assumed an even more threatening attitude and looks the viewer straight in the eye.

It's also interesting that in all likelihood the English painter J.E. Millais drew inspiration from Alma-Tadema's picture.[33] In 1870 he produced a painting of a baby in a cradle. It was seen as a response to the Sheffield flood of 1864 in which about 240 persons lost their lives. Floating in the water is a jug – a striking point of similarity with the work of Alma-Tadema. Unlike that of the Dutch painter, however, Millais's cat is very friendly, making his work a tranquil, idyllic scene of infant bliss rather than a depiction of the struggle between life and death. That portrayal was more in line with contemporary tastes, as is evident from its popularity.[34]

Interest in the Dutch national past also manifested itself in literature. In the nineteenth century, historical novels, narrative poems and plays were popping up everywhere.[35] This focused attention on the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood once again. The Rotterdam manufacturer and poet Reijer Hendrik van Someren published a long poem in 1841 in Utrecht with the title *Saint Elizabeth's Night anno 1421: A Poem in Three Parts*. His main theme was the story of the baby in the cradle, and he defended his choices by means of endnotes. He also drew on his poetic imagination. He called the baby Beatrix and portrayed her parents as a couple of noble birth, Floris and Alma. When the water starts

Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Inundation of the Biesbosch in 1421*, oil on canvas, 1856 (private collection)

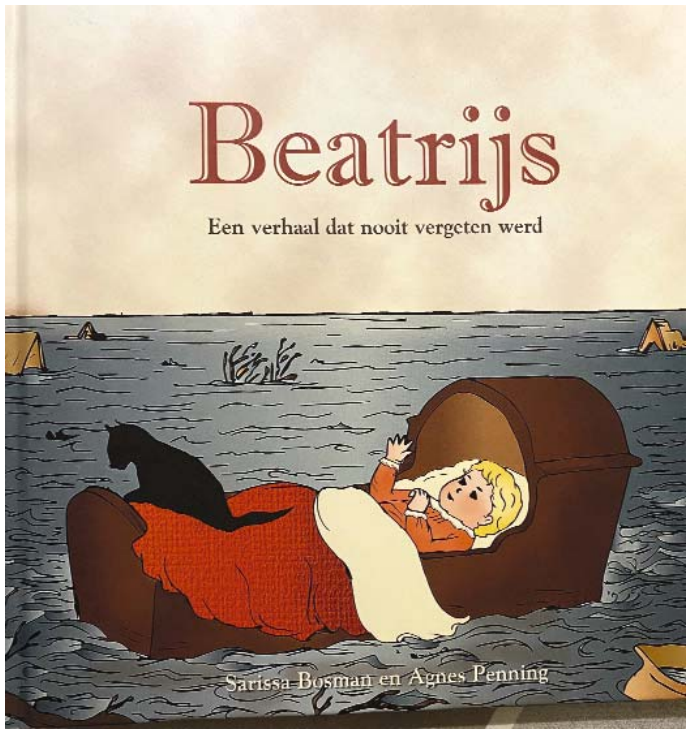
rising, Floris sets his daughter afloat in a cradle in the hope that she will survive the flood. She washes ashore in Houweningen and not in Kinderdijk, because according to the poet it was more likely that the northwest wind would have driven the vessel in that direction.[36] Van Someren deliberately scrapped the role of the cat because he regarded the animal as an "unpoetic creature."[37] Included in the book of poems is a fine illustration of the moment when Floris and Alma abandon their daughter to the waves beside their ruined castle.

Another historian, Louwrens Penning, deliberately skipped the whole scene in his young adult novel *The Flood* of 1904, which went through five printings, referring to it only in a footnote.[38] The story disappeared from the literary genre until the beginning of the twenty-first century, when it received a new im-

Illustration in Reijer Hendrik van Someren's *Saint Elizabeth's Night Anno 1421: A Poem in Three Parts*, 1841

pulse with the publication of several books. The most widely read is *The Big Rijksmuseum Read Aloud Book*, which has undergone ten printings since 2013. The book consists of twenty-five contributions by writers of children's books, each one a fictional telling of a painting in the Rijksmuseum collection. The panels of the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood were the source of inspiration for Joke Reijnders, who took the floating cradle with the cat as her point of departure. She has a mother of the late fifteenth century tell her grandson the story of how little Beatrix survived the flood. The grandson's response is to make a painting for the church in Dordrecht, and thus the circle is complete.[39]

The story also turns up in two Christian children's books: *Beatrijs: A Story That Has Never Been Forgotten* (2015) by Sarissa Bosman and Agnes Penning, and *The Wild Water* (2018) by Arna van Deelen. In both books, the miraculous rescue functions as an illustration of God's providence. Bosman and Penning turned the story into a picture book in which a little black cat holds the cradle steady amidst the churning waves. The woman who takes the baby out of the cradle names her Beatrijs, and the narrator says, "God gave her this special little girl."[40] He concludes with a reference to the modern Kinderdijk, where the extraordinary



Sarissa Bosman and Agnes Penning, *Beatrijs: A Story That Has Never Been Forgotten*, 2015

story is still depicted on the façade of a grand house. In Van Deelen's novel, Beatrijs has grown into an eleven-year-old girl. We follow the adventures she has with her friend Gijs. By chance she also comes to learn of her true origins.

Where there's a flood, there's a cradle

The visual motif of the baby in the cradle, with or without a cat, lives on in all sorts of contexts, from children's books to a film about the 1953 flood disaster, from reproductions of paintings to building façades in Kinderdijk. It also appeared in school posters

that hung in classrooms as part of a series of memorable historic moments from Dutch history. All those scenes are based on the altarpiece that was made in around 1490 as a tribute to the charity shown by the city of Dordrecht in its reception of the flood survivors in 1421.

The iconic image has become detached from the original context, but it still crops up in connection with other floods. Take the flood disaster of 1953. In countless children's book there's a scene in which a baby in a cradle, or some other kind of vessel, is rescued from the raging sea.[41] We see this in *Stand to, Boys!* by Klaas Norel, where the valiant Marieke risks her life by diving into the ice-cold water to save a baby who is wrapped in blankets and bobbing about in a large chair. They drift away and lose consciousness but are rescued just in time. In 2003, the fiftieth anniversary of the disaster, this children's book went into its twelfth printing. A similar scene can be found in *Wind Force Eleven* by Carel Beke, a children's book intended for use in Catholic primary schools. Bella manages to rescue the baby sister of her friend Geert by pulling her out of the water. In the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam the baby girl is reunited with her mother, who is beside herself with joy to hold her newborn child in her arms again. They offer God their thanks. The durability of

Detail of the façade of a house in Alblasserdam (public domain)

Poster from 1914, part of a teaching method in which children wrote essays based on large illustrations hung in their classrooms (published by P. Noordhoff, Groningen)

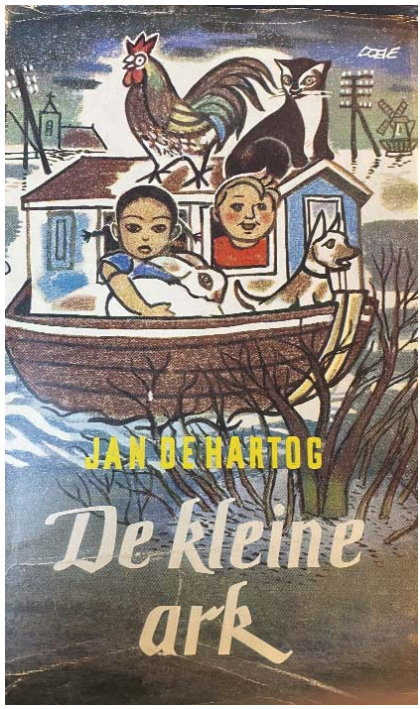
the motif can be seen in the educational comic book *Battle Against the Water,* published in 2011, in which the 1953 disaster is referenced. There, too, a cradle suddenly floats by, but this time an older child is clinging to it. What is striking is that both boys and girls play the role of hero, and the floating baby is always saved.

Even the cat is part of the standard repertoire, although that's not what you would expect at first. Cats keep cropping up in all sorts of new yet familiar contexts. Take for instance the often reprinted *The Little Ark* (1953) by Jan de Hartog, who was in Zeeland with his boat during the disaster. Two children, Jan and Adinda, escape death by taking refuge in a houseboat. The cat Noisette is an important source of security for Adinda. The association with Noah's Ark is fairly obvious. Besides being a good

Scene from *Stand to, Boys!* by Klaas Norel. With illustrations by Roel Ottow (twelfth printing, Kampen, 2003)

Carel Beke, *Wind Force Eleven*

Illustration from Marc Verhaegen and Jan Kragt's *Battle Against the Water* (EurEducation Foundation, 2011)



Cover of Jan de Hartog's *The Little Ark* (1953) by J.F. Doeve

adventure story, the book was also an ode to the fishermen of Urk, who sailed out to rescue people in the country's flooded regions. Proceeds from the book, which was published in English and French simultaneously, went to the National Disaster Fund.

The cat also appears in other places, some of them quite unexpected. Take for example a photo of the flood disaster of 1953: a little boy is clutching his pet cat, his mainstay during the evacuation from the disaster area to the north.[42] Another extremely moving photo was taken of a little girl being evacuated by barge. Wrapped up in blankets, she clings to her cat. The straw beneath her underscores the obvious association with the baby in the cradle motif. At least as striking is the picture taken during the flood of Tuindorp Oostzaan in 1960. There, the little girl has fallen asleep against a stack of suitcases in a canteen that was serving as an emergency shelter. She's got a firm grip on her cat, who

The flood disaster in Tholen, Zeeland, full trains with evacuees headed north (photo: Co Zeylemaker, ANP)

Koos Molkenboer, evacuation by barge, 1953 (ANP)

Shelter in the canteen of the Netherlands Dock and Shipping Company in Amsterdam (Tuindorp Oostzaan Historical Archives)

is warily observing the world around them.[43] Throughout the centuries, cats have served as pillars of support for children undergoing fearful moments during floods – in both imagination and in reality.

2
The Water Wolf

On 19 January 2020, a new sculpture was unveiled on the Waalkade in Nijmegen: *The Water Wolf and the Aquanaut*. This bronze artwork, almost four meters in height, depicts a wolf flashing a mouthful of teeth. The little boy beside him is wearing swimming goggles and flippers and is anything but frightened. On the contrary, he seems to regard the water wolf as his best friend: with one arm thrown across the animal's shoulders he languidly gazes out over the Waal. Which makes perfect sense, because if you look carefully you see that the wolf is actually a toy: the hips are attached to the rest of the body with large bolts. The animal is a reference not only to the water wolf but also to the city's ancient Roman roots. According to mythology, Romulus and Remus, the founders of the city of Rome, were raised by a female wolf.

The new creation on the Waalkade, fashioned by artists Paul Keizer and Albert Dedden, makes use of images that are part of a long tradition. For centuries, the term "water wolf" was used to symbolize the devastating water that devoured people, houses and cattle. In the Nijmegen version, however, the wolf is no longer an enemy but a friend. The aim of the work's creators is to show that Nijmegen no longer turns its back on the Waal but lovingly embraces it. The playfulness of the figures is a reference to the freedom of movement that the river has acquired with the construction of the side channel that was part of the "Room for the River" project.[1]

Paul Keizer and Albert Dedden, *The Water Wolf and the Aquanaut*, Waalkade, Nijmegen (photo: Lotte Jensen)

This new water wolf illustrates how iconic images can assume a different meaning when placed in a new context. They are part of a culture of remembrance, which on the one hand is based on repetition: the more often these images are repeated through time, the more firmly they become lodged in the collective memory. But they are also subject to change, because the media used to produce them and the social framework in which they are active are constantly changing. In addition, writers and artists can consciously "rewrite" myths and stories, thereby altering the way they are interpreted.[2] Existing images are torn open and invested with a more current meaning. In this way, artists challenge the public to consider existing imagery from the perspective of the new work of art.[3]

The reuse of iconic images, even when they are given a totally new interpretation, involves a paradox. Every form of reuse is al-

so a confirmation of the tradition, which has to be activated in the brain in order to make the new meaning comprehensible. This swing of the pendulum between confirmation and disruption is characteristic of the way new versions of myths and stories are dispersed by the various media in our society.[4] That's precisely why it's so important to be mindful of continuities as well as of the specific historical circumstances within which a certain cultural expression came about. The water wolf on the Waalkade becomes more meaningful when we bring the age-old visual tradition into play.

The Haarlemmermeer as water wolf

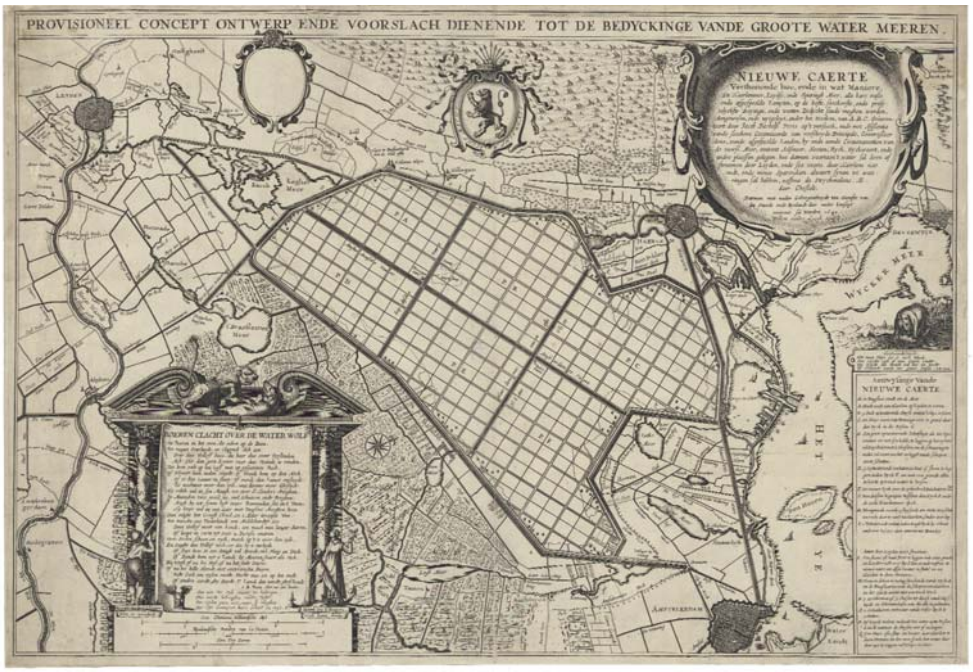
The concept of the water wolf crops up for the first time in the seventeenth century when plans were being made to impolder the Haarlemmermeer, a large lake in the west of the Netherlands. The area had been plagued by serious flooding, notably the floods of 1591 and 1611. There was also a problem of land loss owing to the fact that the southeastern and northern shores were unprotected. Serious plans for land reclamation were first put forward in 1615.[5] Impoldering, it was argued, would put an end to the flooding, but land reclamation was a controversial subject. Local authorities and other stakeholders worried about large-scale economic damage. The fishing industry would decline, and cities such as Haarlem and Leiden were afraid of becoming less accessible for navigation. It would also become impossible to replenish water in the canals. In addition, Amsterdam was concerned about the draining of excess water from the river IJ.[6]

There were also important advantages to land reclamation, however. Extra arable land meant more income. And land loss caused by shore erosion would also come to an end, which was good news for people living on the lakeside and the bordering polders. But most importantly, both town and country folk would no longer have to fear the devastating "water wolf," which

struck with such relentless ferocity every few years. So, several water management experts began developing plans. One of them was Jan Adriaanszoon Leeghwater, who in 1612 had made a name for himself with the reclamation of the Beemster and many other large lakes, including the Purmer, the Wijde Wormer and the Schermer.[7] In 1641 Leeghwater published the *Haarlemmermeer Book*, a work of 172 articles in which he called for the impoldering of the Haarlemmermeer. He painted a dramatic picture of "the water wolf [that] devours and destroys everything in its path." The beast bared its claws and brazenly deprived owners of their land. There was a solution, however: according to Leeghwater, the Haarlemmermeer could be transformed from "a ravenous wolf" to "the eighth wonder of the world."[8] Pumping was the answer, a trick that had already been demonstrated in the North Holland polder.

Leeghwater used the water wolf as a synonym for the Haarlemmermeer, which constituted a permanent threat to everyone living in the vicinity. It was a powerful metaphor that was visualized on the maps being designed at the same time by the planner Jacob Bartelszoon Veris. Following the custom of the time, these maps were elaborately decorated with allegorical scenes. They also served as propaganda, as is clear from the added illustrations and inscriptions.[9] Printed in the left-hand corner of every map was an image of the Dutch lion vanquishing the water wolf. It was a powerful depiction of the regional struggle with the water, since the lion was a symbol of power, unity and fearlessness. It also evoked associations with the Dutch Republic as a whole. In the middle of the map, the Dutch lion was shown with seven arrows in its paw, a reference to the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands.

The motif of the struggle between the Dutch lion and the water wolf was further developed in the poems printed on various maps.[10] These were written by Veris, I.R. Ingelius and Joost van den Vondel. Veris, who produced two maps, promoted the interests of landowners living along the Haarlemmermeer. In his



Jacob Bartelszoon Veris, *New map showing how, and in what way, the Haarlemmermeer, the Leidsemeer and the Spieringmeer could be diked*, 1641 (Leiden University Library)

"Peasants Complain of the Water Wolf," he wrote from the perspective of the peasants, who bewailed the water wolf's evil, all-devouring fury:

> The peasants on the moor, they raise a mighty roar,
> And rise up one by one, to clamor and deplore
> This wolf so cruel and foul, who cometh to devour them.
> Oh! is there not a lion to seize and overpower him,
> To pounce upon his frame, and with his jaws agape,
> To tear and shred his hide, or tread upon his nape.[11]

The Dutch lion defeats the water wolf. Detail from Jacob Bartelszoon Veris, *New map showing how, and in what way, the Haarlemmermeer, the Leidsemeer and the Spieringmeer could be diked*, 1641 (Leiden University Library)

It is for these reasons that the wolf, who threatened the "Fatherland," had to be killed: "This wolf must be destroyed, his power must be broken," according to Veris.[12]

The Amsterdam poet I.R. Ingelius addressed his viewers (*specatori*) directly in his poem and called on the Dutch (Bataven) to build dikes around the Haarlemmermeer. What madness to search for land in distant places when it was present in such abundance at home! The shores of the lake then spoke, explaining how Haarlem and Leiden would rather have land than water as their neighbors. The last to speak were the local inhabitants, who issued a cry for help:

> We are drowning! Alas, the LAKE is like a WOLF threatening the lambs!
> Reach out the lion's hand, Batavian people;
> and protect your own, thrice great with your heroes,
> look – why do you seek land on other shores? – your land is here.[13]

The Batavian people were being called on to show the strength of a lion, as the classical hero Hercules had once done when he strangled the Nemean lion with his bare hands. The Batavian lion may have owed its greatness to many heroes – the great naval heroes, for example – but now it had to seize land from its own territory and not from foreign shores.

Vondel chose yet another perspective in his poem "To the Lion of Holland." He directly addressed the lion, who symbolized not only the province of Holland but also the Republic as a whole, and asked a few critical questions. What purpose did it serve to attack foreign enemies when the country's own entrails were in a state of decay? What good did it do to bare its claws to the eastern and western parts of the world when the "cruel water wolf" was about to bite the lion in the heart? The questions were rhetorical, of course. It was pointless to conquer foreign realms when the country's own well-being was at stake. Which meant it was time for the land's lion to arouse the lords of Kennemerland, Rijnland and Amstelland with a roar and get them to provide assistance: "O land lion, awake." This was the rescue plan:

> It's dikes that bar this beast, your cruel foe.
> The wind lord, too, flies in with windmill blades,
> Drives water wolf to sea, and deals the final blow,
> And puts an end to all his gnawing raids.
> The boggy peasant spurs the hunt along.
> The bog wife cries: "He's gone! The land lion bold
> Now sucks the teats of cows, grows hale and strong!"
> The land reclaimed, the lion turns foam to gold.[14]

Illness and health run like a thread throughout this poem. If the emaciated land lion was to recover, the water wolf would have to be beaten once and for all. That could be done by building dikes on the land and employing windmills to drain the lake. The land lion would rise again in all his glory and turn the useless foaming water into new profits ("gold").[15]

Simon Fokke, *Extraordinary Water Activity in the Haarlemmermeer on 1 November 1755* (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

Vondel's poem would become widely known: it was reprinted countless times and served as a source of inspiration for other poets. It also raised awareness of the metaphorical struggle between the ferocious water wolf and the Dutch lion.

It did not result in the impoldering of the Haarlemmermeer, however, because the opposition was too great. Leeghwater published several editions of his *Haarlemmermeer Book* in which he advanced new and sometimes compelling arguments for beginning the reclamation. In one of them he recounted the anxious hours that he and his son had spent on the lake. They narrowly escaped death.[16] But to no avail: no action was taken, at least for the time being.

Wolf on the loose

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authors used the term "water wolf" mainly as a metaphor for the Haarlemmermeer. We find this imagery in the work of contemporary poets such as Johannes Antonides van der Goes and Pieter Huisinga Bakker, who were well known at the time. Both were clearly quite familiar with Vondel's work. In *The IJ Flood*, Antonides typified the Haarlemmermeer as "a water wolf, who with ferocious teeth, / Mutilates and tears the bowels of his own mother."[17] With his ode to the IJ, Antonides laid the foundations for a new genre: the flood poem.[18] Also belonging to this genre was "Reflection on the Floods of the Fatherland" (1773) by Huisinga Bakker. Bakker pulled out all the stops with the wolf symbolism in this work. He devoted verse after verse to the "cruel wolf, or glutton," who ground whole plots of land into mud and, "howling for plunder," roamed "the defenseless shores." It was time to "restrain this water wolf and his fearsome maw, / Or bravely drive him out with tooth and claw."[19]

The extent to which the term had taken root as a synonym for the Haarlemmermeer is also apparent from several popular

Verbeelding van de ongemeene hooge

WAATERVLOED

In Holland, en Polders en Dorpen van dien, en de groote ſchade daar door geſchiet, tuſſchen den 5 en 6 April A°. 1702.

Zynde dezelve booven de hoogſte Vloeden in een Eeuw herwaards, naar aanteekening op de gemeene Pyl van de Zeedyken hooger gevonden 4 duym.

De Maagd van Holland zit hier in het treurgewaad,
Beweenende, vol ſmart, haar jammerlyke ſtaat;
Dewyl een Zee-Orcaan, rammeyend tegens Dyken
En Dammen, doorbreekt, en met haar Landsdouw gaat ſtryken.
De Noord' en Weſten-wind, twee blaasbalgen, heel verwoed
Uit hunne ketenen geſpat, den Waater-vloed
Doen ſwellen, en met Huys en Hof, en Landgenooten,
En Vee, en Stolp en Stal, om 't jammer te vergrooten,
Verbrooken en geſloopt, heen dryven, en dien ſchat,
Haar welvaart, ſmooren in 't onſtuymig peekelnat.
Wat Landplaag, welk elend, kan by dees droefheid haalen!
Wie zal, als God alleen, haar groot verlies bepaalen.

Naamen der voornaamſte Steeden, Dorpen, Heerenhuyſen en Landeryen, door deze Waatervloed beſchaadigt en ondergeloopen.

Van Amſterdam, de weſtzyde van den Amſtel, gerekent door Ouwerkerk tot de Scheidinge, tuſſchen 't Sticht en Holland.
De Ronde Waveren. Botshol. Ruyge Willis. Vinkeveen. 't Huys te Loenderſloot. Nieuwer-duys. Loenen. Vreeland. Horſter Meer. Ankeveen. Naarder Meer. Keverdyk. Hoßand. Muyden. Weesp. Muyderban. Diemerdam en Dyk. Oosdorp. En de Dorpen, Heerenhuyſen, Polders en Landeryen daar onder gelegen.

Van Amerſoort langs den Eem.
Kuylhorſt. Hoogerhorſt. Grimmeſteyn. 't Huys ter Eem.

Over den Eem.
Eembrug. Immenes Binnen dyks, tot aan de Huyſer Weg, verder aan de Zuyder Zee, en langs deſelve door Spaskenborg, Nickerk, en door Emmeklaer weder tot Amerſoort, en Dorpen en Landeryen in dien omtrek gelegen.

Over het Y, voor
Buyckſloot. Het ganſche Y langs, door Schellingwou. Durgerdam. Uytdam. Monnikendam. Het Eyland Marken. Vollendam Den Broek. Tot Edam. Verders langs de Purmerdyk, Ilpendam. Purmerent. Langs de Purmelander Gouw. Door Landsmeer tot Buyckloot, en de verdere Steden, Dorpen, en Landeryen daar onder gelegen.
En eindelyk de ganſche Aſſendelver en Crommenyer ban, met de Dorpen en Landeryen daar onder gelegen.

t'Amſterdam, by PIETER VANDEN BERGE, in de Kalverſtraat, in de Groene Berg.

Pieter van de Berge, *Depiction of the unusually high flooding in Holland, its polders and villages, and the great damage that was done there between 5 and 6 April 1702* (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

scientific treatises from the first half of the eighteenth century. In a mathematical treatise from 1731, for example, the Leiden professor Willem la Bordus expressed the hope that the "voracious water wolf" would be transformed into a "blessed and enchanting landscape."[20] Jan de Cerff, mayor of Rotterdam and poet, wrote in his rhymed chronicle of the Dutch Republic about how the "rampaging wolf" had threatened numerous villages and cities in 1702. The wolf was already approaching the gates of Haarlem and was threatening Amsterdam as well.[21]

At the same time, De Cerff's history reveals that, by then, the term "water wolf" was being applied more broadly. The flood of 1702 involved a much larger area than the Haarlemmermeer; many villages on the Zuiderzee were also badly hit. De Cerff also spoke of the water wolf in relation to the breaching of the Lek Dike in 1637, the storm surges of 1651, the flooding of Zeeland in 1682 and of Alblasserwaard in 1726.[22] In short, the water wolf was no longer a symbol for the Haarlemmermeer alone.

That the meaning of the term was expanding is apparent from the pamphlet *The Foolish Peasant*, which had to do with the flooding of the Vier-Ambacht Polder just beyond Rijnland in 1788. The pamphlet was written by Jan Verwoerd of Alphen, about whom little is known.[23] He dwelt at length on the damage and misery caused by the breach of the dike: all the houses in the area had been washed away, the livestock had drowned and all sorts of household goods were splashing against the ruins of the dike. His pamphlet is interesting for two reasons. First, he reflected on the use of the designation "water wolf." He thought it was a suitable term because the wolf was a voracious beast that killed both humans and animals. But water had yet another feature: it permanently ruined both land and goods, so their owners could never use them again. That made the water wolf even more threatening.

Second, he explicitly asked the question of culpability: was God the cause of all this misery, or was it people, who had failed to keep the dikes in good repair? For Verwoerd, the answer was

perfectly clear: of course God was almighty, but He was beyond any implication of guilt. The inhabitants had been fully warned in advance and had been negligent in their maintenance:

> That is why, my Fellows, do not be surprised that I apply the word Wolf to the same, and always take care (at least those who have any stake in the matter) that you carefully inspect your Dikes and Dams (to fend off the all-devouring Wolf), to make them strong, and to maintain them from that voracious Beast (your and our chief enemy), so that you will not have to blame yourselves that this same Beast has pounced on you and caused great devastation because of your own failures. And then put the blame on God, as if He was the cause of it all.[24]

The language was clear: whether the inhabitants could prevent another calamity or not was entirely up to them. Sitting back and trusting that all would be well was not an option. Verwoerd hoped that God would provide the Dutch with the necessary strength and means to tame the water wolf, which would also benefit the welfare of the Netherlands as a whole. That did not preclude the need for fervent and constant prayer, however:

> Come people of the Netherlands and turn
> To God, and with humility implore,
> That in this place and on every other shore,
> He'll keep the Water Wolf away.[25]

At first, the water wolf symbolized only the Haarlemmermeer, whereas now the term referred to the overall threat posed by water throughout the Netherlands.

We see this expansion of meaning reflected in nineteenth-century flood disaster literature. From then on, the water wolf could be trotted out no matter where the flood took place, be it Holland, Gelderland or Friesland. When the river region was inundated in 1861, it was anxiously regarded as a new attack by the

water wolf.[26] Even in fictional floods, the term was a useful metaphor. A case in point is the poem "Klara and Ewoud" by the famous patriotic poet Hendrik Tollens, who was known as the founding father of flood disaster literature.[27] In that work, with a grand, sentimental gesture, he described the calamitous scenes that emerge during a flood: floating bodies, wrecked farms, terrified people and shrieking livestock. There, too, the water wolf made an appearance:

> Never had the water wolf so greedily crushed his prey;
> Nor raged with such ferocity, nor all restraints outweigh.
> No graybeard who since early youth had lived there on the dike
> Remembered such a deluge, or had ever seen its like.
> Where have you flown, O happy hope, on which the farmer labored![28]

The water wolf tamed

Although the term "water wolf" came to be more broadly applied over the course of the nineteenth century, that one great water wolf had yet to be restrained: the Haarlemmermeer. Engineering designs from 1808 and 1819 never left the drawing board. Things finally started moving in 1837, when King William I appointed a state commission to come up with a definitive reclamation plan.[29] The king's decision had been occasioned by the major storms of 1836, which had driven the water all the way to Amsterdam and Leiden and caused enormous damage. Just then, and not by coincidence, a new edition of Leeghwater's *Haarlemmermeer Book* had been issued, this time with a greatly expanded introduction by magistrate W.J.C. van Hasselt. Vondel's poem was printed at the front of the book and given a longer title for the occasion: "On the Draining of the Haarlemmermeer: To the Lion of Holland." Van Hasselt then strung to-

gether one argument after another to make it clear that reclamation was the only option for a safe existence: "Will the *water wolf* have to swallow even more land before the decision is made to muzzle him for good?"[30]

Nicolaas Beets contributed his two cents with a poem in which he lets "The Aalsmeer Farmer" have his say in no uncertain terms:

Mighty Lake! Mighty Lake!
I wish they'd drain you for my sake!
I'd rather live all my tomorrows
From your rich and peerless land
Than sit here now in dread and sorrow
On your shoreline's soggy sand.[31]

The cries for help were heard. The work began in 1849 with the help of three great pumping stations, and in the summer of 1852 the lake was finally drained. This was fuel for the writers of occasional verse, who observed with satisfaction that the monster had been appeased. As the poet and clergyman Nicolaas Beets put it in his second "Song of the Haarlemmermeer":

Now Greedy Guts is gobbled up,
His reigning days are ended;
The big and brutal Water Hulk
Can only sit alone and sulk,
It's not what he intended.[32]

Beets went on to write two more Haarlemmermeer songs in which he celebrated the draining of the Haarlemmermeer. An echo of Vondel's poem can be heard in his glorification of the Dutch lion, who is now in perfect health:

Old Holland's Lion, hail,
And shake your mane with pride;

Le Géant de la Côte, colossus of a recumbent lion. A design (never executed) by David Humbert de Superville (Leiden University print collection)

High spirits justified,
Will joyfully prevail!
"So suck the milk of cattle,
Grow healthy now and strong,"
The lowing cattle's song,
Marks this triumphant battle.[33]

The water wolf and the lion were a recurrent combination in the culture of words and images that developed around the battle against the water. The battle was depicted as an actual fight between two terrifying animals, with the triumph of the lion symbolizing the greatness of the province of Holland *and* of the Netherlands as a nation. Thus, both animals were put to work in

the creation of a positive self image. As formulated by priest and writer Jan Willem Brouwers in 1881 in his reaction to a flood in the Brabant village of Nieuw Cuijk: "Is there any victory finer that the Dutch lion can taste / Than weakening the water wolf and seeing him disgraced?"[34]

The symbolism was taken to such extremes that the artist David Humbert de Superville designed a colossal pompous lion that was meant to be placed along the coast of Katwijk to protect the homeland from the water.[35] The lion was also prominently displayed on the coat of arms of the municipality of Haarlemmermeer, which was incorporated in 1855. An initial design made by Mayor M.S.P. Pabst was rejected because it did not comply with the strict rules regarding these kinds of symbols. It featured a red lion operating a cogwheel, and a shield with ears of grain shooting up out of the waves. A few words from Vondel's poem "Gold From Foam" completed the design. Nicolaas Beets wrote an accompanying poem emphasizing the central role played by the lion:

> The Lion of Holland, now strong and hale,
> See by this Shield his pride unveil,
> His mighty claws protect it,
> And the new earth to inspect it.[36]

It was replaced by a much simpler coat of arms in which three golden ears of grain arise from the blue bars. In the revisions of 1980 and 2019, a golden count's crown and a lion were added.

The impoldering of the Haarlemmermeer gave an enormous boost to the Dutch sense of nationhood. One other person who benefited from this, was King William III. The lake was drained during his reign, for which his contemporaries showered him with compliments. Take for example the Catholic writer J.A. Alberdingk Thijm, who penned a poetic tribute to the king on the occasion of his twenty-fifth year on the throne. These verses graced the triumphal arch in Amsterdam's Vondelstraat:

Three variations of the Haarlemmermeer coat of arms. Left: the rejected design of 1855, inspired by Vondel's poem; middle: the accepted coat of arms (1856-1979); and right: the current coat of arms (2019-present) (source: Wikipedia Commons)

> The age of William Three will by posterity be spoken,
> When the power of the water wolf in Haarlem's lake was broken,
> And that great region's riches were wrested from his might;
> Then was the deepest trench dug through Holland's solid ground,
> Luring wealthy ships to Amsterdam from regions all around,
> The telegraph and railway did East and West unite,
> A grateful Nation thanks HIM, our leader bold and sound,
> Who champions our honor into a future bright.[37]

That the draining of the Haarlemmermeer did no harm to the king's reputation is also evident in the "Flood Disaster Wilhelmus" (1881). In this poetic tribute, written on the occasion of his birthday and intended as a means of raising money for the victims of a flood disaster in Brabant, William III was feted as a veritable Neptune. The anonymous author praised the king because he had annexed gigantic bodies of water.[38] The waves saw him as the supreme water lion and obeyed him at the wag of his tail. The

A. Grimme, *The Water Wolf Defeated*, drawings: E.J. Veenendaal, Nijkerk, 1939

Jan Mens, *Gold Beneath the Waves*, cover of the tenth printing from 2013 (original title: *Waterland*, 1943)

royal family thus became part of the cultural self-image in which a heroic lion forced a wolf to its knees.

War against the water wolf

In the twentieth century, the term "water wolf" was widely accepted as referring to the threat of water in the Netherlands. Numerous novels were written in which the term played a role. Some of them had to do specifically with the draining of the Haarlemmermeer, while others focused on other floods. A selection of these titles clearly shows to what extent the water wolf had taken hold as a general designation.

In 1904, Jan Eigenhuis, a teacher from Aalsmeer, published the village novella *The Water Wolf*.[39] The story takes place in the

mid-nineteenth century during the reclamation, with authentic, small-town characters as its protagonists. Kees Voet, the fisherman, is dead set against impoldering. He plans to fish until his dying breath, until the lake no longer has anything to offer him. The story enjoyed great popularity, as is clear from the fact that it was included in anthologies and was still being read on the radio in the 1940s.[40] In other novels, historic figures play an important role. Leeghwater appears as a character in *The Water Wolf Defeated* (1939) by Aart Grimme. This historic young adult novel takes place at the time of the impoldering of the Beemster. There, the subject of the draining of the Haarlemmermeer comes up in conversation. Leeghwater says, "Now take the Haarlemmermeer. You yourself know something about that. The water wolf is tearing his way into the land, which is shrinking by the day."[41] Leeghwater also played a leading role in *Waterland* (1943) by Jan Mens, another book about the Beemster. Later editions bore the revealing title *Gold Beneath the Waves* – again a reference to the flourishing fields of grain that lay hidden underwater.

These books were all about the Beemster and the Haarlemmermeer, but works having to do with other floods also appeared, such as *In the Clutches of the Water Wolf* (1953) by Cornelis Baardman, about the flood disaster of 1953, and *The Water Wolf* (2006) by André Nuyens, about the breach of the Zuiderzee dike in 1675.

In addition to its appearance in novels, the term also took on a life of its own in the news media. During major floods, such as the Meuse flood of 1926 and the flood disaster of 1953, we see a peak in its use in both regional and national newspapers.[42] Three things stand out here. First, the water wolf is portrayed as "our old archenemy."[43] From time to time, the water wolf woke up and sowed mayhem and destruction wherever he went: "The old enemy, the fierce water wolf, has pounced with a howl on the territory that was snatched from him centuries ago by the power of human hands, and has greedily devoured the labor of many generations," wrote the *Friese Koerier* in 1953.[44] That situated the

battle with the water – that is, the water wolf – within a long tradition.

Second, the media used the language of war when describing this struggle.[45] It was a fight with a ruthless enemy that devoured everything in his path. The monster had to be looked straight in the maw and fought with all available weapons: "It was war, plain and simple, war against the water wolf," wrote the newspaper *Trouw* in 1953.[46] The use of military imagery was part of a long tradition. As far back as the sixteenth century, a parallel was drawn between fighting the Spanish and restraining the natural enemy, the water. The historian Simon Schama points out that the story of the revolt against Spain flowed seamlessly into a discourse on how to tame the water wolf successfully.[47]

Third, it was a collective struggle that was carried out by "us" (the Dutch) against "them" (the water wolf). So the imagery was all about creating a positive self-image. It was easy to expand the hostile "them" by means of association. In the same way that the struggle with the water was linked to the revolt against the Spanish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so comparisons with the war against Germany made the rounds during the Second World War. A historical article that appeared in *De Maasbode* in 1940 about Dutch people who had helped to construct dikes in neighboring countries during the Middle Ages featured this very suggestive headline: "The Dutch as conquerors: They fought against the water wolf throughout Germany." According to this article, the Dutch exhibited "unfailingly bold willpower" to overcome the enemy's ever-deepening incursions.[48] The fact that in the years 1944-45 the Germans deliberately flooded large areas of land in Zeeland, the Betuwe and North Holland only served to strengthen the associative connection between the water wolf and Germany. The writer Jef Ersebeek put it this way in his novel *The Last Round* (1947): "At the very end, the ruthless Kraut made a devilish alliance with the arch-enemy of the Low Countries. He unleashed the water wolf across the Dutch polders."[49]

A break in the trend finally did take place. Before the twentieth century, the water wolf was invariably shown in the company of the Dutch lion, who brought him to bay. Now it was the people of the Netherlands who were forced to tackle him with all the means at hand. The perspective shifted from a test of strength between two animals to a struggle between man and nature. For example, when the deep cleft in the dike at Ouwerkerk was closed for good in 1953, the *Limburgsch Dagblad* praised the dike workers who had labored day and night to get the job done. It was a glorious victory over the archenemy. "The Netherlands has dealt with the water wolf," resounded the cheering headline.[50]

Today the term "water wolf" lives on in many different contexts. Some of them have nothing to do with its original meaning. "Water Wolf" is a popular name for rowing, swimming and water polo clubs, for instance. The Water Wolf marina and campground in the town of Oldehove in Groningen is a recreational center. A high-tech surfboard, made in Germany, bears the name Water Wolf. And there's a special brand of beer produced by the Hoop Brewery in Zaandijk. Its promotional material contains an echo of the old impoldering history: "For centuries, the water wolf has been engaged in a fight with the onshore people, constantly grabbing bits of land. Hoop Water Wolf is a dry saison with a fresh, spicy character."[51]

In other cases, the connection with the battle against the water is immediately clear. One of the largest pumping stations in the Netherlands, located in the province of Groningen, is called "The Water Wolf." Nowadays, it's a national monument. The Water Wolf is also an attraction in the Madurodam miniature theme park, where visitors can join forces to try to set the world's biggest steam engine in motion. Here, taming the water has become an exciting action game.[52] In June 2021, a mini-museum called "The Water Wolf" was opened on the Etersheimer Braakpolder. It tells the story of the Markermeer dike and the

surrounding area based on archeological finds. Featured topics include the drowned village of Etersheim, the struggle with the sea and the formation of the landscape.[53]

Education and entertainment are the main functions of the water wolf today. This doesn't mean that the threat posed by water has disappeared; there was a major flood in Valkenburg in 2021. But for the time being, the ravenous wolf seems to have been transformed into a friend.[54] The sculpture "The Water Wolf" on the Waalkade in Nijmegen appeals to both these functions. The insatiable wolf has undergone a transformation from enemy to companion: for the boy with the swimming goggles, the wolf is his buddy. Like the attraction in Madurodam, the scene leaves you with the impression that nature is something to play with. In any case, the fear is gone. Passers-by and tourists who stop to admire the sculpture can relax on the terrace of the nearby Water Wolf Grand Café. No citizen of early modern times would have dared give his tavern the name Water Wolf, let alone tap beer under that name.

The Water Wolf and the Aquanaut gaze out over the Waal in Nijmegen; sculpture by Paul Keizer and Albert Dedden (photo: Lotte Jensen)

3
Flood Disaster Literature

"'Karel,' mother moans, 'I'll never be able to reach the roof. This is the end of me!'"[1] Mother Dijkstra and her son undergo fearful moments in *Karel Saves His Mother*. They've fled to the attic, but the water has risen so high that they have to escape to the roof. Karel climbs out through the skylight. He convinces his terrified mother to do the same. Waving a flashlight, they wait to be rescued. Luckily, father Dijkstra and his neighbor manage to save them. Mother is intensely grateful to both men, but father Dijkstra argues that Karel is the bravest of them all because he helped his mother onto the roof. However, the boy corrects his father: "'No, father... it was not I but the Lord who saved us.'"[2]

A. Duyster, *Karel Saves His Mother*, 1993

People with a flag and a few meager possessions on the roof of their farmhouse during the Zeeland flood, photographer unknown (photo: ANP)

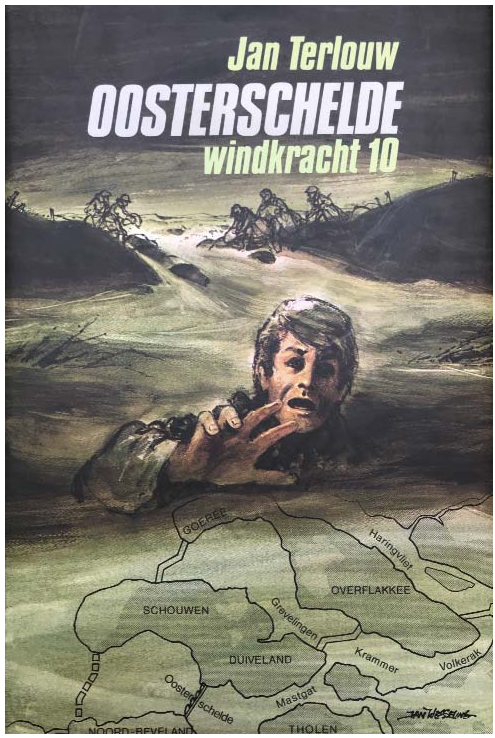
Karel Saves His Mother was published in 1993, forty years after the flood disaster, but the events are no less true to life. The author, A. Duyster, made use of familiar images. For centuries, this kind of scene on the roof has been part of the standard pictorial repertoire for flood emergencies.[3] Others include people shivering in the attic, people clinging to branches or pieces of wreckage to keep from drowning and skippers performing acts of heroism. In this case it's a child playing the role of hero, not only by rescuing his mother but also by delivering a lesson in religious humility at the end. Whether it's children's books, poems, stories or commemoration books, the cultural depiction of flood disasters

follows distinctive patterns. The prototypical scenes may be based on a historical event, but writers invent fictional characters and often add other elements: an exciting plot, imagination and emotion.

Literature is an important way of keeping history alive: it allows people who did not experience the disaster first-hand to form a picture of the event. Another good example is the classic *Oosterschelde Wind Force 10* by the writer and former politician Jan Terlouw. The first edition came out in 1976 and it has gone through countless reprints since then. Readers of the book are introduced to the pregnant Anne, who fears for the life of her husband Henk. He spends three days and three nights on the roof until, finally, he is spotted by the pilot of a Piper Cub. The pilot passes the message on to two boys, eighteen and nineteen years of age, from Oude Tonge, who have "already performed many feats of great danger" and who manage to rescue Henk with a raft.[4] The author was a university student in Utrecht at the time of the disaster and signed up with a team of volunteers.[5] He had seen with his own eyes what devastation the flood had caused, but that was not true for the young readers of his book. Yet his lively descriptions made it possible for them to imagine what had taken place back then.

Karel Saves His Mother and *Oosterschelde Wind Force 10* are part of a long tradition of flood disaster literature. By their very definition, literary descriptions offer a distorted view of reality: it's a stylized *representation* of what actually took place. That makes them less suitable for conveying historical data and facts. At the same time, they're indispensable when it comes to understanding how people of the past dealt with natural phenomena such as floods. Stories and poems offered consolation and lent a deeper meaning to the events by linking them with religious or moral lessons. The use of stylistic devices could serve to reinforce the message, thereby increasing the impact of the work.[6]

Because of that stylization of reality, flood disaster literature was judged by the standards of literary criticism. A novel or



Cover of Jan Terlouw's *Oosterschelde Wind Force 10*, 37th printing from 2010

poem had to be plausible and not to collapse under the weight of clichés. But it was (and is) not easy to write about a flood in an elegantly stylized and original way without putting the authenticity at risk. A nineteenth-century critic once complained about the shortage of good disaster poets. The literary world was teeming with "half-baked poets who make a dreadful mess of the finest material."[7] The line that writers had to navigate between art and kitsch was sometimes very thin indeed.

Standard pictorial repertoire

For centuries the Dutch have written about their flood experiences in stories, poems, sermons, novels, commemoration books

and plays. We can use the collective term "flood disaster literature" when referring to these kinds of works, keeping in mind that the term "literature" should be broadly interpreted. Fewer and fewer genres have come to be regarded as "real" literature. Before the twentieth century, the field was much broader. In the early modern period it also included travelogues, songs, emblem books, diaries, pamphlets and essays in addition to the traditional genres of poetry, drama and the novel. Aesthetics played an important role in all of them. Authors exaggerated the events by means of stylistic devices, and often their main goal was sensationalism: a particular religious or moral message could seem more powerful if the public was emotionally affected in some way.

So, flood disaster literature comprises many different genres in which a wide range of accents can be placed. In sermons, for example, the emphasis is on the edifying lesson, while theatrical plays can introduce characters who represent certain virtues or vices. Songs combine sensational details with a moral message, and commemoration books often contain tables listing those who died for every village. Yet there are a few salient ingredients that are common to every genre.[8]

First, authors almost always dwell on the horrific consequences of the disaster. Hair-raising scenes of people seeking refuge on rooftops, cattle lowing in the throes of death, and parents watching their children drown: it's all described in great detail. Plenty of attention is also focused on all the drowned livestock and floating bodies. The poet G.A.C.W. de Thouars, for example, who served as a page to King William I and has since faded into oblivion, wrote the following about the flood of 1825. He himself was not an eyewitness to the disaster, but he let his imagination do the talking:

> One sees, one stares, oh God! A mother cold and dead ...
> The roof floats closer still; a move that all must dread.
> The desperate cry: I'm gone! but soft! ... I hear a moan ...

A living baby lies in its dead mother's arms alone! ...
Upon the mother's icy breast an infant, sweet and warm, ...
It's still alive, yet soon from its mother's arms is torn.
Two bodies more are found, two corpses small and sweet!
Their spirits with their mother's flown to the Lord's retreat,
[...].[9]

Desperate people on rooftops, a widow stretching out her hands, dying babies: it was all part of the flood disaster poet's standard repertoire. De Thouars's terrifying description reaches a climax in the following chilling scene:

And there behold a mother and the child for whom she prays,
In him she sees her soul's delight, the joy of all her days,
She'd plunge through fire and wreckage, through waters fierce and wild,
Do anything to save the life of this her *only* child,
No fate will make her tremble, nor danger from the sea,
As long as he lies in her arms, her precious property.
At night she lays him in his crib and rocks him with a song,
And gives him one more tender kiss to last the whole night long. [...]
A brutal wave comes up and takes the crib from shore,
And soon the little ship's afloat, she'll see him nevermore.[10]

Here we see a perfect example of the motif of the baby in the cradle. But unlike the original story, this one does not end well. The poet goes on to describe how the cradle capsizes and the child is swallowed up by the sea. He devotes several verses to the boundless grief of the mother, who must comfort herself with the thought that she will see her infant again in the hereafter.

Second, a great deal of attention is paid to extraordinary rescues. No matter how horrific the disaster, there are always hopeful events, such as the miraculous way people manage to get to

safety, the return of long-lost family members and the reunion with loved ones. W.E. de Perponcher, poet and Utrecht politician, gave free rein to his poetic imagination in *Scene From the Flood of 1799*. A first-person narrator travels through the river region and speaks with some of the victims. When he sees a family stuck in the ice, he immediately offers his assistance. They succeed in freeing the vessel, to the great relief of everyone on board. Tears of gratitude flow down the face of the father of the family, but he only has a short time to recover. The next moment, a cradle floats by carrying an infant. They manage to save the baby, who is chilled to the bone and famished, and to reunite him with his intensely grateful mother:

> The mother flies into the man's arms.
> "Oh, my," she says, "thou hast saved my child,
> Now he will also drink his fill!"
> She gives him the breast, he sucks, and swallows,
> And quenches his thirst on the source of life.[11]

All this resulted in repeated thanks to God: "How wonderful God's Providence / Can ensure the preservation of mankind!"[12]

While the scene in De Perponcher's poem was fictional, such miraculous rescues really did happen. Take the story of eight-year-old Johanna van Beek from Beneden-Leeuwen. In February 1861 she floated around in ice cold water for six days until she was rescued five kilometers further on. She was the only member of her family to survive the disaster. This episode inspired several authors to deal with it at great length. A number of submissions describing the incident appeared in the literary magazine *De Tijdstroom*, including a poem by C.A. Campagne of Tiel. He focused on the terrifying days and nights that the little girl had spent on a small piece of roof thatching:

> It's she, who for so many days
> Was lost to us, this gentle child,

An offering to the water wild
That pulled so many into its maze.

[...]

She's saved, her sad, lamenting prayer,
Was finally heard above the gale;
The wind picked up her plaintive wail
And carried it on the blust'ry air.
And God, who would protect her still
From hunger, misery and chill,
Took pity on the little maid,
And her to saving arms conveyed.[13]

The miracle, which was the work of God, clearly spoke to the imagination.

A third and final element is the religious moral. The descriptions of terrifying scenes and miraculous rescues almost always served a higher purpose: to convince the readers or listeners that God's hand was manifest everywhere. He punished humanity for their sins, so it was important to live a more pious life once the disaster had passed. Disaster literature was permeated with this edifying message, which was repeated over and over again. If people refused to see the light, worse disasters were bound to follow. Odds were, that floods would be more frequent, since that was the element that was present in such abundance in the Netherlands. The seventeenth-century Calvinist minister Jacobus van Oudenhoven of Haarlem expressed the idea this way: "In these vast and watery lands, which are water-bound, water is the primary element that God often uses to punish the inhabitants of these regions for their sins."[14] It was a pious message with a variety of gradations, and it changed over the centuries. The image of a harsh, punitive God gradually made way for a much milder God, and authors dealt differently with the role of technological innovations.[15]

Eight-year-old Johanna van Beek of Beneden-Leeuwen, who was saved in a miraculous rescue in 1861 (*De Tijdstroom*, 1861)

Despite the differences in nuance, the various genres of flood disaster literature have much in common in terms of substance. There are also stylistic similarities. Whether it's a commemoration book or a poem, the authors almost always appeal to the imagination to make the horrifying events as vivid as possible. Take the following commemoration book from 1799: *Description of the Flood Disaster of the Year MDCCXCIX* by tax official, surveyor and writer Cornelis Zillesen. He describes the flooding in the river region in meticulous detail, including a comprehensive report of all the damage sustained and the donations received for the benefit of the victims. Although his account focuses on the economic facts and figures, he also makes use of numerous stylistic devices:

> Heavy ice floes fall inward from the steep dikes, creating deep caverns and precipitous pits that lessen the effectiveness of the

> strongest breakwaters, while other floes tear the dikes from without. It is a situation so fearsome and ghastly that the inhabitants of the interior, who no longer considered themselves safe, fled from their homes, often without knowing where to go, while danger threatens all around, and everyone hopelessly cries for help.[16]

Adjectives such as "heavy," "deep" and "strongest" color the text and show how precarious the situation is at that moment. Zillesen also expands on the terrified evacuees who flee their homes in desperation. The procession includes heavily pregnant women who have gone into labor, widows with their little ones, mothers "with tender infants at their breast" and an old man limping along at a snail's pace. The air is filled with "heartbreaking wails," as Zillesen puts it.[17] Zillesen was living in Utrecht at the time and was probably not an eyewitness to the disaster. His work shows that stylistic devices also appear in genres that are aimed more at objective reporting. In that sense, the difference between sources that are mainly concerned with reporting objective information and texts with a more literary style is less pronounced than one might expect.

Flood disaster poetry

Nevertheless, there are considerable stylistic differences between the genres. Linguistic embellishments play a greater role in occasional verse, of course, if only to suit the rhyme scheme. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a boom time for flood poetry. Poets seized on the genre in vast numbers as a way to show off their literary prowess.

One of these poets was Hubert Korneliszoon Poot. This versifying farmer from Abtswoude wrote a poem about the Christmas Flood of 1717, which mainly struck Groningen and northern Germany. Although he lived far from the affected area, the storm

had led to threatening situations in other parts of the Netherlands. He opened his poetic reflection as follows:

> Of the wrath of the tortured sea
> And of her waves I shall sing;
> And how the world shrinks from furious water woe.[18]

Poot began with the epic opening words "I shall sing," immediately making it clear that his subject was one of great interest, and he followed this with a trio of alliterations: "world," "water," "woe." He went on to explain that the disaster must be seen as God's punishment: the people had provoked God to such a degree with their pride and "accumulated sins" that He threatened the earth with a new Deluge. He "burst forth the brine on fathomless fields" – another splendid alliterative sequence.

Not only did Poot place the flood within the context of the biblical Deluge, but he also made reference to the story from Greek mythology in which Zeus, the supreme deity, punished humanity with a great flood. The only survivors were Deucalion, who built a ship, and his wife Pyrrha. Poot ended his literary impression of the Christmas Flood with the prayer that God would spare the Christians of the future: "O Heaven, never send again a cause for such sad grieving, / But pour your blessings down on every Christian land."[19]

Poot wasn't the only one who tried to write a poem about a flood with as much eloquence as he could muster. The eighteenth century saw the development of a veritable craze for flood disaster poetry, in which factual reporting was subordinated to poetic style. One of the most striking examples is *The Netherlands Flood* (1741) by the Amsterdam businessman P. Bakker (who later published under the name Pieter Huisinga Bakker).[20] In this fifty-page poem he describes the flooding of large parts of the river region during the winter of 1740-41. His main priority was not factual accuracy but the ornamentation of the language: "It is not a historical narrative, but rather, according to the na-

ture of the poetic arts, it is a picturesque observation of the Netherlands Flood Disaster, embellished with several additions and ornamentations, so that I, as much as was possible in the midst of the hustle and bustle of merchantry, might arrange them according to the tastes of different palates."[21] So the poet seeks a diversion in the midst of his commercial activities and hopes his verses will appeal to the tastes of a broader public.

The poem takes the form of a journey: the first-person narrator travels through the afflicted areas and reports on what he encounters. In doing so he gives free rein to the poetic power of his imagination and makes use of a compelling style characterized by a great many embellishments. It abounds in colorful adjectives, metaphors, alliterations and hyperboles, as the opening verses illustrate:

> What urge has seized my soul to contemplate in verse,
> While dressed in mourning weeds, my country's watery curse?
> I feel my song arise with the rivers' agitation,
> And seek to find respite from my daily occupation.[22]

Over and over again, the poet appeals to his muse, Melpomene, for inspiration and strength: "Strengthen me, O Melpomene!"[23] He also draws sustenance from classical poets such as Ovid and Virgil, whom he frequently paraphrases. It's partly for this reason that the narrator comes to resemble a wandering Aeneas, the protagonist in Virgil's epic *The Aeneid*, who, after many peregrinations following his flight from Troy, finally reaches Italy. In the case of Bakker's narrator, his wanderings lead him to his home port of Rotterdam.

The narrator presents himself as a sensitive soul. Wherever he goes he is deeply affected by the scenes of calamity around him. This drives his poetic enthusiasm to unparalleled heights:

> I feel new strength, nothing can still my zeal
> I'll venture forth on a sea of tears and gloom,

And bob on the back of that deadly watery tomb,
And depict the FLOOD, should I be given the grace,
That the paint may thereby play with the life I face.[24]

The text is teeming with these kinds of poetic pronouncements. The poet is constantly being moved by the scenes of calamity before him. It touches him so profoundly that, on several occasions, he considers stopping his writing altogether: "Where so much grief abounds, I feel my pen has failed me."[25] At moments like these, he seeks the support of Melpomene, who must offer him new laments and inspiration so he can continue with his verse.[26]

It should be clear that what we have here is not an ordinary reporter but a poet of deep emotion whose state of mind is present throughout the entire text. We see the passing landscape through his poetic lens, and that accounts for the large number of adjectives, hyperboles and topoi (poetic clichés). For example, Bakker's narrator employs a striking number of battle metaphors. He speaks of the Dutch people being assaulted by "the violence of the waters" and the "water wolf," which have caused the collapse of the Alblasserwaard.[27] This kind of bellicose language occurred frequently in early modern flood texts, as we saw in the previous chapter.[28] It turned the water into a common foe that must be conquered by a united effort.

Bakker's account culminates in an appeal for love and integrity. He applauds the relief efforts of the nation's rulers and appeals to all its citizens to donate to the cause. After so many lyrical digressions, this literary voyage ends with a very concrete, tangible call for financial and material assistance.

That message was also promoted on the work's beautiful frontispiece by Jan Caspar Philips. It features a boat sailing through a flooded landscape. Sitting in the back of the boat are the poet, who is busy writing, and Melpomene, the muse of tragedy. Pictured at the top is Pheme, the goddess of rumors. In each of the four corners of the print is a river god: the Tiber, the Danube, the

Rhine and the Meuse. In the water and on its banks are several groups of people coming to each other's aid: those who are drowning are pulled on board a little boat, while others lift their fellows onto dry land. The printmaker was fastidious in following Bakker's text.[29] The poet in the boat is the first-person narrator. He reports on the impact of the flood while the boat is under sail, mainly focusing on examples of mutual help. In word and image, the reader is thereby encouraged to undertake acts of charity.

Bakker's poem is prototypical of a series of other flood disaster poems from the eighteenth century.[30] Literary travelogues of the floods of 1775 and 1799 were written by the clergyman Olivier Porjeere, the politician W.E. de Perponcher and the rector E.J.B. Schonck. The entire arsenal of poetic clichés is evident in these works, from desperate people on roofs to floating cradles rescued from the waves. And even if the poet was an eyewitness to the disaster, as in the case of Schonck, the writer's imagination often got away from him. In his forty-plus page poem about the Nijmegen flood of February 1799, Schonck made things out to be much worse than they actually were. His ice floes were bigger and more numerous than in reality, as he pointed out in a footnote. Poetic license allowed this exaggeration, he explained; he also wanted to avoid disturbing repetitions in his text.[31]

The best of the flood poets

If we had to make a list of the top ten flood poets, two names in particular would be indispensable – at least judging by the glowing reactions in the press at the time: Katharina Wilhelmina Schweickhardt (1776-1830) and Hendrik Tollens (1780-1856). Although today's readers might be surprised by the extreme sentimentality of their work and the quantity of clichés therein, both authors were regarded as a class apart in their day. There are barely any references to concrete reality in their poems; literary

Frontispiece by P. Bakker, *Flooding in the Netherlands* (1741)
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

quality is paramount. Furthermore, they're drenched in a sauce of nineteenth-century domesticity. All of the main characters have reached the apex of marital happiness and have a young child who is its crowning achievement.

Both Schweickhardt and Tollens romanticized their materi-

al,[32] which was in line with the "romance" genre that was popular at the time. Usually, these involved amorous stories in a picturesque setting. They were often set in the Middle Ages, but there were contemporary romances as well. The main characters were usually pastoral figures with names that had a literary ring to them like Aspasia, Colma or Ewald. A great many Dutch poets tried their hand at this genre, which had come over from Germany and England.

A few months after the flood of 1809, Schweickhardt, whose pen name was "Vrouwe Bilderdijk" (she was the partner of poet Willem Bilderdijk), published a seventy-seven-page collection titled *The Flood*. It contained two poems about the Gelderland catastrophe. In the opinion of one anonymous reviewer, she had produced a phenomenal work of art. Unlike many writers of pulp poetry, she knew how to strike exactly the right melancholic tone. His verdict: "Her depictions are true to Nature, simple, poignant and touching. She is never tedious, never confusing, she never exaggerates." She was able to move readers to tears, the reviewer claimed.[33]

In the first poem, "The Flood," the poet introduces a fictitious couple, Amint and Elize. They have reached the height of conjugal joy, now that their love has been sealed with a son. While the little lad is crawling around, Amint takes his wife into his arms. Elize, however, has a vague premonition that their happiness is only temporary. The boy then plays with a soap bubble, which bursts:

> Fool! cease your honeyed words: if fate would show you favor,
> 'twould be the empty bubble that sparkled in your eyes.
> The playful youngster sees the bubble hanging in the air,
> And stretches out his little arms to what so lovely seems,
> Imagines he will catch the shiny gold, so fine and fair,
> No sooner does he grasp it than it's gone, like idle dreams!
> Amint, such is that dream, the cause of so much hoping![34]

Medallion portrait of Katharina Wilhelmina Schweickhardt (1776-1830), possibly painted by her father, H.W. Schweickhardt, c. 1797 ("Het Bilderdijk-Museum" Society, Leiden)

It's a familiar emblematic scene: children blowing bubbles (in this case, catching them) that symbolize the transience of earthly happiness.[35]

Indeed, the domestic idyll proves all too fragile: the family is struck by a terrible flood. With alarming power, the Rhine – one of the few geographical references in the text – displays its fiercest waves; the water sows death and destruction. The family is trapped by the water and is forced to escape to the roof, where their fear of death reaches its climax. The poet doesn't tell us how it ends, but she uses the scene to sing of the common anguish felt by all mothers in distress.

The poem ends with another romantic narrative, this time involving Aristus and his unnamed wife in the leading roles. Aristus and his wife look on helplessly as their little ones drown before they themselves fall prey to the waves:

> With lips already stiff and speechless glance undying
> Aristus's arm embraces his dear beloved friend;
> And so the two as one, in gesture horrifying,
> Follow their precious offspring to meet a watery end.[36]

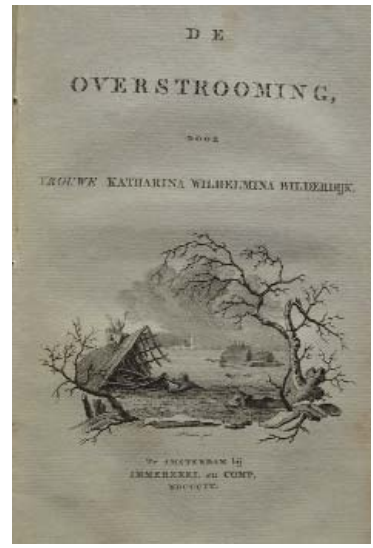
Here again, Katharina Wilhelmina uses a domestic, pastoral scene to show the immensity of suffering that occurred during a flood disaster, without referring to the specific situation in Gelderland.

In the second poem in the book, "The Flood, A Romance," we again find few concrete references to the Gelderland flood disaster, except for the fact that the story takes place on the Waal river.[37] The main characters are the shepherd Myrtillus, his beloved Dafne and her father ("the Graybeard"). In the first of two stanzas, Myrtillus asks for Dafne's hand. He praises "the benefits of marriage" in every possible way and considers himself the happiest man in the world when he is given permission to marry. Dafne asks only one favor: to be buried with him in the same grave after their death. Myrtillus is in full agreement: "Yes, Dafne, when we are parted by death, / One grave will unite us!"[38]

In the second stanza disaster strikes. The young couple set off on a journey despite the ominous weather. They find themselves in a life-threatening situation, but take comfort in the thought that they will be united after death. Both die in the churning water. The poem reaches a dramatic climax when the Graybeard sees both of the couple's bodies float past his house:

> He sees him there, Myrtillus' corpse;
> With Dafne's corpse as one;
> And feels then, as he falls to earth,
> His trembling heart undone.[39]

At that moment the Graybeard also breathes his last. A group of shepherds and maidens mourn the fate of the deceased, after which the omniscient narrator announces that they will be buried in one grave, and that at this "sacred grave" tears will be shed:



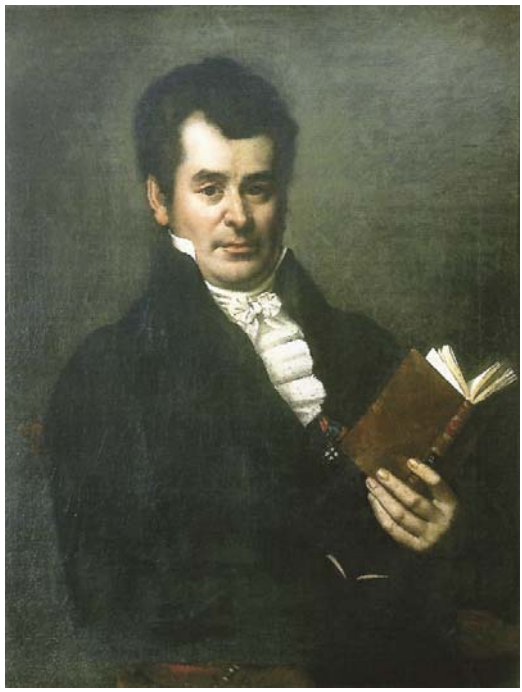
Vrouwe Katharina Wilhelmina Bilderdijk, *The Flood*, 1809 (Leiden University Library)

The wind here shuffles through the green,
And bends the grasses low,
It sends sad shivers through the blood
And causes tears to flow![40]

In this silent, pastoral universe the tears flowed in abundance. Any connection with the actual Gelderland flood was nowhere to be found, while the emphasis was on aestheticizing the disaster and arousing the readers' emotions.[41]

That was just as true for Tollens, who published his flood poem "Klara and Ewoud" in 1828.[42] This poem is fully disengaged from reality: it's not even based on an actual flood. It does contain all the ingredients that readers of the time might expect from a flood poem, however: evacuees, crashing waves, devastation and deliverance.

The poem opens with the miraculous rescue of a young mother, Klara, and her infant, both of whom had been floating around on a raft for quite some time. Finally, they're offered shelter, which Klara accepts with tears and gratitude. She's desperate, but



Hendrik Tollens (1780-1856), by Jan Willem Pieneman (private collection)

the omniscient poet is quick to reassure us that the Almighty is watching over her, since nothing escapes His notice: "There's not a sparrow falls to earth that He does not see fall."[43] Tollens then elaborates on the gravity of the flood disaster. The "water wolf" has wreaked terrible havoc, and the lashing waves and towering ice floes have left a trail of devastation across the landscape: "The piercing ice, the cutting floes; the chafe and smack / The hammering on the quay, where all things tear and crack."[44] The dreadful cries for help and the howling cattle can be heard for miles around. Fortunately, there are a few valiant souls who risk their lives to save others. Among them is Klara, who fears for her husband:

> "Oh, Ewoud! Ewoud!" sobbing, she sinks in desperation,
> Wringing both her hands again, a prey to desolation,
> And kissing the child anew, who, hanging on with all his might,

Caresses her wet cheeks, as if he understood her plight [...]
My woes are at their peak! All hope has now been lost!
Oh, when I lost my Ewoud, when my only one departed,
My soul was torn to shreds and I'm forever brokenhearted.[45]

Klara looks back on her life and remembers how they had fallen in love at a young age. Together, they endured much suffering, such as when Ewoud's mother passed away. His father, Herman, told them that it had been her dearest wish for them to marry, and so it happened. No happier couple than Klara and Ewoud. Their happiness reached a pinnacle with the arrival of their first child. Tears of gratitude were always flowing down Klara's cheeks.

Their happiness is dramatically interrupted, however, by the terrible flood. Klara recalls fleeing to the roof with her child, while Ewoud and his father tried to save their house. But to no avail: the roof broke in two and Klara disappeared in the waves. Although she has been rescued, she misses her beloved Ewoud.

Then, the miracle happens. After much wandering, Ewoud manages to find his beloved Klara and they fall into each other's arms. At Ewoud's request, the entire company praises God, who has rescued them from this perilous situation:

He bids them every one the Almighty God to praise,
To thank Him for the proof that He follows all our ways,
And watches over us and defends us from all care;
To thank Him for delivering the reunited pair.
Then he raises up his eyes, and invites them all again
To thank the Lord, and with one voice they sing it out: amen.[46]

All's well that ends well.

Curiously, one of the twelve apostles plays an important role in the poem. St. Thomas makes three appearances, all of them at moments of great and unexpected joy. The first is when Klara and Ewoud decide to marry, the second when their first child is

born and the third when Klara and her child end up on a raft after the roof collapses: "And so for this the third time St. Thomas came to me," Klara rejoices. The fact that she cites St. Thomas shows how truly incredible these events were. Thomas, one of the disciples, refused to believe the stories that Jesus had risen from the dead until he saw him with his own eyes (which is where we get the expression "doubting Thomas"). By referring to St. Thomas three times, Tollens is emphasizing the miraculous, almost implausible character of the events. We can also deduce from this the extent to which Tollens was still tied to the Catholic Church: although he had moved from the Catholic to the Remonstrant Church in 1827, he had absolutely no difficulty in giving a key role to a saint.

The poem was packed with emotion and drama, reinforcing the power of its pious message: God has a purpose for everything that happens (a sparrow doesn't fall dead to the ground for no reason), and whoever trusts in Him will be rewarded. A reviewer from the *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* was wildly enthusiastic about the poem's conclusion: "So the Poet places us right in the middle of the stage where the disaster is being played out, he keeps our interest aroused, touches our hearts, satisfies our curiosity, and has us cheering at the end."[47]

Assembly line work

For the critic Conrad Busken Huet, however, who wrote half a century later, this much appreciation for Tollens's melodramatic poetry was more than he could muster. He would have none of Tollens's pious, moralistic verse, and he found "Klara and Ewoud" simply awful. He branded him a "dike-breach singer," which was meant to be derogatory: in his eyes, poetry could hardly sink any lower.[48]

Busken Huet wasn't alone in his disparagement of flood poetry's artistic level. In the second half of the nineteenth century,

there arose strong criticism of its cliché-ridden style. During the floods of 1855 and 1861, the quantity of occasional poems increased so dramatically that the market became saturated. Critics accused the authors of insincerity and laziness.

After the flood of 1855, writer and critic C.E. van der Bilt la Motte lashed out ferociously at the fourth- and fifth-rate poets who were inundating the market with their insipid verse. In the essay "Flood Disaster Fantasies," he introduces the fictional poet Albert Montanus, who would do anything to write a brilliant flood disaster poem. Working in his cold garret, he lets the "fire of holy poetry" serve as his source of warmth:

> And Albert Montanus works and sweats and toils; "waves," it's such a splendid word, such a sublime word, that it seems right at home in a flood disaster poem, but dear God, what rhymes with it; he's already used "graves" once; he can't use "saves" twice either, even if it could be excused just this once as a matter of poetic license; but what other choices does he have? – "Slaves" sounds good, but what in heaven's name do floods and slaves have to do with each other?

Fold-out page: Brief Description of the Flood of 1855,
Dike Breach in Dreumel (Royal Library of the Netherlands)

> – "Caves" then; ha! That might work, and even though any link between floods and caves is highly questionable, it is making the best of a bad situation, [...][49]

The poet is overjoyed to see his name and poetry adorning the display windows of every bookshop. Actually, Van der Bilt la Motte was being something of a hypocrite, since he himself contributed two works of prose to the collection *Charis: Prose and Poetry*, which was published that same year for the benefit of the victims in Gelderland.

The country's leading cultural magazine *De Gids* also made short work of flood disaster literature. The critic Hendrik Jan Schimmel inveighed against the many improbable scenes, miraculous rescues and graphic clichés. He found the vanity and egotism of the flood disasters poets nothing short of revolting.[50] Busken Huet also denounced the decadence of the poets and described their efforts as "assembly line work."[51] Clichés, decadence and assembly line work: the flood disaster poets got it from every direction. The humorist Schenkman poked fun at the genre of flood disaster poetry by having six statues discuss the pitiful level to which literature had sunk. One of them, Tollens, complains about the large number of pulp poets:

> That's what I find so bothersome. This flood has made me see
> That the pulp potential in the land has grown substantially,
> For anyone with rhyming skills will try his very best
> To rhyme *ape* with *gape* or *creep* with *sheep*, his chief poetic quest,
> But such insipid verses are as watery as the ocean
> And all the rivers of the world, and full of false emotion.
> Let no man call it poetry, to do so would be scandal,
> It's doggerel and nothing more, the work of a shameless vandal![52]

This kind of criticism mainly shows how ingrained the visual repertoire was and how difficult it was to escape it.

Critics also denounced the selfish motives of the writers, who were hitching a ride on the wave of flood disaster literature and were interested in nothing more than increasing their name recognition. That criticism was most sharply articulated by the clergyman-poet P.A. de Génestet in his poem "To the Flood Poets":

> Flood poets, do your duty!
> There isn't time to waste,
> And pen your watery beauty
> With passion, but with haste!
> Bring scissors, oh so holy,
> Within your firm control,
> For now all rhymes are sanctified,
> Made sacred by your Goal!
> [...]
> If a line just turns to ashes,
> Then substitute it here
> With a row of dots or dashes
> ——————————
> ——————————
> Now that looks awfully queer![53]

Inexhaustible source

Yet the flood disaster genre remained popular well into the twentieth century. Although the Movement of the Eighty (or the *Tachtigers*, a group of radical Dutch writers of the nineteenth century) had regarded their own feelings as the measure of all things ("I am a God in the depths of my mind" wrote the poet Willem Kloos in 1894), the tenor of flood disaster poetry remained deeply religious. The aforementioned Hendrik Marsman

was the exception to the rule. In his "Memory of Holland" (1936) it wasn't a punitive God he feared but "the voice of the water."

What did undergo a dramatic change was the form: under the influence of modernism, which had begun emerging at the end of the nineteenth century, authors broke away from clichéd expressions and began experimenting with form. This is apparent in the literary output that followed the disaster of 1953. Writers such as Ed Leeflang, Maarten Doorman, H.H. ter Balkt and Jacques Hamelink produced original and moving poetic impressions of the flood. The anthology of prose and poetry that Ad Zuiderent compiled in 2003, fifty years after the disaster, bears witness to this change.[54]

Another difference between the twentieth and the two previous centuries was that flood disaster prose and poetry was no longer being written primarily to raise money. The edifying message was also less pervasive, especially as the event itself slipped further into the past. More and more, the disaster became literature, in which language served as a creative instrument for shaping new images of something that was actually beyond description. Another difference is that writers more often found ways to avoid clichéd ideas and storylines. One intriguing example is "Drowned" (2005) by Margriet de Moor. Nothing happens according to a predictable pattern. Lidy travels to Zierikzee for the weekend and perishes in the flood. Her sister Armanda assumes care of the daughter she has left behind and marries Lidy's husband, with whom she has two children. But the past comes back to haunt them and the marriage ends in divorce. Another tragic element is the time it takes for Lidy to be officially declared dead – the gravestone must remain nameless due to government regulations. The edifying moralism of earlier flood disaster literature has been replaced by unease, guilt and realism. In De Moor's universe, fate determines the course of things, not a providential God.

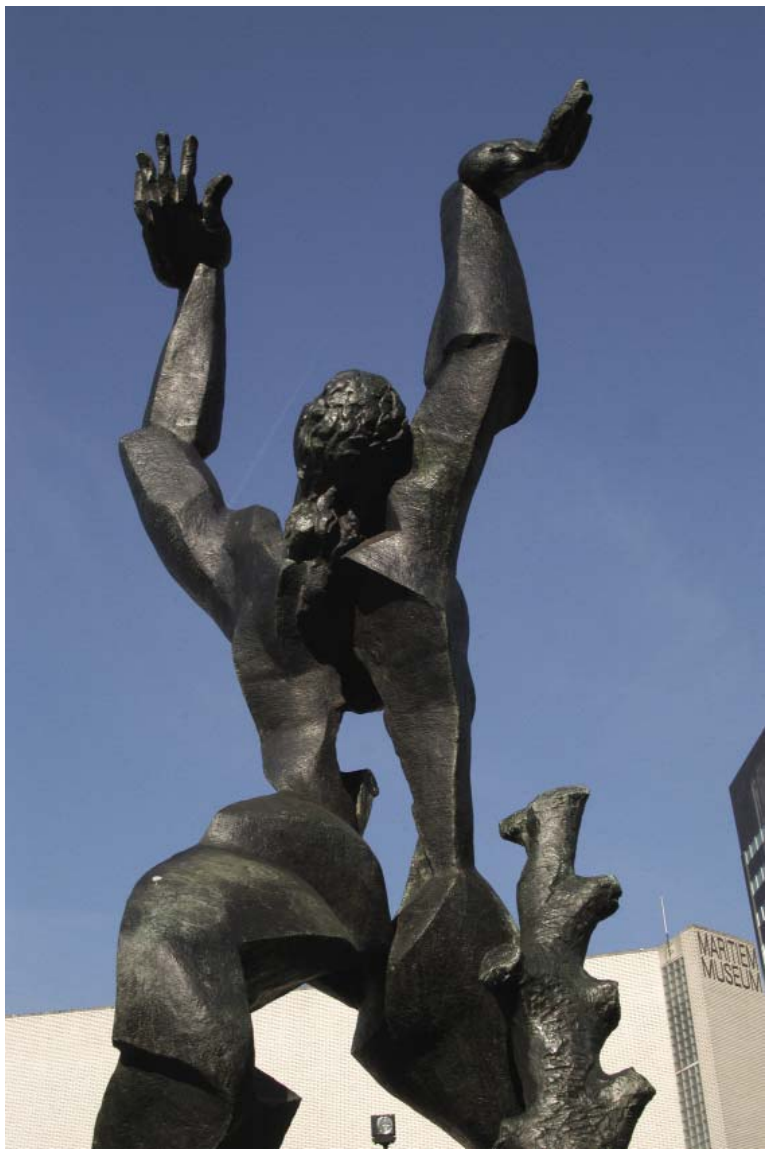
So, literature became the place for expressing despair, and for raising doubts about the supposed deeper meaning behind trau-

matic events. One of the finest poetic reactions to the disaster of 1953 is by Gerrit Achterberg. His poem "Flood Disaster" first appeared in 1957 in *De Gids*.

Mirrors of Zadkine, mothers there
lifted babies from the springtime flood.
Sons watched their fathers carried off for good;
how heavy are the old ones in your care;
barns torn away, where once a farmyard stood.
Rats and people clambering for air.
A child bewailing her dead doll, who would
immediately the same condition share.

The water rose above the cattle's cry.
And noisily they fell among the dead,
It strangled them; their bellies upside down.
Hens flew like snow across the sunken town.
Some boy scouts later found, enraged and dry,
a couple of treebound cats; a loaf of bread.[55]

Achterberg linked the disaster to the Second World War by referring to the sculptor Zadkine, who produced his work "The Destroyed City" in response to the bombing of Rotterdam. The sculpture depicts a person helplessly raising his hands to heaven. He has no heart, thus symbolizing the city robbed of life. Like petrified statues, mothers try to rescue their babies from the water. In just a couple of verses, Achterberg manages to depict the total despair of man and beast. All that remains are a few cats in trees and a loaf of bread. What Achterberg thereby created was a flood disaster monument in words, with eternal significance.[56]



Ossip Zadkine, *The Destroyed City*, statue erected in Rotterdam in 1953 (photo: Rogier Bos, Wikimedia Commons)

4
Role Models

The day after the flood, on Monday, 2 February 1953, Queen Juliana and her mother Wilhelmina visited the disaster area. They traveled to several locations in order to see as many different towns as possible.[1] While Wilhelmina went to Zeeland, Juliana made a tour of South Holland. In Numansdorp, one of the municipalities hardest hit, she paid a surprise visit to Het Schippershuis café where she spoke with the evacuees. She then went to Middelharnis and waded through the flood in boots in order to reach the town hall. After her tour she returned to Rotterdam to see firsthand the evacuation centers in Feyenoord Stadium and the Ahoy Arena. The following day Juliana flew over West-Brabant, where she once again mingled with the local population.[2] There were more visits and conversations with surviving relatives in the weeks that followed. In Oostdijk, a Zeeland farm woman in traditional costume guided the queen through the devastated area and told her about the horrors that had struck the village.[3]

In making this journey, Juliana and her mother were following a tradition that went all the way back to the early nineteenth century. Louis Bonaparte, brother of the French emperor Napoleon I and King of Holland from 1806 to 1810, was the first monarch to act as father of the people in times of calamity. He rushed to disasters areas and became actively involved in the relief efforts. The Dutch royal family would emulate him throughout the next two centuries, and as a result the king or queen grew

Queen Juliana visits the disaster area in 1953 (photo: ANP)

into symbols of national solidarity whenever disaster struck.[4] Floods were important moments in which they could demonstrate their concern and sympathy for the victims. But such visits also meant a great deal to the people in the affected areas: they felt that they were being seen and heard. One of the inhabitants of Oostdijk described the meeting with Juliana as follows: "Not being forgotten does us good; we are happy that you have come."[5]

A royal visit attracted much attention, but there was one other category of individuals who could count on major media interest: the "water heroes," or those who had risked their own lives to rescue others. They showed exceptional courage under extraordinary circumstances and received high praise for it. While many carried out their deeds in anonymity – nurses, police officers, soldiers, volunteers – some stories of heroism reached a broader public. In times of extreme emergency the need for role models grew: they sustained the populace throughout difficult

Silver medal awarded for the flood disaster of 1825, bearing the image of King William I (photo: NCO Photography)

periods and showed them that resilience and compassion were universal.

Hats off to the hero!

Countless citizens were honored for their exceptional conduct in the form of bonuses, certificates and medals. These were awarded personally by the directors of various organizations, such as the Society for the Rescue of the Drowning (founded in 1767), the Society for Public Welfare (founded in 1784) and the Dutch Moorland Reclamation Society (founded in 1888). A system of royal medals was inaugurated in 1825, when five captains were each given a medal from the king for their efforts. In 1855 a special flood disaster medal was introduced, but this fell into disuse after 1926.[6]

Acts of heroism were also widely memorialized in commemoration books, laudatory poems and newspaper articles. The Nijmegen poet Lambert Stoppendaal praised all those who had risked their lives in the flood disasters of 1781 and 1784 that occurred in the river region. According to him, charity was one of the "fundamental characteristics" of the Dutch people.[7] In 1825,

the poet Petronella Moens sang the praises of her fellow countrymen who had sacrificed themselves for others:

> Who, Holland's sons! who sings of deeds so glorious?
> Your sacrifice to help your folk in need?
> You take no pride in the enemy's snares notorious.
> No! saving souls is your triumphant deed.
> Soaked with spray, vying with storm and lightning,
> The savior proudly ventures through the foam,
> He steers his craft with fists both bold and frightening,
> And flies to meet the drowning people's moans.
> Winds hurl him on, past screams of desperation
> In villages washed away. He helps the cattle,
> And to the weakened few he brings salvation [...][8]

Charity and self-sacrifice were the two characteristics that the Netherlands could build on in anxious times, according to Moens. Her contemporary, the teacher J.C. Beijer, insisted that the Netherlands surpassed every other nation in that regard: "Certainly there is no nation on earth that has distinguished itself more in its charity and steadfast loyalty, and still distinguishes itself most gloriously, than the Dutch."[9]

Some of them were put on a pedestal. One of these was Dirk de Bekker of Maasbommel, who lost his life on 24 February 1799. When the dikes gave way in several places two weeks earlier, he, his two brothers and a friend worked day and night to help the local residents. They managed to rescue many people. At the same time, the De Bekker family offered shelter to eighty evacuees. Things did not go well for Dirk, however. After distributing food to the people in the nearby village of Alphen his boat capsized. His brother and two friends survived, but he perished. It was a terrible blow for the family because he was one of the breadwinners.[10]

Contemporaries praised Dirk and his fellow helpers for their tireless efforts on behalf of the needy. Because of his tragic fate,

most of the attention was focused on Dirk: he was elevated to the status of martyr. The Remonstrant clergyman Adriaan Stolker placed an appeal in the *Rotterdam Courant* to honor the memory of the water hero and to assist his family.[11] Literati were even more colorful in their adoration. Evert Schonck, a Nijmegen headmaster, extolled the heroism of Dirk de Bekker in a poem about the flood of 1799:

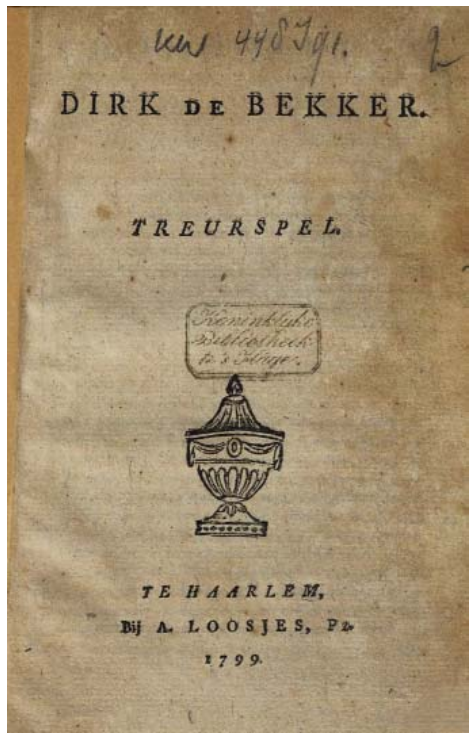
I gladly cite your virtuous art,
O honest BEKKER, friend of all!
And praise your tender, sensitive heart!
That joys in saving those who fall.[12]

Schonk called him "a second Woltemade," a reference to the South African farmer Wolraad Woltemade, who had managed to save fourteen seamen during a maritime disaster.[13] The Nijmegen writer also reflected at great length on the grief of Dirk's mother, who now had to do without her youngest offspring. Schonck comforted her with the thought that God had seen it all and would surround her with "gentle blessings" as long as she lived.[14]

The Haarlem publisher and writer Adriaan Loosjes erected a literary monument to Dirk de Bekker by dedicating both a poem and a tragedy to him. In his lyrical ode, Loosjes welcomed De Bekker into the pantheon of national heroes: "He died a hero's death, a man, a Christian friend / He merits thus the crown of life without an end."[15] The play takes place partly in the living room of the De Bekker family and partly in Alphen, where a starving family waits for help. The scenes in the De Bekker home show how compassionate they are: they've taken in a clergyman and his wife, Ernst and Sophia, and the sons do everything they can to help as many people as possible. From time to time the clergyman speaks words of consolation. He says that God's purpose is not to punish but to pour out his blessings on mankind. He describes the sons as "worthy guarantees of Heaven."[16] The

family in Alphen falls into deep despair when their seventy-year-old granddad starves to death. The assistance brought by Dirk and his pals may have come too late for him, but the other family members are intensely grateful for the arrival of food. The dramatic low point is the moment when the brother returns home and tells his mother that Dirk has not survived the journey. The clergyman speaks these final words of comfort that merit consideration:

> O that the Batavian People knew how a Citizen of this Commonwealth perished in the midst of his benevolent endeavors: how, after days and nights on end, having revived and rescued



Title page of the play by Adriaan Loosjes about the "water hero" Dirk de Bekker, 1799

> the unfortunate, he perished in the water like another LEOPOLD. And would the Batavians be less grateful to their DIRK DE BEKKER than the Germans to their LEOPOLD?[17]

Loosjes compared Dirk's heroic act with those of the German Prince Leopold, who lost his life on 27 April 1785 in an attempt to rescue several inhabitants of Frankfurt an der Oder. The news made the Dutch newspapers and became the subject of a piece of music.[18]

Dirk de Bekker was honored posthumously for his deed of self-sacrifice during a ceremony in which the water heroes of 1799 were presented with diplomas and gifts on behalf of the departmental board of the Dommel River region. Dirk's mother received the certificate and the silver box, valued at ƒ50 (€428), on behalf of her deceased son.[19] His brother Aert was also among the honored. An elaborate printed report of the ceremony was published.[20] Bekker and his pals were not the only ones to be

Silver tobacco box with inscription, given to G. Verploegh of Dreumel for his charitable acts during the flood of 1799 in the Bommelerwaard (collection of F.J. Haffmans, Art and Antiques, Utrecht)

honored in this fashion: the *Bataafsche Leeuwarder Courant* published a list of twenty-five persons who had received similar gifts. The valuable objects were adorned with personal inscriptions and were presented at a public gathering.[21]

For the thirty-three-year-old Harmen Jans Groen of Friesland, admittance to the pantheon of water heroes followed a somewhat different course. In 1825, the *Leeuwarder Courant* reported that this fisherman, who lived on the banks of the Tjeukemeer, had saved fifty-eight human lives and several cattle.[22] Groen himself had also suffered losses of ƒ600 or ƒ700 (€6,940 or €8,096) and was now living in appalling conditions. The local branch of the Society for Public Welfare in Leeuwarden had responded by setting out collection boxes to raise money for the brave fisherman. Soon rumors began spreading, however, that cast him in a negative light: he was said to be a bad man who had robbed others during the floods and was now in a house of detention. The matter reached such proportions that the Society for Public Welfare set up a special investigative commission to look into it. After the commission had heard several witnesses, Groen was rehabilitated. Commissioner Robidé van der Aa made all the documents public, along with an extensive explanation and an ode to the Frisian fisherman. In it, Van der Aa urged that Groen be forever remembered: "'Tis he, who, so opposed to spurious glory, / Granted many other souls a boon, / Engrave his name now in our country's story; / 'Tis GROEN!"[23]

The proceeds from the publication, which was open to subscribers throughout the Netherlands, greatly benefited Groen.[24] The *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* reported several contributions that had been deposited especially for him.[25] The action generated a total of ƒ2,095.97 (€24,242). This enabled Groen to build a new house and purchase furniture as well.[26] All's well that ends well. Van der Aa's panegyric inspired George de Thouars, who at that moment was serving as a page to King William I, to compose his own hymn of praise. There he proposed that both Van der Aa and Groen be added to the Dutch pantheon of heroes, be-

cause Van der Aa had effectively managed to silence the wicked slanderers and had moved him to tears.[27] This set off a veritable snowball effect. Unfortunately for De Thouars, a writer of occasional verse, no one took up the cause to elevate him to the status of hero.

The deeds of Dirk de Bekker and Harmen Jans Groen set many pens in motion. Most of these were briefer accounts. In his *Historical Report* on the flood of 1809, Hendrik Ewijk of the Ministry of Transport and Public Works mentioned a number of "manly" lifesavers.[28] Teacher Jan Coenraad Beijer compiled a commemoration book in which he also praised numerous men who went out at all hours to offer assistance during the flood of 1825. Three captains from the seamen's board set out in the middle of the night for Ransdorp, Holysloot and the Bijlmermeer to rescue people from their roofs.[29] Jan ter Pelkwijk, a teacher from Zwolle, mentioned many heroes by name in his provincial commemoration book on the impact of these floods in Overijssel. Jan Beunte was one of them: he managed to save from the "furious waves" two women who were "wrestling with death in a small boat." In 1855 the newspapers reported an extraordinary rescue that had taken place near Driel. The ferryman, his wife and his child were sitting in mortal terror on the roof of their house. A rescue operation was launched. Alexander Cremer, father of the famous writer Jacob Jan Cremer, offered ƒ100 (€1,024) to any brave men who dared risk their lives. In response to his call, two persons, one of them a tax officer from Heteren, immediately set off in a boat. At great personal peril they carried out the daring exploit.[30] In 1926, a reporter from *De Haagsche Courant* praised the courage of farmer Henk Wezendonk, who set out to warn others "without giving a thought to his own property and home." Thanks to him there were no deaths recorded at Pannerden. In the laudatory words of the report: "Hats off to this hero!"[31]

Today we still see this fascination with heroic deeds in times of calamity: the need for role models is apparently timeless. Yet

Hub Bertram of Valkenburg carries his 101-year-old neighbor to safety, 15 July 2021 (photo: BSR Agency, Patrick van Katwijk)

since the mid-twentieth century there has been a noticeable change. While "water heroes" were initially lauded because they were the pride and joy of the Dutch nation, after 1953 the emphasis shifted to their ordinariness. They were just plain folks who had done something exceptional under extraordinary circumstances. Take the skipper B.W. Schot, for example, who rescued almost eighty people from flooded farms in the region of Zierikzee during the disaster of 1953. He thought that what he had done wasn't really so special. He took action "because there wasn't anything else to do at that particular moment."[32] Another revealing response was that of Hub Bertram of Valkenburg, who came to the assistance of his 101-year-old neighbor during the flood of July 2021. The iconic photo resonated deeply with people because it depicted compassion in such a striking way. Bertram's

response was sober and pragmatic: he hoped his neighbor would be able to go home soon and that the housing authority would quickly make her house habitable again.[33]

What is striking is that almost all the heroes being portrayed are men. That was in keeping with the nature of the operations, which required a great deal of physical strength. In addition, skipper and soldier were typically male occupations. Yet many women also played the hero's role, although it was more in the background. They were the ones who took in evacuees, cared for the sick, and provided food and drink in emergency shelters. Take the mother of Dirk de Bekker, who arranged for the reception of evacuees in her home. Journalists and writers described her in terms of her role as mother, however, who grieved over the loss of her heroic son. Countless women were also active in ladies' committees, where they organized collection campaigns and lotteries.

Only a few female heroes were celebrated in the media. In 1757, for example, when 's-Hertogenbosch and its surroundings were ravaged by a flood, the lady of Geffen Castle helped many evacuees by offering them shelter. She was commended for this effort in the publications issued on the occasion by engineer and commander Jacob Pierlinck and by H.L. van Linden, lawyer of 's-Hertogenbosch.[34] The latter wrote a poem about her in his *Commemoration Column*:

> When cruel disaster struck, what kindness you have shown!
> O Geffen's Lady, saving many an anxious Soul,
> Where rising waters raged and threatened to take their toll!
> Merciful Christian, whose compassion is well known!
> Your glory shall precede you, so virtuous, so good,
> As long as Dikes can crumble beneath the furious flood.[35]

Another striking example is the story of the eighteen-year-old Johanna Sebus. She rescued her mother from the Rhine in 1809 after the dikes had breached. When she tried to help more peo-

The monument to Johanna Sebus near Kleve on the Rhine
(photo: Karin Laakes, Wikipedia Commons)

ple, she herself perished. In Germany she attained the status of hero: the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe dedicated a ballad to her that same year, Napoleon Bonaparte honored her with the Order of the Roses, and Schubert composed a song about her. An imposing monument was erected in the German town of Kleve, and schools and streets were named after her. The reason almost no one in the Netherlands knows about her is rather trivial: she performed her heroic deed on the Rhine, precisely where the river divides Germany from the Netherlands (near Spijk). If she had performed her acts of heroism just a couple of kilometers further on, then Dutch writers would have risen to sing her praises and incorporate her into the Dutch pantheon of heroes. Now she is part of the German culture of remembrance.[36]

Royal involvement

The most media attention by far went to monarchs who visited disaster areas. That tradition began with Louis Bonaparte, who made a big impression as sovereign of the Kingdom of Holland with his journeys to flooded areas and his involvement in relief

operations. He faced two major flood disasters during his reign. In the night of 14 to 15 January 1808, Zeeland was struck by a major storm in which Vlissingen was hardest hit. Water swept through the streets and dragged thirty-one people to their deaths. This was followed one year later by a serious flood in the eastern Netherlands in which 275 people lost their lives.[37] Louis's tireless efforts earned the king the nickname "père des malheureux," or father of the unfortunate.[38]

Yet he was not the first leader to show sympathy for the populace. George Albrecht, Prince of East Frisia, distributed beer and cheese to the needy during the Christmas flood of 1717. Special prayer services were also held in his castle.[39] As city administrator, Diederik Gregorius van Teylingen, councilor and alderman of 's-Hertogenbosch, was also hailed as a father figure after personally laboring on behalf of his people in 1757:

> The *City's President* gave orders for the striking
> Of locks, and bolts, and latches, and keys for vacant dwellings.
> Providing barges swift, and with servants thus attended
> To provision all the people, from calamity defended.
> *Beloved President*, your deeds are beyond telling.
> And like a noble father, you gave your blood and wealth
> To thus defend his faithful, and keep them in good health.[40]

The chief difference between these leaders and Louis Bonaparte, however, is that the latter operated on a national scale. He coordinated nationwide fund-raising campaigns, made financial resources available, traveled throughout the country, and actively participated in the upkeep of the dikes.[41]

Visits to disaster areas were of great importance to his reputation as a good monarch. Louis's commitment to the local population was made much of in the media. The aforementioned Hendrik Ewijk was requested by the Minister of the Interior to produce a *Historical Report* of the floods that had struck the river region in 1809. Ewijk's praise for the charity of the king was effu-

Hermanus Fock, *Memorial to the Flood of 1809*
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

sive: "There wasn't a town or village that the king passed through without him offering comfort and caring for the poor and suffering."[42] Engravers captured his visits in prints in which his heroic efforts were explicitly mentioned. One of the prints shows the perils he faced during a visit to the river region: his coach is in danger of being trapped by drifting ice on the Dalem dike. The artist Hermanus Fock made a drawing in which the king is surrounded by survivors of the flood of 1809. His retinue distribute food, drink and blankets to the desperate people who have been rescued from drowning.

This charm offensive was effective: the king was inundated with poems of jubilation. At the same time, some authors permitted themselves a critical sneer at the French regime: the king

may have had the best interests of the population at heart, but the same certainly could not be said of the overlord in France, Napoleon Bonaparte. In the eyes of his critics he was an untrustworthy, power-hungry tyrant, although most writers would not say that out loud for fear of being prosecuted.

These critics subtly combined their praise for Louis Bonaparte with criticism of the big boss in France. The poet Willem Justus Winckler was one of the many writers of occasional verse who put the king on a pedestal after the flood of 1808 in Zeeland. In his poem, Winckler described the situation in Vlissingen, which was particularly hard hit. In November 1807, this city had been annexed by the French empire under the Treaty of Fontainebleau. On the one hand, Winckler typified Louis Bonaparte as a caring father:

> Our PRINCE, our Father, country's best,
> An exemplar of sympathy
> Who calls us all at his behest:
> "Help ZEELAND, suffering miserably."
> [...]
> His kindly and paternal care,
> Attends to Zeeland's sure defense,
> And guarantees the country there
> Much better times in ages hence.[43]

On the other hand, Winckler repeatedly stressed that Vlissingen was of great value to the country, and that the rest of Holland should not abandon the eleventh departement – a reference to that city's altered political status.

More explicit in their criticism were Cornelius van Epen, who served as a clergyman in Vlissingen during the disaster, and the Leiden theology student Willem Cornelis van Campen. Van Epen's *Lamentation Over the Terrible Storm and Flood* teemed with anti-French comments in which he criticized the annexation of Vlissingen by the French. He wrote that the city was

"more separated from the Fatherland than ever" and "for years had been robbed of what had once caused it to flourish."[44] He then recalled hopeful events and heroes from the past, thus drawing a parallel with the way the people of Leiden had freed themselves from the Spanish in 1574. He went on to sing the praises of Michiel de Ruyter and the Zeeland patriot and poet Jacobus Bellamy, icons of the love of freedom.[45] Van Epen's rousing verses struck a sympathetic chord: the book went into a second printing. That inspired the Leiden student Van Campen to write a poem that he recited at a gathering of the "Productive Through Diligence Society." He also glorified De Ruyter and Bellamy as freedom fighters, and called on the Dutch to support Vlissingen: "Separated from your land; – but not from your heart!"[46]

Adriaan Loosjes also criticized the French regime. In 1808 he published the play *Ewoud van Lodijke, or the Destruction of the City of Romerswaal in Zeeland*, which dealt with the disappearance of Romerswaal (also known as Reimerswaal) during the flood of 1555. Loosjes – who previously had fiercely protested the arrival of a French king – said nothing in his play about the king's actions. Silence was also a form of resistance.[47]

In addition to the praise there was also a great deal of criticism of Louis's efforts on behalf of the population. This was directed not so much at the king as such but at his brother, or, in a more general sense, the French lust for power. Even more striking is the unvarnished criticism of Louis Bonaparte by Maria Aletta Hulshoff. This radical republican published a pamphlet against compulsory military service in April 1809 under the pseudonym P. Monitor titled *Warning Against the Requisition*. She lashed out against all the king's sycophants who, she claimed, had ruined and killed thousands. Not only had he been negligent in maintaining the dikes, but his generosity was also a farce: those monies had come straight from "the country's treasury."[48] Few writers were as outspoken as Hulshoff. She paid for her resistance with a prison sentence, but she managed to escape and fled to England.[49]

Although opinions of Louis Bonaparte varied sharply, he was a role model for the following kings and queens of the Netherlands. Exhibiting concern in times of calamity became part of the standard repertoire for all his successors. Yet there were differences in the ways the Dutch monarchs manifested this ideal, as historian Fons Meijer has shown.[50] King William I acted very decisively when floods struck, but he did so mainly from his desk. In 1820 and 1825 he coordinated national fundraising efforts, managed local administrators and provided his own substantial financial boost to the campaign.

Visits to the disaster areas, however, were something he preferred to leave to his son, crown prince William Frederick. Ten days after the disaster of 1825, the prince made a tour of the stricken area. He arrived in Amsterdam on the evening of 14 February and traveled by boat to Buiksloot the following morning, where he changed to a coach that took him to Durgerdam. After having inspected the damage there he returned by sloop. In the evening he attended a service in the Nieuwe Kerk. The next morning he went to the Almshouse in Amsterdam, where he witnessed an emotional scene. A heavily pregnant woman suddenly fell ill and had to be taken to the hospital straightaway.

The prince immediately pledged a gift of ƒ200 (€2,313) to the woman and instructed the mayor to tell her that he would stand godfather to the child and would represent the king at the baptism.[51] This would not be the first time a member of the royal family appointed himself or herself godparent after a flood. Wilhelmina became the godmother of a little girl born during the stormy night of 13 to 14 January 1916.

The next day the prince set off for Overijssel to take stock of the level of destruction there. He visited a number of stricken villages and cities and assured the inhabitants that he and the king would do all they could to help them. According to journalists, his compassion made a deep impression on the populace. The teacher J. ter Pelkwijk of Zwolle published an illustrated report of the disaster in which he dwelt at length on the visit of the

Matthias Ignatius van Bree, *The Prince of Orange visits the victims of the flood who are being temporarily cared for in the Almshouse in Amsterdam on 14 February 1825* (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

crown prince, who in turn ordered six copies.[52] In his commemoration book, Beijer also expressed appreciation for the crown prince, who had served as an "interpreter" for his father and had left his palace "to visit the humblest hovels, to journey to places of misery and devastation, and to devote himself tirelessly to the alleviation of misfortune and the spreading of hope and happy prospects."[53] Beijer regarded the crown prince as "a hero who leaves the splendor of the court in order to appear as a savior in the homes of the afflicted."[54]

An even greater hero status fell to his successor, King William III. That is to say: his efforts during the floods of 1855 and 1861

brought him enormous prestige. That was all to the good, since his reputation was otherwise extremely dubious. From 1887 on, his compulsive gambling and sexual escapades had earned him the nickname "Gorilla King" in socialist and anti-monarchist circles. And politically he had contributed very little since Thorbecke's constitutional reforms of 1848. So harsh as it may sound, the floods came as a real blessing for the king. Like his predecessors, he did everything in his power to assist the victims. He traveled to the stricken areas, contributed enormous sums of money and provided relief supplies. He sent "Royal tents" from Het Loo Palace in which victims were given medical care. Cans of food were sent to the disaster area, and the king even authorized the purchase of clothing in The Hague for the needy.[55]

William III was showered with praise for his efforts in the form of prints, poems, paintings, medals and commemoration books. It was hard to keep up with the torrent of superlatives, hyperboles and exclamations. The adoration reached a climax with the occasional poem *The Crown of William the Good* by the poet Willem Hofdijk, written in response to the disaster in the river region in 1861. On 11 February he recited the panegyric to the Holland Society in Amsterdam, and the next day he performed in the Lourens Janszoon Coster Chamber of Rhetoric in Haarlem. It was a resounding success. In Haarlem the audience was treated to a special surprise. While the poet was still speaking, the curtain was raised and the spectators saw before them a bust of King William III, placed in a "magnificent trophy of flags, greenery and flowers." To top it all off, the trophy was illuminated by "Bengal fire," or Blue Light, a bright, chemical flare.[56] The hall emptied to the strains of the national anthem.[57]

On 19 February, a special publication was issued in honor of the king's birthday, with a handsome illustration of the king dressed in the clothing he was wearing when he visited the disaster area. He is shown pointing the way like a veritable messiah. In his hymn of praise, Hofdijk describes how Count William III of Holland, who bore the name William the Good, rises from the

dead and passes his honorific on to the noble "Son of Orange." The count removes the king's hat and whispers to him, "While I may have earned this honor when I ruled upon the earth, / Far more right hast Thou accomplished: Thou hast proven now thy worth!...[58] His nocturnal voice is then heard throughout the Netherlands and proceeds "from heart to heart":

> Among the counts of Holland's land we find
> William the Good, whose lineage did not end,
> But lives on in Orange still, in a noble friend:
> Inherited by a King of Nassau's line;
> And in the row of kings of Netherlands blood,
> We also praise this William as The Good.[59]

Apparently the poem met with wide approval, for it went through three printings within a very short time.

In addition to the vast number of occasional poems, the king was also honored with two monumental gifts. The first was an Authorized Dutch Bible with lectern. The gift was organized by

Water King William III, in: W.J. Hofdijk, *The Crown of William the Good*, 1861 (Atlas van Stolk collection)

means of what amounted to crowdfunding: the minimum amount for participating was ƒ.02 (€.20) and the maximum was ƒ1 (€10).[60] The Bible was designed on behalf of 55,000 (!) donors and presented to the king on 22 March 1862. But first, this beautiful object was put on public display in a number of big cities, including Utrecht, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Leiden, Zwolle, Dordrecht, Assen and Delft.[61] Thousands of visitors came to marvel at the silver cover on which memorable moments from the nation's history were depicted, such as the murder of William of Orange in 1584 and the Battle of Nieuwpoort in 1600. The lectern, too, was impressive in size and richly decorated. The second gift was a monument, given by the grateful population of Leeuwen. They thanked the king and his brother, Prince Hendrik, for the support they had provided after the breach of the dike. With this monument the villagers commemorated the thir-

The nation's gift to King William III for his efforts during the flood of 1861: an Authorized Dutch Bible (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

ty-seven fellow citizens who had perished and the miraculous rescue of the eight-year-old Johanna Verbeek, who was saved after six days alone in the floodwaters.

The unveiling took place on 12 May 1874 in honor of the king's silver jubilee. In a great many newspapers, and in numerous prints and occasional poems, the moment was seized to honor the king once more for his efforts during the flood disasters. Jean Jacques Gabriëls of Limburg wrote a festive poem graced by a very beautiful cover page. Gabriëls applauded the king in a resounding triplet: "How brilliant his Star, with its generous glow; / How resounding His words of comfort and cheer; / How glistening His gifts, defying the flow."[62]

The glorification of the king took such exalted forms that criticism was inevitable. The cover of the *Comic Album* featured an illustration of the king being worshipped by his people, along with the caption: "No power, O King, more strongly binds than that of anguish shared."[63] This was gentle mockery compared with the anonymous brochure *From the Life of the Gorilla King* of 1887, in which the king is really subjected to scorn. The author, understood to be the freethinker Sicco Roorda van Eysinga, left little to admire about William's efforts during the floods. The king was said to be blind drunk and, according to the author, had to be rescued from drowning himself:

> The newspapers were full of Gorilla's bold feats. The truth, however, is that he was usually drunk during the floods and went on to do the most absurd things, so that he was more of a burden than a help. One time, when he was thoroughly soused, he thought it would be a good idea to walk across the River W..., in which he would have drowned, of course, if his adjutants had not forcefully withheld him.[64]

These critical reactions were dwarfed, however, by the massive tribute paid to King William III. The initiatives came from the citizens themselves and showed how much they appreciated roy-

Cover page of *The Most Beautiful Pearl in his Crown, or the King's Charity During the Flood* by Jean Jacques Gabriëls, 1874 (Royal Collection, The Hague, A45-Xg-16)

al involvement in times of calamity. Surprisingly, however, he rarely concerned himself with such disasters for the remaining twenty-nine years of his life, while there certainly were opportunities to do so during the floods of 1876, 1880 and 1881. He awarded flood disaster medals and sent field boilers to the flood victims, but personal visits and national collections were now a thing of the past.[65]

In the twentieth century, his heirs to the throne would once again take an active part in flood response. When North Holland

Cover page from the *Comic Album* "The House of Orange and the Flood of 1861" (Atlas van Stolk collection)

was struck by severe flooding in January 1916, Queen Wilhelmina, her husband Prince Henry, and their daughter Princess Juliana, made several visits to the disaster area and to the emergency shelters. On 17 January, the royal couple were taken by boat past Broek in Waterland, Volendam and Monnickendam. They also paid a separate visit to Marken, which had been very hard hit. It was there that the queen, following the example of her grandfather, agreed to stand godmother to a newborn baby.[66] The little girl's name was Lijsje van Riel and she was born two days after the disaster struck. The pregnant mother had spent most of the disastrous night on an attic beam in their neighbors' house, half of which had been swept away.[67] Wilhelmina also stood godmother to a second child: Aartje Vedder, from the fishing village of Spakenburg. The queen visited the girl every year until her fifteenth birthday.[68]

A second series of visits followed in mid-February, when the group called in at Zaandam, Purmerend and Edam. Newspapers reported on the event and included photos in which the queen was invariably shown wrapped in a heavy winter coat and lean-

Queen Wilhelmina visits Marken, 1916 (Royal Collection, The Hague)

ing on a walking stick. She ended her tour of North Holland in May with a final series of visits. One of the most remarkable events occurred in Ilpendam, when her majesty single-handedly rescued a cat family from an abandoned house. At her request they steered her boat to a dwelling, from which a "plaintive moaning arose." A black cat with her three kittens were brought to safety. This earned the queen the honorary title of "protector of animals."[69]

Ten years later, when a new flood occurred in the region of Nijmegen and the Land van Maas en Waal (the region lying between those two rivers), the royal couple once again sped to the afflicted area. They traveled there by train on New Year's Day, along with the queen's retinue and a reporter from *De Telegraaf* newspaper.[70] Wearing long raincoats and boots, they had to make part of the journey by boat because the roads had become

impassable. They showed their concern in other ways as well. Prince Henry visited a lacework exhibition on the Lange Voorhout in The Hague, in which part of the proceeds went to the victims of the flood.[71] Persons who had exhibited exceptional courage were given bronze flood disaster medals. On the heads side of the medal was an image of King William III, who had created this type of award in 1855.[72] In 1927 in Alverna, Prince Henry unveiled a monument at the spot where the royal couple had landed one year before.

This royal solidarity was expressed once again in 1953: members of the royal family visited many affected villages and emergency shelters and showed their concern for the populace. Princess Beatrix, who had just had a birthday, donated her new bicycle to the Red Cross.[73] Another element was added to the royal repertoire: the radio message. Queen Juliana addressed the nation several times via this medium. She mourned the dead

Bronze flood disaster medal from 1926, with the image of King William III on the heads side (photo: NCO Photography)

Tails side of the same medal bearing the name H. Dijkstra, who offered his help as skipper during the flood of 1926 (photo: NCO Photography)

and thanked all those who had made themselves available to others in those perilous times:

> My fellow countrymen who have been affected by the disaster, and you, rescuers and helpers in the broadest sense, we all stand in awe of the great suffering that has afflicted our entire nation, when one week ago some of our people were overwhelmed by storm and flood: in awe of the courage shown by so many in need, and in awe of the horrors endured by those who have been taken from us and those who remain with us with the heavy lot they now must bear.[74]

At such moments, the queen was giving voice to the grief *and* the strength of the Netherlands: now that the country had been stricken again by a terrible disaster so soon after the Second World War, and everyone was being asked to do their utmost, the important thing was to show resilience. Solidarity, brotherhood and harmony were the key words in her address. When the worst of the disaster was past and life could return to normal, she hoped the period of reconstruction would proceed in the same spirit of solidarity.

Royal visit to Limburg

For the last three decades, Limburg has been the area most vulnerable to flooding: in 1993, 1995 and 2021 the rivers there overflowed their banks. While there were no deaths, the material damage and mental shock to the inhabitants was enormous.

In keeping with a tradition that had been started by a French king, members of the Dutch royal family also rushed to the disaster area. Queen Beatrix pulled on a pair of green rubber boots and entered the homes of a few flood victims to assess the damage with her own eyes. In the summer of 2021, Willem-Alexander and Máxima hurried to Valkenburg to show their solidarity.

King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima visit flooded Valkenburg (photo: Robin Utrecht)

It has now become a tradition for these kinds of visits to be carefully scrutinized. To opponents, they constitute an opportunity to express outrage: there's a direct line from Maria Aletta Hulshoff, through Roorda van Eysinga, to the readers' comments in the *Algemeen Dagblad*, in which the royal couple were accused of hypocrisy after their trip to Valkenburg: only a day after their lightning visit they flew to Greece in their private jet.[75]

What is certain is that royal attention cuts two ways: in times of calamity, monarchs can show that they sympathize with the people and are sensitive to the needs of the country's citizens. For the popularity and legitimacy of the royal family, disasters can be a real blessing, provided the members of the family show their best side. But for the victims, too, royal solidarity is more than a mere ritual: being seen and heard really matters. They expressed their appreciation in countless letters, occasional poems and songs. One reader from Nijkerk, writing in 1926, could barely curb his enthusiasm for "the mother of the country": "When

disaster makes us fear, / She's the first to being us cheer, / Noble queen we greet with awe: / Wilhelmina of Nassau!"[76] Homage was also paid to her in song, this one written to the tune the then-popular air "The Leftovers":

Hearing an urgent cry for aid,
And with compassion vast and strong,
Walks our Queen, quite unafraid,
To where the trembling people throng.
Tireless, with rapid stride,
The face of sympathetic care,
She bravely walks through water wide,
To meet the people waiting there.[77]

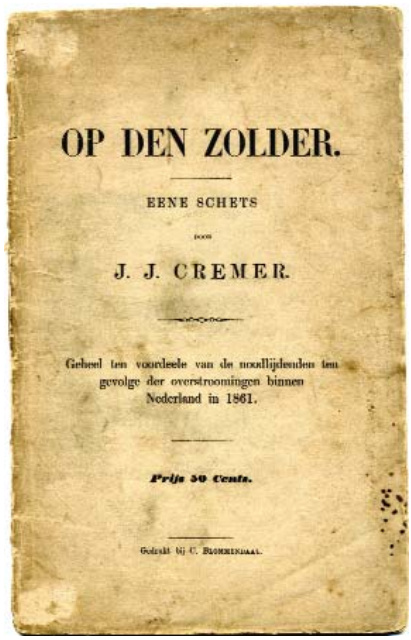
In honor of her fortieth jubilee in 1938, several newspapers published a Queen Wilhelmina photo supplement bearing the title "A Mother for Land and People." Her visit to Marken, when "the water wolf caught North Holland off guard," played a prominent role in the news coverage.[78] As "fathers" and "mothers" of the nation, it all came down to showing empathy *and* donning a pair of boots whenever floods struck. Ever since Louis Bonaparte, this has been part of the standard royal flood repertoire.

5
National Charity

Their teeth chattering, the Daalhof family are sitting in the attic: grandma, father Arie, mother Hanneke and their three children, the youngest of whom is still in the cradle. They've fled upstairs because the rest of their house is under water. Chilled to the bone, they listen to the thundering roar of collapsing ice blocks: "Do you hear that cracking in the distance... it's the ice floes crashing down, shattering one another – howling and angry as untamed and drunken beasts of prey, racing madly to destroy the walls of the farmhouses with their iron claws, to devour the already creaking roofs, and – swept on by the seething flood – finally to come to a halt, offering their savage backs to their followers, who will continue their annihilating trek."[1]

With great empathy, the painter and writer Jacob Jan Cremer described how a farm family try to keep warm in their ice-cold attic during the flood of 1861. They light a fire, which turns into a blaze and has to be put out. They keep up their hopes by praying. At daybreak a rowboat appears and they're saved. The moral of the story? Praise the Lord: a message not only for the Daalhof family but for all the people of the Netherlands. This was "God's call to awaken the entire country, a call to love!"[2]

This last sentence was a summons to all readers to convert their love for their countrymen into hard cash. Give, give, give, was Cremer's appeal: "You can never give too much."[3] Cremer's booklet, which cost ƒ.50 (€5.12), also benefited the needy people in the flooded areas of Brabant and Gelderland. Sales brought in a net amount of ƒ2,155.90 (€22,083).[4]


OP DEN ZOLDER.

EENE SCHETS

DOOR

J. J. CREMER.

Gebeel ten voordeele van de noodlijdenden ten gevolge der overstroomingen binnen Nederland in 1861.

Prijs 50 Cents.

Gedrukt bij C. Blommendaal.

Jacob Jan Cremer, *In the Attic*, 1861 (private collection)

Cremer was certainly not the only one involved in raising money for the victims of the flood. Music societies, citizens' committees and churches took action to extend a helping hand to those affected. In The Hague, a large-scale "General Raffle for Items of Art and Taste" was organized. At least 304 sub-committees in several municipalities worked to make the raffle a success. 218,000 raffle tickets were sold at ƒ1 (€10.24) per ticket, and 14,000 objects were submitted.[5] From poets to members of the royal family: everyone donated generously. After the deduction of a few costs, a total of ƒ1,509,907.63 (€15,465,850.56) was available for distribution.[6]

If there's anything that characterizes the Dutch response to flood disasters, it's the culture of charity. Right from the start, the demonstration of love of neighbor based on Christian motives played an important role in providing help to the victims. In the media this was touted as typical of Dutch identity: Dutch citizenship and relief actions went hand in hand. This emphasis on

charity as the national virtue was so pervasive that at a certain point the cult of charity reached its limit. Critics questioned the sincerity of all those authors of occasional verse and committee members; even a successful author like Cremer was given a good going-over. Both tendencies – linking Dutchness with compassion and the tendency to question the sincere intentions of those who initiate relief activities – are still operative today in the Dutch response to disasters.

Charity as a national virtue

Until well into the eighteenth century, charity was organized on a local and incidental basis without any large-scale infrastructure. The district water boards did play an important role in the prevention of floods and in assistance to and the recovery of affected areas, but it was always primarily up to the stricken villages or cities, and to individuals, to provide help. A collection taken in Groningen after the Christmas flood of 1717 raised a sum of more than ƒ13,000 (€152,536), most of which was spent on food for the needy.[7]

In the winter of 1740-1741, when large parts of the river region were inundated, the relief operations exceeded local or regional dimensions for the first time.[8] A group of affluent Rotterdam and Amsterdam burgers set up a relief committee to raise money and collect goods for victims in the eastern part of the country. These citizens were part of the Collegiant Movement, which consisted of enlightened Christian freethinkers. One of the ways they demonstrated their social engagement was by extending a helping hand to victims of natural disasters.[9]

The Amsterdam merchant and historian Jan Wagenaar was part of this movement. He served as a sort of secretary to the committee and published a report of their relief efforts.[10] He believed that the townspeople of the west were so moved by the suffering of their countrymen that not helping was simply out of the question:

> A number of charitable inhabitants from the most prominent Dutch cities felt the distress of their countrymen from afar and immediately sent help to the needy, thus accomplishing more quickly and more fully that which higher authorities were not able to provide. The suffering people were given food, clothing, stockings, hats and other head coverings to protect them from the bitter cold, all this carried by land, by water and across the ice, sometimes not without considerable danger, and the hearts of many of the afflicted were thereby refreshed.[11]

From the surrounding cities and regions such as Leiden, Hoorn, Monnickendam, The Hague and Zeeland, substantial amounts of money were paid to the committees in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This yielded the impressive sum of more than ƒ55,000 (€575,991).[12] Wagenaar noted with satisfaction that "everyone was dealt with bountifully, without distinction," and that here "the ever-famous Dutch charity" had manifested itself.[13] In saying this, he explicitly made the link between charity and the Dutch identity.[14] He also printed a financial report so readers could see exactly where the money had been spent.[15]

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, flood disaster assistance became larger in scale and more professional. The relief efforts of 1784 provided the model for future floods.[16] For the first time, a campaign to raise money was launched throughout the republic. A central committee was appointed to coordinate the aid operation. The allocation of funds and goods was delegated to district committees, which worked according to a system of claim forms. The campaign, conducted through newspapers and other print media, was extremely successful: at least ƒ250,000 (€2,507,151) was raised. As in the relief efforts of 1741, the link with national identity was explicitly made. Take for example the recommendation of two booksellers, who published an illustrated *Accurate Description* of the flood:

> Since not only compassion but also immediate help to the needy is an exceptional feature of our nation's character, no true Dutchman can be indifferent to a description of the disastrous floods that have taken place in our homeland and elsewhere.[17]

That is to say: the Dutch excelled in charity. It was partly for this reason that the "true" Dutchman would be sure to show a great deal of interest in the illustrated disaster report, according to the publishers. And they were right: at least 347 people throughout the entire country subscribed to the publication.[18]

The fund-raising drive of 1784 was the last to be organized without government intervention. In the decades that followed, the relief committees would be appointed by the national government in The Hague.[19] This placed control in government hands, which also supervised the spending of contributions. Here the successive kings played a guiding role: they stimulated national charity, and they themselves donated large amounts of money to the victims.[20] Even so, most of the fund-raising initiatives still came from the citizenry, who organized lotteries, benefit concerts, church collections and public sales. This coordinated approach bore much fruit. In 1799, ƒ195,000 (€1,667,246) was raised; in 1809, ƒ985,000 (€7,732,300), in 1825 about ƒ2,200,000 (€25,445,039), and in 1861 more than ƒ758,000 (€7,764,127).[21] This included large gifts from kings and foreign parties, but most was collected by Dutch citizens, who thereby demonstrated their commitment to their homeland.

The success of the campaigns can partly be explained by the solidarity that burgers felt with their countrymen in need. They saw it as their Christian duty to care for the suffering. These three points – piety, patriotism and charity – were repeated over and over again in the media. In 1799, a journalist from the *Binnenlandsche Bataafsche Courant* argued that the Dutch were driven by charity, which is why the relief campaign had been so successful: "Charity, which is still a trait of the Batavian people,

is our guarantee that so many of our unfortunate fellow citizens will not have to wait in vain for help from society."[22] An occasional poet writing in 1825 believed that charity was the most important characteristic of the Dutch:

> Thanks be to God that even in this widespread disaster, true patriotic hearts are being found that have shown by their deeds (and do so every day) that the main feature of the Dutch character, kindness, which has endured throughout the changing centuries, is still firmly rooted here, and will continue to be rooted as long as this nation exists![23]

In that same year, the aforementioned teacher Johannes ter Pelkwijk of Overijssel also praised the generosity of the Dutch: "While the Dutch have always been known for their benevolence, now that quality shone so brightly that one [...] felt a strange new joy in one's heart caused by the extraordinary charity exhibited by our nation."[24] An anonymous poet went one step further and wrote that the Netherlands had come to occupy a unique position in the world: "'Tis in the Netherlands, where it is most practiced, that it is also to be learned."[25]

That donors were also driven by patriotic motives can be seen in the verses and mottoes they included along with their gifts. Lists of donors' names were printed in newspapers and commemoration books, some of them hidden behind revealing names like "true Hollander."[26] Others were accompanied by little verses. One striking example is this verse from 1861:

> The Dutch heart that weeps and bleeds for neighbors' sore distress, That pure and kindly heart cannot stop from being torn, That heart that fiery burns and oft itself forgets, That Dutch heart will go on beating in children yet unborn.[27]

In the twentieth century an important shift took place in the way citizens viewed relief efforts. More and more people felt that the

main responsibility lay with the government: compensating affected businesses and private individuals for damages incurred was the government's job. The flood of 1926 was a turning point in this regard. Because the flood was not declared a national disaster, innumerable conflicts arose over compensation: it was not clear who was responsible for what, so a great many people found themselves stuck in no man's land. The Amsterdam Fund (General United Commission for flood disaster relief in Amsterdam) stepped in on behalf of the victims and organized a national fund-raiser. Thanks to all the publicity in the press and on the radio, at least ƒ4,700,000 (€38,795,875) was donated.[28]

To avoid similar problems in the future, the National Disaster Fund was set up in 1935. The government was made responsible for damage to businesses, and private individuals could have recourse to this fund in the event of future disasters. When the 1953 flood occurred, foreign and domestic relief efforts raised so much money that the foreign gifts were placed in a separate account.[29] The "Purses Open, Dikes Shut" action was an unparalleled success, with proceeds of more than ƒ5,200,000 (€20,128,648). Every Saturday evening the combined radio networks broadcast a program in which businesses and private individuals could reveal how much they had donated. There were also live performances by famous artists and choirs. The final program of 28 March was broadcast live from the Concertgebouw (Concert Hall). The total amount of money raised, including all the other gifts and relief efforts, was about ƒ138,000,000 (€534,183,343) for the victims.

This campaign and those that preceded it show how deeply rooted the desire is to help people in need. That desire only becomes stronger as the sense of urgency and solidarity with the victims intensifies. The Dutch media made it a point to stress that the "true" Dutch person was one who excelled in charity and generosity. Reporting and reality reinforced each other: the more the media emphasized typical Dutch generosity, the more the Dutch gave. And the more they gave, the more this attribute was given top billing in the media.

Final evening of the "Purses Open, Dikes Shut" campaign in which the total amount is shown (photo: Joop van Bilsen, public domain)

National fund-raising campaigns are still part of the standard flood repertoire. Take the national relief efforts that were launched in 1995, when an enormous flood disaster threatened the river region. Although the dikes held in the end, Dutch burgers still reached for their wallets in vast numbers to show their concern. "As always happens in such cases," noted the editors of the 1995 commemoration book, "the Dutch people were generous."[30] In making this statement – and this is also part of a long tradition – the editors established an explicit connection between generosity and the Dutch identity.

Poster for the "Purses Open, Dikes Shut" campaign of 1953 (public domain)

Charity visually depicted

Ever since the Middle Ages, *caritas*, the mother of all virtues, has played an important role in the cultural depiction of flood disasters. One striking example are the panels of the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood made by an anonymous painter in 1490. The panels had been commissioned by the descendants of the victims in Wieldrecht, who wanted to thank Dordrecht and its inhabitants for offering sanctuary to the evacuees during the flood several decades before. Two panels show the actual disaster, and clearly visible are people in small boats transporting victims and goods. The other two panels illustrate the life of St. Elizabeth of Thüringen, who was known for her care of the weak and the sick. By linking the disaster with such a role model of charity, the panels clearly contributed to the moral-Christian message that everyone should care for the suffering.[31]

In the centuries that followed, artists continued to focus their attention on the importance of relief efforts in the paintings and

prints they produced. They showed people in a wide variety of settings who were saving others from difficult situations or distributing food. In the print made by Jan Caspar Philips of the flood of 1741, for example, the artist presents a highly detailed scene of people helping each other during the flood: people dragging others onto dry land, skippers sailing around with boats full of people rescued from drowning, and a woman protectively holding her children close. This last detail suggests a personification of Caritas, who for centuries was depicted as a woman giving the breast to an infant with her other children clustered around her.[32]

Figures of mothers with children also strengthened the association with charity. A fine example of this is a detail from a print made by the engraver Johannes de Vletter in response to the breach of the Waalband dike in 1809. A mother is carrying a young and hungry child in her arms and is surrounded by three little ones clinging to her skirts. One of the children seems to be calling for help. The mother is looking directly at the viewer, as if she were begging for someone to come to her aid.[33]

Besides mother figures, the printmakers often depicted boats carrying people saved from drowning. Illustrative of this trope is a print of the flood of 1775 at Kampen by the engraver Noach van der Meer. In the foreground we see a skipper trying to bring a family and their livestock to safety. In the background is another sailing ship, also loaded with people and cows. Yet another element often shown in prints and paintings was the sanctuary offered in churches. During the flood of 1885 the town of Veenendaal was hard hit. Thousands of residents were forced to evacuate. Some of them were offered refuge in nearby villages such as Ede, Lunteren, Bennekom and Otterloo. The Geertekerk in Utrecht took in 478 victims.[34] They were transported by train and welcomed with a hot meal – sauerkraut with bacon.[35] The General Commission, which was the central aid committee, disbursed funds to cover sheltering costs. Numerous private collection drives were also launched. Benefit concerts were held

Details from the title print of J.C. Philips's *The Dutch Flood of 1740 and 1741* (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

throughout the country, and lotteries and evening recitals were organized. In Utrecht, seven well-to-do women set up a ladies' committee for the specific purpose of helping the needy of Geertekerk. They coordinated the collection of clothing and goods for the evacuees. Local residents contributed massive amounts of clothing and other items, such as "a duffle coat and six white singlets."[36] The evacuees stayed in the church for seven weeks, in separate sections for men and women. A strict daily

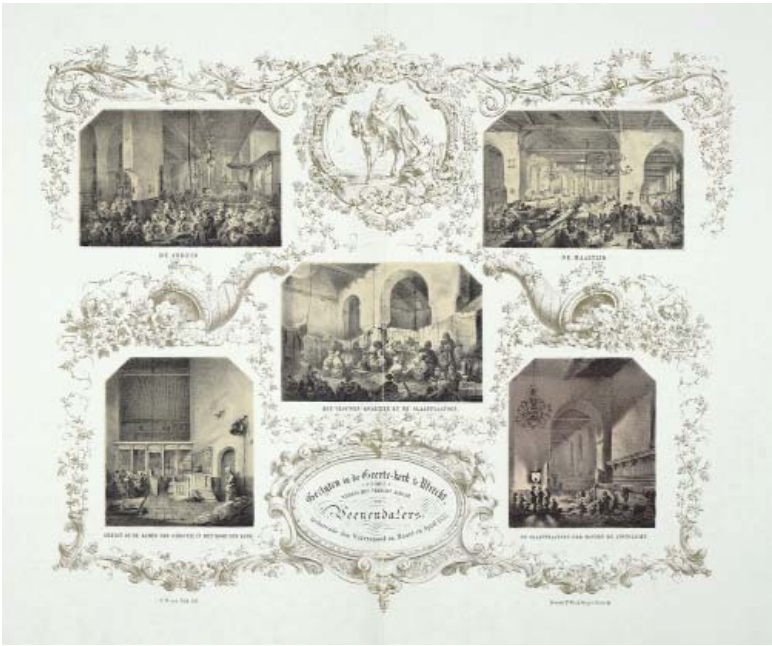
Detail from Johannes de Vletter, after Jan Lodewijk Jonxis, *Breach of the Waal Dike in 1809* (Rijkmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

Noach van der Meer, *Breach of the Dike at Kampen*, 1775
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

schedule was put in place for the various activities: washing, eating, working, praying, sleeping. During the day the children attended local schools.

The relief operations were painstakingly recorded by engravers and painters. David van der Kellen showed how the women and children occupied themselves during the day; blankets can be seen in the background drying on a clothesline. Another drawing shows how meals were served: men, women and children sat together and ate from several large common bowls of soup.

The rich visual culture in which scenes of charity were featured contributed to the emergence of the cult of charity in the Netherlands. The prints were sold to raise money for flood victims. Bookseller Christiaan Josi (1768-1828), who ran an art



Impression of the accommodations and activities of the Veenendaal evacuees in the Geertekerk in Utrecht, drawing by C.W. van Dijk, lithograph by P.W. van Weijer (Utrecht Archive)

gallery on the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, sold prints of recent floods, with proceeds going to the needy. Buyers had to dig deep to acquire such works. According to an advertisement in the *Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant*, a set of colored prints, using the most expensive paper, cost at least ƒ28 (€ 220).[37] These were labor-intensive art objects; one surviving drawing shows the artist Christiaan Andriessen coloring in flood drawings by hand at Josi's request. The advertisement explains that the large prints served as "consoling monuments to the general helpfulness and kindness of our Nation."[38]

The combination of charity and a love of art reached a high point in a series of twenty-four prints made by members of Arti et Amicitiae, an Amsterdam art society, in support of the 1855

David van der Kellen, *Victims of the Veenendaal Flood in the Geertekerk in Utrecht*, 1855 (Centraal Museum Utrecht)

G.A.G.Ph. Mollinger, *Mealtime in the Geertekerk for Evacuees from Veenendaal in 1855* (Utrecht Archive)

flood victims. About fifteen artists went to the disaster area and made preliminary sketches in the villages of Elst, Dreumel, Lienden, Alem and Opheusden, among others. Back in the studio they turned these sketches into etchings. The final work was dedicated to the king and provided an impression of the havoc wreaked by the sheer volume of water in the river region. Some of the prints featured long-distance views, others zoomed in on a ravaged farm. The series of black-and-white illustrations cost ƒ10 (€93).[39] King William III ordered thirteen copies, printed on expensive Japanese paper.[40] The project brought in ƒ1,500 (€13,948).[41] A color painting of the series was also produced by the Amsterdam artist Johan Veltens (1814-1894) and is now the property of the Valkhof Museum in Nijmegen.

The concept was widely imitated. After the flood of 1861, several large bonus plates were made available featuring a series of miniature drawings. Besides serving as mementos, they were also meant to support the victims in the river region. For example,

Christiaan Andriessen, *19 July. Coloring in the Floods for C. Josi*, 19 July 1806 (Amsterdam City Archive)

Johan Veltens, *The Flood of 1855* (Het Valkhof Museum, Nijmegen)

one was offered as an extra bonus plate in the magazine *Europa*.[42] The extent to which art and charity were interwoven can be seen in the beautiful pen-and-ink drawing that the Catholic painter Jan Toorop donated to adorn the program booklet for a benefit concert held on 30 January 1926 at the Hotel De Witte Brug in The Hague. The evening was organized in support of the victims of the flood that had taken place earlier that month in Gelderland and Brabant. The drawing features two nuns. The black nun has her hands raised in lamentation while the white nun is reaching out to an emaciated woman in night clothes. The white nun has the appearance of an angel or saint and is wearing a crown. The crown could also refer to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which has come to the rescue. Behind a swirling wave is the head of a suffering man on a cross. In the background

Jan Toorop, *Relief Efforts During the Flood of 1926, Symbolically Represented* (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

on the left there's a road leading to a church, and more churches are visible as points on the horizon. The white nun in particular fits into the visual tradition of a caring female figure – think of St. Elizabeth and Caritas. One reporter spoke of a "very tight and bold composition that visually summarizes the impact of the national disaster."[43] The benefit was a success: it brought in ƒ2,700 (€22,287).[44] At least ƒ600 (€4,953) was bid for Toorop's original drawing.[45]

Charitable publications

In addition to prints and paintings, national compassion was also stimulated by charitable publications. Netherlands expert Marita Mathijsen has studied the genre, and according to her research it emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, peaked in the mid-nineteenth and died out in around 1930.[46] Writers took up their pens en masse and began to write not only about fires, epidemics and poverty but also about floods. As one author observed in 1861: "'Tis raining flood verse everywhere you're turning, / While day and night the presses keep on churning."[47] Other genres such as plays, commemoration books, stories, sermons and eye-witness reports were also put to work to raise money for flood victims. Among the authors were many writers of repute such as Bilderdijk, Tollens, Cremer, W.J. Hofdijk, J.P. Heije and Multatuli. Numerous amateur poets also made contributions, not always to the enrichment of poetic standards.

In order to reach the largest possible readership, booksellers placed advertisements in the daily and weekly newspapers. People could sign up for a copy at their local bookshop. The subscription lists were then sent to the intended publisher, who made sure the expenses and income ended up in the right place. The bookseller J.H. Mellink of Zutphen specified on his subscription list that the proceeds from the planned publication *Jesus Wept* would be deposited "in the hands of the Main Commis-


Inteekenings-Lijst, 10 Maart 1855.

VOOR DE ONGELUKKIGEN, WIER BEZITTINGEN ONLANGS DOOR

IJSGANG EN OVERSTROOMING

IN GELDERLAND

zijn verzwolgen, zal door den Boekhandelaar J. H. MELLINK te Zutphen, ten spoedigste worden uitgegeven:

JEZUS WEENDE, ENZ.

DOOR

PR. R—B. TE DOETINCHEM.

INHOUD. Een woord vooraf. — Toewijding. — Jezus weende. — Aan eene Bedrogene. — Herinnering aan het H. Avondmaal. — Aan Jonkvr. C. B. G. S. te K. — Bij het verscheuren van het eerste Bal-kleedje. — Mijn gevoelen. — Op eene kraamvisite bij Dominé. — Berusting.

Prijs ƒ 0.40.

De algemeen bekende berigten omtrent de vreeselijke ramp, waarmede HIJ die gezeten is over de Watervloeden, velen onzer Landgenooten heeft bezocht, zijn te treurig welsprekend, dan dat het niet eene beleediging voor uw gevoel zou zijn, mijn Bevoorregten! indien ik met veel omhaal van woorden, U tot weldoen en leniging wilde bewegen. Met bescheidene doch vrijmoedige herinnering aan Uw gezegend lot, vraag ik van U eene gift der Christelijke liefde en erkentelijkheid, en biede U in ruil eenige regels aan. Zij zouden echter inderdaad voor Uwe gave eene schrale vergoeding zijn, indien Gij niet zeker wist wat de eeuwigheid er U oneindig beters voor belooft! God bewege Uw en veler harten; ook tot het aanwenden van Uwen vermogenden invloed, om de inteekening, ter bereiking van het doel, *krachtdadig* te bevorderen; en — zoo (onverhoopt!) Gods bestuur eenmaal eene dergelijke pijnlijke aanvrage voor U zelven mogt noodig maken, moge alsdan Uwe bereidwilligheid tot weldoen van heden, de maatstaf kunnen zijn, naar welke Gij die van anderen voor U zoudt wenschen berekend te zien. De Inteekenlijsten worden bij den Uitgever terug verzocht, zoo spoedig dit redelijker wijze, zonder de inteekening te schaden, mogelijk zij; terwijl het zuiver bedrag der opbrengst zal gestort worden in handen van de Hoofd-Commissie in *Gelderland*.

10 MAART 1855. **Pr. R — B, te Doetinchem.**

NAMEN.	WOONPLAATS.	KWALITEIT.	GETAL EXEMPL.	EXTRA-GIFTEN.	BIJ WIEN TE BEZORGEN EN WAAR OVER HET BEDRAG TE DISPONEREN.

Subscription list for a charity publication by Pr. R.- B., *Icy Conditions and Flooding in Gelderland*, 10 March 1855 (private collection)

sion in Gelderland." One column on the list was left blank for any additional gifts people might want to give.

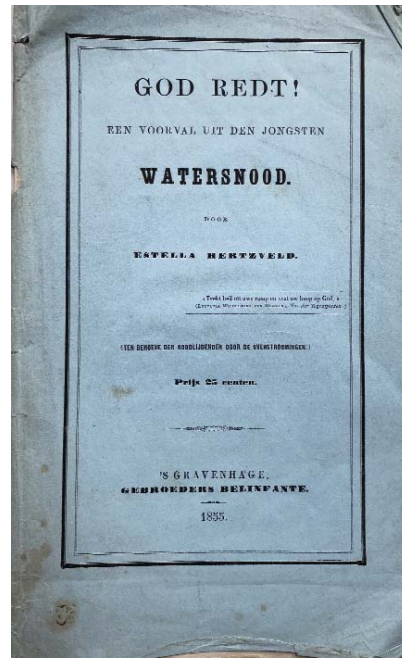
The charitable publications could be divided into two categories in terms of content: the first consisted of works that dealt with the disaster itself, and the second of publications that had nothing to do with the disaster but whose proceeds would go to the victims. The overwhelming majority were those in the first category. Some of them were genuine bestsellers, such as Cremer's *In the Attic* and *The Crown of William the Good* (1861) by W.J. Hofdijk. The latter went through at least three printings. The price was relatively high, ƒ0.60 (€6.15), but that included an illustration of the king wearing the suit he had worn while visiting the victims of the disaster. The poem inspired composer Anton

Berlijn to write an instrumental concert titled "The Great National Fantasia," which was performed several times in the Frascati Theater for the benefit of the needy.[48]

The bestsellers constituted only a fraction of the vast number of charitable publications that were produced. Most of them have passed into oblivion, which is understandable given their uneven quality. But some are worthwhile for many reasons, such as their remarkable content. Take the occasional poem that the Jewish poet Estella Hertzveld wrote in 1855 in support of the victims of the Gelderland flood. For a mere ƒ0.25 (€2.32), readers could acquire *God Saves! An Incident from the Most Recent Flood*. She describes a quite specific event that took place near Doorwerth. The brave youth Anthony sets out in a boat to search for his father and brother. He wants to warn them that his mother and the other children are in need of help. The raging waves crash over him, but miraculously he survives. This is all owing to God, who is "pure love," according to the author. She ends with an appeal to all the people of the Netherlands to be merciful:

> All Dutch people! have compassion,
> Watch your King and from him learn,
> And a higher Heavenly monarch
> Gives His blessings in return![49]

The writer remarks in a note that she read about this incident in the newspaper, and indeed both the national and the regional dailies included lengthy reports of the terrifying adventure of seventeen-year-old Anthony. Placed side by side, the poem and the newspaper story show how thin the dividing line is between poetry and journalism. The newspaper report was much more detailed and hair-raising: "Anthony grabs hold of a tree, lands on a swirling ice flow and imploringly raises his eyes to heaven in the hope that he will survive."[50] Hertzveld used these ingredients and cranked up the level of religious morality even further. The appeal for donations was her own addition.


GOD REDT!

EEN VOORVAL UIT DEN JONGSTEN

WATERSNOOD.

DOOR

ESTELLA HERTZVELD.

(TEN BEHOEVE DER NOODLIJDENDEN DOOR DE OVERSTROOMINGEN.)

Prijs 25 centen.

'S GRAVENHAGE,
GEBROEDERS BELINFANTE.

1855.

Estella Hertzveld, *God Saves! An Incident from the Most Recent Flood*, The Hague 1855 (private collection)

In addition to charitable publications dealing with the disaster itself there also appeared numerous works that had nothing to do with the actual event but were sold to benefit the needy. Some of them were quite lucrative. One absolute winner was *Red Teun* (1860) by the clergyman Bernard ter Haar. The story had nothing to do with the flood, but Ter Haar passed the proceeds on to the victims as an act of piety. It brought in at least ƒ2,853.64 (€29,230).[51] Another example is *Charis: Prose and Poetry* (1855). The Arnhem clergyman Jan Pieter de Keyser worked with the Arnhem bookseller G.W. van der Wiel to compile this hefty anthology. Many authors, well-known and lesser-known, selflessly donated their work, among them Tollens, Cremer, Heije and Elisabeth Hasebroek. The final sum of ƒ1,156.54½ (€10,754) was turned over to Gelderland's Royal Commissioner.[52]

There were intriguing publications in this category as well. In 1830, a work titled *The Journey to Gelderland, or the Fulfillment of*

Herman's Wishes was issued by the Nijmegen publisher J.F. Thieme. It was written by an author who had several well-known works to her name but preferred to remain anonymous. The work was occasioned by a flood that struck the Betuwe region in 1827. Publication was delayed for three years, however, due to personal circumstances: the author's step-daughter and another loved one had died, and she herself was living in the most appalling conditions. Yet she didn't want to disappoint the subscribers – at least five thousand! – which was an impressive number at that time.

The story describes the journey of a brother and sister through the Land van Maas en Waal during which they discuss all sorts of curious details, including the rivers' water levels. The author also worked in many references to popular writers. As they pass through the village of Dreumel, which had been very hard hit at the time, Herman recalls the "beautiful poem" "Klara and Ewoud" by Tollens, enabling the travelers to fully identify with the horrors of such a calamity.[53] Critics effusively praised the noble intentions and pious moral of the travel story.[54] The publication brought in ƒ1,300 (€13,586), which was divided among five municipalities: Appeltern, Dreumel, Druten, Horssen and Wamel.[55] The famous writer's identity is still a matter of speculation. Could it have been Anna Barbara van Meerten-Schilperoort, prolific author of a wide range of writings? The style of writing fits her profile, and her husband died in 1830, but nothing is known of a step-daughter.[56]

Criticism of charity

Generosity was infectious: citizens were encouraged from all sides to convert their compassion into gifts. Contributors saw their largesse rewarded when their names were mentioned in newspapers and commemoration books, and charity was preached from the pulpits. This situation provoked Bilderdijk to

write a critical verse with the title "Insincere Gift." In his opinion, all that magnanimity reeked of ostentation and self-importance.

> Conceited ostentation, when offering your dole
> You give it to the Devil and dare ask God to bless you,
> And those unchristian hell-folk, go tremble for your soul!
> The curse is on your gift, and its wages will possess you.[57]

According to Bilderdijk this charity had nothing to do with true religion and everything to do with vanity.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the boom in charitable actions assumed such proportions that it caused a surge in criticism. Skeptics claimed that many do-gooders were mainly out to profit from the flood disasters, such as writers of occasional pieces who used the misery of the victims to make a good impression. For authors who were less well-known, a disaster was a golden opportunity to try for a breakthrough. Administrators saw it mainly as a means of self-promotion. And weren't the people who participated in all those lotteries simply hoping to rake in some prize money? In 1861 a number of cartoons appeared in the magazine *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, featuring people who were trying to cash in on the recent calamity.[58] In one of the cartoons, a lottery winner tries to hoist a ridiculously large painting through a tiny attic window. In the meantime, none of the posh gentlefolk seem to notice the poor fellow on two wooden legs who is standing right in front of them. In short: how sincere was the national fund-raising craze anyway?

Spiritus Asper en Lennis, probably a pseudonym of the clergyman-writer B.Th. Lublink Weddink, published a biting and humorous piece in *De Tijdspiegel* about relief efforts during the flood of 1855. According to him, nothing was more suitable for "establishing and rehabilitating the real, true notion of a people."[59] The author included a handy table in which the basic ingredients of "national compassion" were listed. Tears were on the

Cartoon ridiculing the flood lottery, in *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, 4 May 1861

list, but so were collections and advertisements for books sold at cut-rate prices. Generous citizens were all too eager to have their names printed in the newspapers along with the amounts donated. The author had a point: the newspapers were teeming with lists of donors and their contributions. Booksellers greedily capitalized on the disaster by advertising charity publications: good publicity for both the author *and* the bookseller!

Spiritus Asper en Lenis also poked fun at well-to-do ladies

and gentlemen who organized musical evenings under the motto: not only do "the poor brothers and sisters in Gelderland" get something out of this, but so do we! An additional advantage of this "people's disaster" was that all religious disputes were silenced: "This is one blessing of the *flood*, that *religious opinions* disappear (at least temporarily)."[60] And finally, he provocatively stated that the flood could not be seen as a punishment of God, for why would the Lord aim his arrows at the people of Gelderland alone and leave the folks of Groningen, Friesland and Zeeland unaffected? The humorist made mincemeat of generosity as the "national character": self-interest reigned supreme.

The same sort of criticism, but even sharper and more sarcastic, came from Multatuli, pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker. In 1860 he had raised the topic of the exploitation of the local population in the Dutch East Indies with his novel *Max Havelaar*. One year later, he published the brochure *Show Me the Place Where I Have Sown!* to benefit the victims of the flood on Java.[61] Three weeks after the floods in the Bommelerwaard and the Land van Maas en Waal, a flood also swept through Java. Multatuli mercilessly attacked the feeble flood disaster literature produced by his fellow authors and questioned the willingness of the Dutch to donate to a disaster overseas. He denounced the so-called Christian motives behind all that charity: he saw nothing but hypocrisy. The Dutch, he said, should be guided by reason-based arguments rather than those based on Christianity. Only

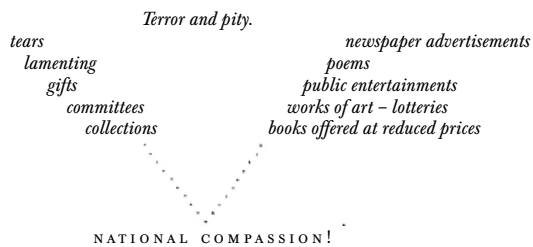


Table of "National Compassion" in *De Tijdspiegel* (1855), p. 295

then would they realize that the prosperity of the mother country depended on the colony, and that making donations would benefit their own self-interest. An additional advantage was that their gifts would pay off the debt their forefathers had accrued through their abuse of the local population. His own booklet raised more than ƒ1,300 (€13,316) for the victims on Java.[62]

A few years later, Multatuli revisited the whole affair in a *Postscript*. He was ashamed of the behavior of his countrymen, since all they had been able to spare for the victims on Java was ƒ11,000 (€112,672). By way of comparison: that was less than one-ninth of what a single Chinese person had donated there in the form of rice.[63] It isn't entirely clear what Multatuli based his figures on, since according to a *Report of the Allocation of Funds* the Netherlands donated more than ƒ160,000 (€1,727,859) to Java.[64] That amount was quite a bit higher than that quoted by Multatuli, but it was still a fraction of what the Dutch had collected for the victims of the flood in their own country.

Criticism mounted in 1881 when some wealthy Amsterdammers organized a large-scale campaign for the needy of North Brabant, where a dike breach at Nieuwkuijk had resulted in much material damage and many victims. The Amsterdam committee organized a "Flood Festival" on 18 February in the Palace of Industry. The proceeds from the purchase of admission tickets, lottery tickets, drinks and food were intended for the people affected by the flood in North Brabant earlier that year. The food and drinks were plentiful. Cook and pastry chef Jacob Zomerdijk Bussink served two sumptuous four-course meals. The most expensive wines could also be ordered, or a bottle of champagne for ƒ7 (€81). Concerts, tableaux vivants, lotteries, a carnival and traditional games were organized in the various rooms for visitors to enjoy.[65] Despite the high price of admission, thousands managed to make their way to the Palace.[66] The proceeds were considerable: a total of ƒ66,000 (€763,430) was raised.[67]

An impressive figure, but some people felt that with this Flood

Festival the organizers had crossed the line of decency. The theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper expressed his objection as follows: "When the dikes broke in the past we had a Day of Prayer and Donation; / Now we practice Charity with a Disaster *Celebration*."[68] Someone else pointed out that the organization had chosen a very expensive venue for its festival.[69] A few of the nation's reporters were also quite critical. One journalist from *De Standaard* had nothing good to say about using the suffering of victims as an occasion for feasting: "It is our firm, heartfelt conviction that such a Flood Festival is nothing less than a defilement, a contamination, a desecration of the robe of Compassion."[70]

Yet the critics were in the minority. Despite the negative reactions, an overwhelming and nearly inexhaustible stream of relief efforts were launched during the years 1850-1880, and the proceeds were high. There is something questionable about the collective nature of charity on such a grand scale, however. The historian Fons Meijer points out that not all the Dutch were donors by any means and more money was collected in the urbanized west than in other parts of the country.[71] Nor was the sense of solidarity universal: religious groups deliberately made sure the spotlight was on them, and conflicts arose over the religious meaning of disasters. In 1825 this led to fierce religious disputes between the strict Calvinists and the more moderate Reformed Protestants.[72]

Nevertheless, the feeling of national solidarity did prevail, at least if we base this view on what was written in the media and on the impressive amounts of money that were raised. Good citizenship, as the commentators repeatedly stressed, went hand in hand with Christian love of neighbor and concern for those in need in the homeland – whether around the corner or in another part of the country.


Vrij van Zegel (Z. M. besluit van 19 Januarij 1861, n°. 47.)

Overgenomen ter ligting van den daarop gevallen Prijs het Lot

№ 216963

in de Algemeene Verloting ten behoeve der NOODLIJDENDEN door den Watersnood.

Het Lid der Sub Commissie te

Voor de Sub-Commissien laagst één tijn al te snijden.

Vrij van Zegel (Z. M. besluit van 19 Januarij 1861, n°. 47.)

f 1.— **Watersnood 1861.** f 1.—

ALGEMEENE VERLOTING VAN VOORWERPEN VAN KUNST EN SMAAK

TEN BEHOEVE DER NOODLIJDENDEN,

GOEDGEKEURD BIJ OPGEMELD KONINKLIJK BESLUIT.

LOT N°. 216963

De houder van dit Lot kan den daarop gevallen Prijs binnen zes weken na de Verloting hetzij door tusschenkomst van eene der Sub-Commissiën, of regtstreeks te *'s Gravenhage* ontvangen.

Het tijdstip der trekking en de plaats van aflevering der prijzen worden in de Staats-Courant aangekondigd. De na verloop van gemeld tijdvak niet afgehaalde prijzen vervallen aan de kas der Verloting.

Voor het Bestuur der Algemeene Verloting,

's Gravenhage,
1 Februarij 1861.

Gedrukt bij Gebr. J. & H. van Langenhuysen.

Ticket for the lottery organized for the victims of the flood of 1861

The legacy of the past

The cult of charity, which reached its high point in the nineteenth century, is still visible today. Calamity always contributes to an enhanced sense of national community based on empathy and solidarity. In 1995, when Dutch producer Endemol organized a large-scale television campaign within the space of thirty hours, presenter Linda de Mol said this action could show "what a wonderful people we are."[73] The people of the Netherlands reached for their wallets en masse, even though the dikes had not yet breached. In the summer of 2021, when water began pouring through the streets of Valkenburg in Limburg, relief operations once again were spontaneously launched. The National Disaster Fund opened a bank account number to which people could donate; within a few months, more than €11,500,000 was raised.[74] No matter how sincere the intentions of the organizers and benefactors are, critical voices have always been raised, although now they're more subdued. That, too, is a legacy of the nineteenth-century cult of charity.

In 1995 communication expert Jaap van Ginneken published a fascinating analysis of the role of the media in large-scale relief

campaigns during flood disasters.[75] He said that with each new disaster, images that have been lying dormant in the collective memory are reactivated. "Primal patterns" emerge that stimulate citizens to donate: images of collapsing dikes, terrified inhabitants who have fled to the attic and the heroic deeds of fellow citizens.

Much less attention is usually paid to the sometimes tedious task of settling insurance claims. Some groups feel they've been abandoned or ignored, or that they have to wait too long for financial compensation. In 1995, for example, the Union of Pig Breeders mounted surprise actions to protest the meager amounts they were given.[76] Farmers and nurserymen were also furious over the limited compensation promised them by the government.[77] In actual circumstances, national solidarity is often of limited duration. At the same time, each eruption of national charity makes such an impression that the media can't stop writing about it. National charity thus remains a core element in the Dutch self-image: whatever fits in the picture is made much of. Reality and image reinforce each other.

Matchbox used for collecting money for the victims of the 1953 flood

6
International Solidarity

"We come from a small country, but we feel for you as we would for our own brothers and sisters. When we get back home we'll tell our countryman that the Dutch people are a friendly people. We wish you much success in the reconstruction of your land."[1] These heartwarming words were spoken by Knut Nielsen on 23 February 1953 on the Malieveld in The Hague. He served as section leader for the relief convoy of the Danish Civilian Protection Corps (*Civil Forsvar*), which had provided transport services to the Dutch Red Cross to help the victims of the Zeeland flood disaster. His men stood lined up in front of a long row of trucks, each of which was marked "*Hollandshjaelp*."

Then a representative of the Dutch government, E.O. Baron van Boetzelaer, took the floor. He too showed his deep appreciation for the tie between the two nations: "We know that the Danes are good people, but now we have proof of it. The disaster has never been out of our thoughts, not for a single moment. We will never forget your help."[2] Following his remarks, the Danish soldiers climbed into their trucks and rode slowly off the Malieveld. The traffic police accompanied the convoy, while the grateful Dutch stood along the sidelines waving.

This solemn ceremony reinforced the already strong bond between the Danes and the Dutch. In times of calamity, as both speakers made clear, the inhabitants of the two countries were always ready to come to each other's aid. And the Danes weren't the only ones to offer assistance from abroad. As any perusal of

Storage facility for relief supplies for the victims of the 1953 flood (National Archive/Spaarnestad Collection/ANP)

the newspapers of 1953 clearly show, the massive support that the Netherlands received from other countries is impressive indeed. From Australia to Japan, from Indonesia to South Africa, goods and gifts were sent from all over the world.

Most floods are mainly remembered within a national context: they form the building blocks of history that are passed on to new generations by way of schools, educational material, books, stories and museums. The disaster of 1953 is such an important benchmark: it's part of the "Canon of the Netherlands," fifty panels that encapsulate the basic knowledge of Dutch history and culture.[3] But when an event is thus embedded in the national historiography it's easy to lose sight of its international dimensions, including the way disasters contribute to the formation of identity. Floods have led to a stronger sense of "us" on both a national *and* an international scale.[4]

This was mainly reflected in relief efforts in which donors and

aid workers emphasized the importance of international solidarity. As with the national fund-raising campaigns, the media played an important role, stimulating readers' empathy and encouraging them to make donations.[5] "Media" should be broadly understood here to include not only newspapers and illustrated magazines but also prints and songs. One example is a song that was popular in the Netherlands and had to do with the calamitous flood that struck the Mexican cities of Leon and Silao in 1883. The anonymous author encouraged people to donate generously: "No matter where you happen to live, / Have compassion and give! yes, give!"[6] Many years later, in 1926, *The New York Times* was still recalling the disaster in its pages.[7] Countless foreign media have also reported on floods that took place in the Netherlands. British, French and German newspapers kept their readers closely informed when vast stretches of the river region were inundated in 1861. "The great enemy of Holland – water – has again put forth its strength," reported *The Westmorland Gazette*.[8] A great many newspapers published appeals to donate to the needy.[9]

In this way, the media contributed to the creation of a sense of solidarity on an international scale. People who did not know each other personally felt connected nonetheless because of these reports. Political scientist Benedict Anderson coined a term for this phenomenon – "imagined community" – in which his focus was mainly on the role of the mass media (newspapers, television) in the emergence of national communities.[10] But since illustrations and news reports circulated not only within their country of origin, it's important to look beyond the borders.[11] An international dynamic also existed in the case of catastrophes, in which like-minded people stepped up to offer each other assistance.[12]

Community formation always goes hand in hand with a process of inclusion and exclusion, and the international imagined community is no different. The anthropologist Marcel Mauss became famous for his provocative thesis that gifts are al-

ways accompanied by a form of self-interest because they conceal an expectation of reciprocity.[13] This was clearly the case in many international flood campaigns, where initiators and donors were often motivated by religious, political and economic considerations.[14] It becomes apparent when we take a closer look at any of the international relief efforts conducted in response to floods in the Netherlands.

The culture of giving, from the national to the international

International relief campaigns go all the way back to the early modern period. Dutch citizens frequently came to the aid of foreign victims, not only in the aftermath of floods but also during famines, religious persecutions and destruction by war or fire. For both organizers and donors, humanitarian and religious considerations were decisive: Mennonites and Reformed Christians stressed the importance of helping co-religionists in need.[15] Commercial interests could also play a role. In 1737, Dutch merchants rushed to the aid of their flood-stricken colleagues in Gdánsk.[16] Trade concerns and networks formed the basis for this campaign, which, partly thanks to the efforts of Amsterdam city historian Jan Wagenaar, raised approximately ƒ15,000 (€173,301).[17]

Perhaps the most well-known example of international relief efforts was the response to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The disaster left tens of thousands of people dead and the city in complete ruins. Several European governments demonstrated their commitment by sending money and goods. The English dazzled with their enormous gift of 100,000 pounds, partly in the form of food and materials.[18] Other city and national governments made generous donations, but conspicuously absent was the Dutch Republic. Under pressure from the Protestant clergy, the States General donated precisely nothing: the Catholic Por-

tuguese had only their sinful behavior to blame for the disaster.[19] This example shows that gifts were certainly not value-free. In this case, conflicting religious beliefs was the overriding factor in the decision *not* to render assistance.

The international media played an important role in spreading the news of the Portuguese disaster and other foreign catastrophes: through newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, prints and songs, reports of these calamities were able to reach a much wider public. That influence only increased during the nineteenth century, thanks to higher print runs, faster forms of transportation, communication techniques and a higher literacy rate. The news media deliberately stimulated giving behavior. Indicative of this practice is a statement in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* of 20 October 1879, in which the European press was called on to assume its responsibilities after a flood had claimed countless victims in the Spanish province of Murcia: "The support of the European press is vigorously called on to obtain relief for an emergency reminiscent of that of Szeged."[20] This a reference to the catastrophic destruction of the Hungarian city of Szeged earlier that year, when the Tisza burst its banks. The flood left 165 dead, and only a very few houses and buildings remained intact. Several newspapers reported on the fund-raising campaigns in support of the victims that were organized in the Netherlands and beyond.[21] In Rotterdam the Bugle Corps held a benefit concert.[22]

Watersnood Hongarije.

Onder dankbetuiging aan de milde gevers, hebben de Ondergeteekenden de eer te berichten, dat bij hen zijn ingekomen de volgende giften, als:

Van Gebr. R. *f* 25.—, van R. & v. d. H. *f* 25.—, van *N. N., Tilburg*, *f* 3.—, v. R. *f* 20.—, H. *f* 10.—, E. v. R *f* 10.—, M., te *IJselmonde*, *f* 3.—, uit *Utrecht* voor *Szegedin* *f* 2.50, v. d. H. *f* 10.—, I. v. S. *f* 5.—, E. B., *Deventer*, *f* 10.— Doris *f* 10.—, F. G., Operazanger *f* 10.—, I. P. v. V. *f* 10.—, D. v. d. K., *Loon op Zand*, *f* 2.50, A. Z. *f* 1.—, S. R. *f* 5.—, collecte Societeit *B.-op-Zoom* *f* 9.85. Uit de bus van A. K. 1 coupon *f* 14.85. Van diversen *f* 55.77.

Welke gelden naar de bestemming zijn overgemaakt.

Rotterdam, 24 April 1879. **ROGGENBACH & VAN DER HOOP.**

NB. Verdere giften zullen in dank worden aangenomen! 5923

Advertisement for the flood in Hungary in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* of 31 March 1879

The readiness to give to distant strangers was fueled by the cult of charity that was in its heyday at the time. In the Netherlands of the nineteenth century, setting up committees, launching fund-raising campaigns and organizing benefit concerts in the wake of disasters had become a national pastime. As historian Fons Meijer has contended, you might call it disaster nationalism: following a catastrophic event, a whole repertoire of charitable activities immediately went into effect, from benefit performances to fund-raising campaigns, and from occasional publications to the awarding of medals for bravery and charity.[23] These kinds of practices validated the tie with the homeland and strengthened solidarity among the Dutch themselves.

People saw it as their religious and patriotic duty to help their countrymen. The expectation of reciprocity, from man or God, played an important role in this thinking. Good citizenship was normative: giving was a duty, but it was always a two-way street. Those who helped others could count on receiving support themselves in times of adversity.[24] Giving meant hoping for the mercy of God. This verse by a certain B.R. of Tholen, who donated ƒ3 (€23) to the victims in Zeeland in 1808, nicely summarized this underlying principle of reciprocity:

> Though the Flood does me a victim make,
> Yet still I give for duty's sake
> This mite in Kruiningen's time of woe,
> So God will never let me go.[25]

This ties in with Mauss's basic principle: that consciously or unconsciously, givers always have a return gift in the back of their minds.

It seems like only a small step from this national culture of giving to international charity campaigns: citizens operated within a system of Christian-Enlightenment norms and values that held generosity in high esteem – even beyond the borders of their own country. Yet questions do arise: what was it that in-

duced people to help their brothers and sisters in distant lands? And conversely: why did foreigners offer assistance when the Netherlands was in need? Were the motives different from those that inspired national fund-raising campaigns? As we learn from nineteenth-century commemoration books and from the foreign news media, that was indeed the case: family relationships and commercial interests were often a factor behind gifts sent from abroad.[26] This becomes clear when we look into the foreign gifts made in response to the floods of 1820, 1825, 1861 and 1953.[27]

1820: "Distress in Holland"

In January 1820, drifting ice floes caused the dikes in Gelderland and Brabant to breach in several places, leading to major floods in the vicinity of Nijmegen, the Alblasserwaard and 's-Hertogen-

Destruction of the "Huis te Oosterhout" on 23 and 24 January 1820, engraving by P. Velijn after C. van Hardenbergh, from the commemoration book of G.J.A. Beijerinck (public domain)

bosch.[28] Dozens of people and hundreds of animals drowned, while survivors sought refuge in neighboring churches and other locations.

That same year, the Amsterdam publisher G.J.A. Beijerinck issued a detailed description of the flood so that every Dutch person "would be able to see with his own eyes, as it were, the fateful situation to which this land is exposed every winter when a heavy frost is followed by a rapid thaw."[29] His hope was to further stimulate the sense of national solidarity in times of calamity: "Perhaps such evidence would encourage him to form an even closer bond with his countrymen and companions in adversity, manifesting itself in pure benevolence."[30] The measure of the concern that the people of the Netherlands felt toward each other is evident in the large sums of money that were collected through fund-raising campaigns. Beijerinck's commemoration book includes a list of all the contributions that were donated in North Holland and South Holland on behalf of the victims. He was not able to draw up a total summary for all the provinces, but in those two alone the impressive amount of ƒ406,948.87 (€3,918,452) was raised.[31] Even the king was generous: he donated ƒ30,000 (€288,866), and he and his wife signed six copies of the commemoration book.[32]

More striking than the list of domestic donations is the appendix with the names of over three hundred donors from England. They raised at least ƒ19,400 (€186,800) for the victims in the Netherlands.[33] Who were these donors and what led them to help the victims in Gelderland and Brabant? The answer is clear: most of the money came from people who felt a connection with the Netherlands, either through birth or through business.

The day after news of the floods in the Netherlands had reached England, several merchants got together in London to discuss how they could help the victims. They decided to organize a public meeting in a room of the Old London Tavern in Bishopsgate. A committee was organized at that meeting, consisting of fourteen persons. William Ward, a merchant who en-

joyed considerable prestige in London, assumed the role of chairman. The minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in London, J. Werninck, was appointed secretary. He also gave a speech that made a deep impression on all those present.[34] He told them how 1,500 men had worked day and night to reinforce a dike, but to no avail, and how 750 persons had been forced to leave all their possessions behind when they fled to the church, which lay on higher ground. In Lent, a village near Nijmegen, at least 200 persons were forced to seek refuge elsewhere. And in neighboring Oosterhout, several houses were inundated, as was the church, and many residents drowned.

Those present at the meeting decided that the focus of the fundraising campaign should not be restricted to business partners or Dutch people living in England, but that the flood deserved to be brought to the attention of the entire British population. To do this, the committee arranged for a detailed account of the meeting to appear in *The Times* under the title "Distress in Holland." Other news media then picked up the story.[35] As a result, the campaign spread to areas far beyond London, and English people with no specific ties to the Netherlands also made donations. In Hull, for example, more than 52 pounds were collected. Residents of Falmouth in Cornwall also launched a fundraising campaign, which they advertised in the local newspaper.[36] School pupils from Poplar donated the pocket money they had received during the first week after Christmas, according to a list of donations in *The Morning Chronicle*, a collection that brought in 2 pounds (€19).[37]

Thanks to Beijerinck's commemoration book we know exactly who the donors were and how much they gave. To begin with, the list of British donors includes a large number of Dutch people who were living there. It's teeming with Dutch names, such as G.A. ten Bruggenkate, J.B. Moens, W. van Hemert and W. ten Broeke. Among the donors was also "A Dutch widow," probably a Dutch woman who had been married to an Englishman. There are also many names of commercial enterprises, such as Baring,

Brothers & Co, May, Alewyn & Co and A.F. Haldimand & Zonen. Thus many donors had family or business ties with the Netherlands.

Other donors had diplomatic and political dealings with the Netherlands, such as the Dutch consuls in Dartmouth, Plymouth, Sheerness and Wight. Among the most prominent donors were Lord Castlereagh (Henry Robert Stewart), the Foreign Secretary, and his wife, each of whom gave ten pounds ten shillings.[38] He maintained very good diplomatic relations with the Netherlands, and both countries cherished their "special relationship." They saw each other as their "most natural ally," in the words of historian Niek van Sas.[39] So it wasn't surprising that Castlereagh was prepared to demonstrate his sympathy with the victims in the Netherlands; undoubtedly the floods will have come up in one of his many meetings or conversations with envoys. A special collection may have been taken up via the embassy in London. In any case, his donation underscores the fact that political ties were strengthened in times of disaster.

One last category that stands out in the commemoration book consists of the donors who identify themselves by their military rank, such as Captain E. Page, Lieutenant Roentgen and the generals Cook and Campbell of Portsmouth. Could it be that they felt a kinship with the Netherlands because they had fought with the allied troops against Napoleon at Waterloo? That is definitely true of the most famous commander on the list: Arthur Wellesley, better known as the Duke of Wellington. King William I awarded him the Knight Grand Cross in the Military Order of William for his performance on the battlefield. Wellesley donated at least twenty pounds.[40]

The donors' list clearly shows why so many English were willing to help the Dutch: most of them had an obvious connection with the country in either personal, economic or political terms. The campaign's great success was also owing to the extensive coverage in the British press: the repeated mention of the misery in the Netherlands and the appeals to donate bore much fruit.

Historic bonds of friendship

Five years later, in February 1825, another major flood struck the Netherlands. This time the disaster occurred around the Zuiderzee. The northern provinces of Overijssel, Friesland and Groningen were the hardest hit. In his beautifully illustrated commemoration book, the teacher J.C. Beijer listed all the gifts that had been made by domestic and foreign donors. Once again, many gifts came from England. Interestingly enough, some of the donors had already been named in the list of 1820. Among the most generous were the firms of Honourius Combauld & Co and Kops, Coussmakers & Co.[41]

This time, the largest contributor did not come from England, however, but from Russia. Czar Alexander I donated at least ƒ100,000 (€1,156,592) to the needy in the Netherlands, as much as King William I had given. What accounts for this gigantic donation? It all boils down to Mauss's principle of reciprocity: diplomatic relations between Russia and the Netherlands had been flourishing since Crown Prince William had married the Czar's sister, Anna Paulovna. A few weeks earlier, on 19 November 1824, an enormous catastrophe had taken place in Russia. The Neva had burst its banks, taking the lives of 2,500 to 3,000 people.[42] The damage to the Saint Petersburg region was gigantic: many houses were rendered uninhabitable and large parts of the city were completely destroyed.[43] There was also considerable economic damage: sugar refineries and copper smelting plants had collapsed, and the loss in merchandise was estimated at 100 million rubles.[44] Czar Alexander immediately made a million rubles available to alleviate the worst of the crisis, and the Czarina created a shelter to accommodate the victims of the catastrophe.[45] Crown Prince William and Anna Paulovna, who happened to be staying in the area of Saint Petersburg at the time, also expressed their sympathy by means of a generous gift.[46] Here family and political interests overlapped. Beijer wrote about this royal charity in his commemoration book:

Jan Willem Pieneman, *Double Portrait of Prince William of Orange and Anna Paulovna*, 1816 (Tilburg Municipal Museum)

"Without the throne's magnanimity, by which the crown prince and the crown princess of the Netherlands, who were residing in the Russian capital at the time, excelled with such nobility and brilliance, the disaster, which now has been mitigated as much as is humanly possible, would have been far more severe in its consequences."[47]

So it's no wonder that in 1825 the Czar dug deep into his pockets to respond to the needs of his brother-in-law's countrymen. Anna Paulovna was in Russia when the Dutch disaster struck, and she was said to have been deeply upset when she read about the horrors that had taken place in the Netherlands. She wanted to return to the Netherlands immediately in order to offer help, but Grand Duke Michael told her that was pointless: "did she think that by her presence the waves of the sea would be repulsed?"[48] She and her husband did donate ƒ30,000 (€346,978) in support of the needy.

There were also donors from other European countries, such as Germany, Austria, Portugal, Switzerland and Italy. Many of these maintained diplomatic relations with the Netherlands, as is evident from their titles. Various consuls and vice-consuls were on the list, as was the secretary of the embassy in Berlin. Several merchants who traded with the Netherlands were also listed. In short, the donations were always based on a specific tie with the Netherlands.

The same was true regarding gifts from the colonies. In Batavia (the capital of the Dutch East Indies, present-day Indonesia), several fundraising campaigns were held which together brought in ƒ46,000 (€532,033). Workers and employees in 's Lands Drukkerij in Batavia donated ƒ400 (€4,626), and "even the natives" made their contribution, according to the author of the summary.[49] The inhabitants of the islands of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba demonstrated their concern with a donation of ƒ2,286.60 (€26,447).

As with the flood of 1820, the press played an important role in spreading the news and stimulating people to donate. The *Bataviasche Courant*, for example, printed an appeal from the charity commission that had been set up by order of the governor general of the Dutch East Indies: "We entreat and invite each one of you to indicate on the accompanying list what he wishes to contribute to this holy cause, the cause of the Homeland and of humanity."[50] The British newspapers also reported on the latest developments. Many papers mentioned the large-scale fundraising campaigns that had been launched in the Netherlands and had prompted a considerable response: "The Dutch papers are filled with lists of subscriptions by the late flood."[51] As one reporter put it, "liberal subscriptions are flowing in from all quarters for the relief of the distressed."[52]

1861: "Bonds of gratitude"

When another severe flood occurred in the Netherlands in 1861, the news traveled quickly via the national and international news media. This time it was mainly the province of Gelderland that was affected, where on 5 January of that year a dike had breached, causing twenty-three houses to be swept away. More breaches occurred at the end of January, the most tragic of which took place in the village of Leeuwen: thirty-seven inhabitants drowned. King William III and his brother, Prince Henry, visited the stricken area.[53]

Once again, a great many gifts came in from abroad, according to the commemoration book compiled by the clergyman J.C.W. Quack.[54] At the time of the disaster he lived in Brakel, so he was an eyewitness to the flood. A total of more than ƒ300,000 (€3,072,874) was donated, or to be precise: ƒ304,439.69 (€3,118,349). The Belgians donated the most, followed by the Cape of Good Hope, France, England, Switzerland, the United States, Luxembourg, Russia, Hannover, Württemberg, Denmark, Baden, Austria, Hamburg, Rome, Italy and Turkey.

So the donations came from near and far, and here, too, people were motivated to donate on the basis of their specific relationship to the Netherlands. In the former colony of the Cape of Good Hope, the Dutch people living there organized several fundraising campaigns. Two booksellers from Cape Town, both originally from the Dutch town of Zaltbommel, launched a campaign that brought in ƒ1,248 (€12,783).[55] The consul general formed a committee of influential persons and invited church councils and civil commissioners throughout the land to support the action. That yielded another ƒ4,800 (€49,166). In Wellington, a city in the province of Western Cape, the Dutch correspondent for *Het Volksblad* read aloud a report of the disaster during a church service. The minister, who himself was not Dutch, set up a committee on the spot. This brought in another ƒ40 (€410), "and that in a small village where few Dutchmen

live," according to the *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*.[56] And more was yet to come: benefit concerts and lotteries were planned, and a Dutch milliner named Koster announced that he was remodeling old hats and handing over the profits to the committee.[57]

Clearly, this was a matter by the Dutch for the Dutch; the sense of us-ness did not extend to the country's indigenous people. One correspondent commented scornfully that little could be expected from the "natives": "the brown inhabitants are not much concerned about this matter."[58] In a following piece, the same reporter wrote that the proceeds had already exceeded ƒ20,000 (€204,858), and that, relative to the number of inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope, this was a gigantic amount. The reason the Dutch gave so generously was "that the people here do not forget that the forefathers were mostly Dutch, and that charity is one of the fairest virtues."[59] That kinship ensured that, after Belgium, the Cape of Good Hope was the largest donor, with more than ƒ42,000 (€430,202) in total.[60]

The sense of community may have gone beyond the national borders, but it was restricted along colonial lines. Something similar happened that same year during the floods on Java. These took place several weeks after the disaster in the Bommelerwaard and the Land van Maas en Waal, with catastrophic consequences for the local population. The donations from the Dutch were sparse, however. Perhaps they were preoccupied by the disaster in their own country, but Multatuli struck a nerve in the aforementioned brochure *Show Me the Place Where I Have Sown!*: the sense of us-ness was actually based on forms of hypocrisy and exclusion.[61]

A new element then began appearing in the press coverage: more prominence was being given to pictorial material, thanks to the emergence of the illustrated press. For example, the French weekly *L'Illustration* published two images of the disaster area made by the Dutch artist M.W. Hekking.[62] There, we see women and children desperately holding their arms in the air in

M.W. Hekking, "Une scène d'inondation à Nieuwaal en Hollande" (in: *L'Illustration*, 2 March 1861, 141)

the hope of being rescued from their precarious situation. In the meantime, the men are doing their very best to provide assistance in rowboats. This gender distinction was a common motif: the helpless women and children were meant to influence the mind of the public.[63] Visualizations of suffering went hand in hand with an appeal to sympathize with the brave Dutch people, who fought against the natural elements as energetically as ever: "Ce courageux peuple hollandais est bien digne de la sympathie des autres nations. Toujours en lutte avec la mer, il soutient avec une énergie que rien n'abat ce rude duel avec sa terrible ennemie."[64]

The bilingual Belgian journal *Le Progrès: Journal de l'éducation*

populaire also played on the emotions of its readers by emphasizing the suffering of helpless mothers. On 21 April 1861 it published a poem in both French and Dutch titled "For the Poor Mother, Fleeing From the Flood in Holland." The work contained an explicit call to donate: "Have mercy on the wretched fate / The needy woman tasted! / Give help and donate, for with God / Such alms are never wasted."[65] This was accompanied by a summary of the results of a few fundraising campaigns held at schools. The pupils, encouraged by the example of their parents, had "pooled all the pennies they had saved in order to ease the suffering of the unfortunate."[66]

English newspapers and weeklies devoted considerable attention to the disaster as well, in words and illustrations. *The Westmorland Gazette* also focused on the struggle of the Dutch against water: "The great enemy of Holland – water – has again put forth its strength, and broken down the dams which protected households and farms from its devastations [...]. The wretched inhabitants of the inundated districts, driven from their homes naked and foodless in this inclement season are in a state of destitution."[67] *The Illustrated London News* published a graphic by the Dutch artist and lithographer C.C.A. Last, which depicted the flooding of the Bommelerwaard, where dramatic and hectic scenes had taken place. Families were rescued from roofs, cows and horses tried to climb onto dry land, and evacuees fled the area by coach. In the far right-hand corner there's a familiar motif: an abandoned baby floating around in a cradle.[68] The print was also sold by Dutch booksellers for the benefit of the needy, indicating that it was widely circulated.[69]

On the initiative of the consul-general of the Netherlands, J.W. May, and the pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in London, H. Gehle, a special charity commission was formed.[70] *The London Daily News* published the names of all eighteen of the commission's members.[71] Meanwhile, fundraising campaigns were launched throughout England to collect money for the victims. In Holmfirth, for example, a special collection was taken during

C.C.A Last, "The Inundations in Holland – the bursting of the dyke at Bommelerwaard, in January last" (in: *Illustrated London News*, 2 March 1861, 199)

a church service.[72] The commission managed to raise a total of ƒ18,211.50 (€186,539).[73]

The torrent of newspaper articles gives us insight into the motives that prompted British donors to contribute to the campaign. The primary emphasis was placed on the commercial connections between the two countries. In an open letter to *The Bradford Observer*, a certain E.B.O. praised the entrepreneurial spirit and industriousness of the Dutch, and called on readers to open their hearts to the victims: "Can we not in England give some help? Especially in Bradford, and neighboring towns, so closely connected in many business transactions with Holland? Are we not bound by every good motive to do something to alleviate the misery?"[74]

The second level of emphasis was on the historic tie between the two countries. On 7 February 1861, *The London Daily News* published a piece by Simon Belinfante, who was born in Amsterdam and pursued a medical career on the medical faculty of University College London. Belinfante referred to the time when

stadtholder William III "liberated" the English from the Catholics: "England, the most liberal and charitable country of Europe, allied to the Dutch in race, religion and institutions, will, it is hoped, lend a charitable ear to the appeal of its unfortunates, whom it once so nobly assisted in its independence; and bonds of gratitude will unite more strongly two liberal and civilized nations."[75] *The Norfolk News* emphasized the strong affinity and old ties of friendship between the two countries: "England, more naturally allied to the Dutch than France or Germany, will not be less charitable than these countries. England will not forget previous ties of friendship and alliance."[76] There's almost something of a competitive spirit lurking in this quote: France and Germany must never be allowed to donate more!

Thirdly, an appeal was made to general humanity and good citizenship. In the aforementioned letter in *The Bradford Observer*, E.B.O. urged everyone to help the victims on the basis of human compassion. He addressed "all persons interested in our relations with that country, in our trade with her people, or in that humanity that makes brothers of us all, but most brothers when in misfortune, that immediate steps be taken, by public meeting or otherwise, to open subscription lists for the relief of this distress."[77] His words reveal the existence of a sense of community that transcended national borders. People were brothers, and they experienced that most strongly when adversity struck. It was precisely in times of disaster that the two countries, so closely tied in economic and political terms, should reach out to each other.

1953: The whole world is helping

"The whole world is helping. No word is sufficient to express our thanks." So read the headline in the *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* of 11 February 1953. Ten days earlier, a severe northwesterly storm, in combination with a spring tide, had

led to one of the worst disasters in Dutch history. Large portions of Zeeland and South Holland were flooded, and 1,836 persons lost their lives. The United Kingdom and Belgium were also hard hit. An English ferry was wrecked in the storm, leaving 133 dead. A day after the disaster struck, help started arriving from every direction, and not only from inside the Netherlands. The whole world seemed to be offering assistance. It was accepted with gratitude: "With ever-increasing emotion, all our people are seizing the helping hands being offered from every corner of the world. Relief efforts are being organized in every western country."[78]

The help from abroad was impressive indeed. From all over Europe, trucks full of blankets, clothing and boots made their way to the Netherlands. Sweden and Norway sent piles of fur coats. Greece sent currants and lemons. Germany donated a fully-equipped ambulance. Airplanes from Rome and Milan brought blankets, rice, vegetables and countless items such as typewriters, shovels and even cars. But help also came from outside Europe. People from the Dutch embassy in Washington arrived with vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, toothpaste and cigarettes. Relief supplies collected throughout Australia were shipped for free by the Holland-Australia Line.[79]

As with earlier international relief actions, donors were often motivated by their special tie with the Netherlands. In Canada, for example, it was the Dutch immigrants who "moved mountains of work and goods for the old Homeland."[80] Dutch immigrants in Australia joined forces following an appeal in the *Dutch Australian Weekly*. One moving story was that of a merchant in Sydney, who had left the Netherlands for Australia four years earlier, poor and impoverished. He had made his fortune there and was now able to help his brother in Schouwen, who had lost a hundred cows in the disaster. He sent him a thousand pounds (ƒ8,500; €32,903).[81] In addition, a commemoration was held in Australia at which fifty thousand Dutch people who had settled there came together to remember their countrymen.[82]

Th. Lawaetz, collection campaign in Aabenraa, Denmark
(Museum Sønderjyllands Mediearkiv)

There were other forms of connection besides those based on personal kinship. The Italians had recently experienced a major flood. In the autumn of 1951, dikes along the Po River had given way in several places. Many lost their lives and more than 200,000 Italians became homeless.[83] In the Netherlands, a North Italy Flood Relief Committee was set up, and many actions were organized. The troupe of cabaret performers known as De Inktvis (The Octopus), whose lyrics were written by the famous Dutch writer Annie M.G. Schmidt, gave a benefit performance attended by the Italian consul and the mayor of Amsterdam. During the intermission a wooden Pinocchio was sold, bringing in no less than ƒ335 (€1,297).[84] Now that the Dutch were experiencing a similar catastrophe, the Italians were eager to show

their appreciation. The Italian government donated two hundred million lira (ƒ2,000,000; €7,741,788) to the Red Cross, and the mayor of Milan offered to take in a thousand Dutch children – the principle of reciprocity at its best.[85]

The many news reports expressed deep gratitude and much emotion for the solidarity shown by so many people around the world: "The Netherlands has made many friends in the world, whom the little nation on the North Sea will not forget in their hour of trial. Our people will never forget this," said one of the reporters.[86] Queen Juliana gave a radio address that could also be heard on Swiss and Italian stations. She emphasized how grateful the Dutch people were for all the help they had received. It was precisely in times of calamity that people showed their best side: "The deeper the crisis, which has demanded its sacrifices, the deeper the starting point planted in our hearts for a brotherhood of mankind, which has resonated far beyond the borders of our country."[87]

One of the countries that excelled in charitable actions was Denmark. Measured in terms of population density and economic potential, the Danes surpassed every other country, according to the *Algemeen Dagblad*.[88] In no time at all, countless relief campaigns were organized there to help the victims in the Netherlands. Two weeks after the disaster, the Danish had raised the impressive amount of ƒ5,500,000 (€21,289,916).[89] Some donors were motivated by personal motives. One thirty-year-old Danish businessman, co-director of a textile and shoemaking company, brought five hundred pairs of boots to the Netherlands because a few of his best friends lived there.[90] But there was more to the relationship than that. All of Denmark seemed to pitch in, and that had everything to do with the "deep sense of connection between the Dutch and the Danish people."[91] As the newspapers wrote, the Danish and the Dutch had much in common in terms of nature and character.[92] The Danes felt they were being called en masse to help the Dutch, who had been forced to deal with yet another major catastrophe so soon after the Second World War.

Collection campaign in Varde, Denmark, with music
(Varde Lokalhistoriske Arkiv)

The great success of the relief action had to do with its coordination. The Red Cross opened centers throughout the country where Danes could drop off goods. There were two hundred such points in Copenhagen alone. A national publicity campaign, "*Hollands-Hjælpen*," was also launched. Promotional posters were issued to encourage the Danes to transfer money to the giro 154 emergency account. One of the posters featured a wave in the shape of a hand about to engulf a Dutch windmill. Another showed a flooded area with broken utility poles. Special postage stamps were also issued with a ten *øre* (cent) surcharge to benefit the victims. And a Danish soccer team traveled to the Netherlands to play a benefit match against the Dutch – even in the middle of winter.[93]

Poster for the *Hollands-Hjælpen* campaign

Poster: *Hjælp Holland nu*

Special postage stamps with a surcharge for flood relief, Denmark (public domain)

Two relief campaigns stand out in particular. The first took place in the coastal town of Esbjerg, where a large-scale charity drive was initiated by several residents and with the cooperation of the Dutch vice-consul. The residents fully lived up to the town's motto: "*Rask må det gå*" (no time to waste). Sound trucks drove through the town encouraging the population to donate

goods – and with success. The fire department, which picked up the items, could barely handle the vast quantity of contributions. The Union of Female Volunteers then sorted the articles of clothing and packed them up. Other trucks drove around to pick up more items from the residents' homes, which led to touching scenes. People spontaneously parted with overcoats and money, even when they couldn't spare them themselves. In one case, a woolen blanket was placed on the truck with the following note: "This blanket was given to me in a concentration camp by a compassionate Dutchman. Now the blanket is returning to its homeland to warm a Dutchman in need, as the blanket once warmed me."[94] A moving and emotional example of how the principle of reciprocity could be expressed in times of calamity.

A second relief campaign that was greatly applauded in the Dutch press was the deployment of a complete transport column for the Red Cross. Soldiers of the Danish Civilian Protection Corps (*Civil Forsvar*) rode to the disaster area in a convoy of trucks filled with forty tons of relief supplies. My grandfather, convoy supervisor Kai Eilskov Jensen, waved goodbye to his men. On 8 February they arrived in the Netherlands and then stayed on, partly to assist in the transport of goods between Schiphol Airport and Rotterdam.[95] In the Dutch socialist newspaper *Het Vrije Volk*, one of the commanding officers, the twenty-nine-year-old Albert Hansen of Haderslev, gave an interview. "We're happy to do this," he said, "because we love Holland and we have respect for the Dutch."[96] But he went one step further: "Something good always comes of every disaster. Perhaps those fourteen hundred Dutch people did not die in vain, but they paid with their lives for a speedier unification of Europe. In any case, the realization that we belong to each other has become stronger because of it."[97] In this way, the Danish officer said, the disaster contributed to a European sense of community.

More than three months after the disaster, the Dutch royal couple paid a state visit to their Danish counterparts. In almost all the news media, both Dutch and Danish, the flood played an

Cover of the Danish *Billed Bladet*, 17 February 1953

important role. As they made their way through Copenhagen, Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard were cheered on by an admiring Danish public. The reporter for the *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* traced the explanation for their popularity to their attitude during the disaster: "The Danes do not attach much importance to outward show. What they value is human compassion.[98] During the state banquet, the heads of state referred to the recent floods. King Frederick IX praised the way the Dutch tackled the process of reconstruction, and Queen Juliana recalled with gratitude how the Danish had come to the aid of the Dutch during both the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945 and during the flood. She spoke of a "practical friendship," and of the real hope that both countries "will be seen working shoulder to shoulder in establishing a safe and united world."[99] The two countries needed each other, she affirmed during a visit to the Copenhagen City

Hall in an improvised speech: "We are glad to have your friendship, and our relationship is based on the fact that the need for this friendship is mutual," Queen Juliana said.[100]

World citizens

Reciprocity turned out to be a key concept when it came to foreign assistance: it reaffirmed the special ties of friendship and strengthened diplomatic relations between the different countries. This international culture of giving also revealed that there was something more than the formation of national identity alone: for some it indicated the existence of a sense of European community or even world citizenship. As a columnist in the *Overijssels Dagblad* put it: "When so much help was sent from all the countries of Europe for the victims of the flood of 1 February, we really felt that we were Europeans, didn't we? In fact, the truth is this: help was sent from all the countries of the world. So actually we're all world citizens!"[101]

7
Flood Songs

On 14 February 1953 a poem appeared on the front page of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, written by a thirteen-year-old girl, Renée. Its power lies in its simplicity: it speaks of love for water as well as fear of it. She hopes the sea will never strike like that again:

The Disaster

Don't do it again
dear sea
we will never understand
our dunes and our dikes
so big and so strong
and you even stronger

You snuck up on us
while we were asleep
you have destroyed our coast

Don't do it again
you're flowing through streets
where you don't belong
the tops of the trees
and the roof of our house
and everything that's ours
is yours

don't do it again
never again


ALGEMEEN HANDELSBLAD VAN ZATERDAG

VOOR JONG EN OUD

DE RAMP

DOE NU NIET MEER
LIEVE ZEE
WIJ BEGRIJPEN HET NOOIT
ONZE DUINEN EN DIJKEN
ZO GROOT EN ZO STERK
EN JIJ NOG STERKER

JE BENT VERRADERLIJK OPGEVLOGEN
TERWIJL WIJ SLIEPEN
HEB JE ONZE KUST VERNIELD

DOE NU NIET MEER
JE STROOMT NU DOOR STRATEN
DAAR HOOR JE NIET THUIS
DE KRUINEN VAN BOMEN
EN HET DAK VAN ONS HUIS
EN ALLES VAN ONS
IS VAN JOU

DOE NU NIET MEER
NOOIT MEER

RENEE
13 JAAR

Poem by the thirteen-year-old Renée in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 February 1953

Whether the accompanying drawing was also by her is unknown. The poem makes clear that literature was a means of processing the events and expressing feelings of fear and powerlessness. This girl voiced the hope that the sea would never again commit an act of such cruelty. She did not speak of a punitive God; instead, she referred to the "dear sea" that had betrayed them in the dead of night.[1]

In Arnhem, almost two hundred kilometers from the site of the disaster, the composer and piano instructor Jeanne Beyerman-Walraven (1878-1969) was deeply moved by the poem.[2] She turned it into a musical work for voice and piano that was meant to be performed with great feeling: "con molto sentimento e con tristezza." It was published in 1955 with two other songs and is still available.[3] The Utrecht musical ensemble Camerata Trajectina released it on the CD *Treur Nederland! Rampliederen door de*

tijden heen (Weep, Holland! Disaster Songs Through the Ages). So the poem and the musical composition live on, seventy years after the flood.[4]

Flood songs are part of a rich culture of remembrance born of flood disasters. Music was an important means of dealing with such events: the songs are full of emotional exclamations, words of comfort and instructive messages. Literary and musical trends helped determine how the event was described. The songs often teemed with stylistic devices that were meant to heighten certain emotions or to pump up the edifying message, so that what they offered was a distorted view of reality. At the same time they teach us a great deal about how people processed the disasters they had lived through: collective singing served as a coping mechanism as well as a way of sharing grief.[5]

Songs differ from other cultural media because they involve a musical component: making music and singing is a physical activity involving both the voice and the body. It is also an activity that often takes place in groups. A singer in an outdoor market is performing for bystanders, people sing together in church or benefit concerts are held to raise money for the victims. Generally speaking, historic flood songs serve four functions: spreading the news, conveying a moral message, creating a sense of community, and they also had an aesthetic function.

Spreading the news

The oldest printed flood song dates to 1624 and concerns the breach of the Lek at Vianen on 1 January 1624. The author, Leenaert Clock, was minister of the Mennonite Church in Haarlem, and in 1604 he published *The Great Song Book*, an enlarged edition of which was issued in 1625. One of the added songs has to do with the flood at Vianen. In the first couplets Clock gives the date and extent of the disaster:

The date was sixteen hundred
In the four-and-twentieth year
God's judgment came and thundered
In a terrible flood severe
[...]
In the first month of that year
As reckoned by the Old Style
Came a clamor all could hear
From a breach both great and vile,
It struck six fathoms down,
And twenty rods wide,
All climbed to higher ground,
Oh, the screams that people cried.[6]

Clock provided many details of how the people had tried to close the gaps and raise the embankments, but all in vain: "They dammed the water flowing / Through ramparts narrow and wide / The building work kept going / Along the Gou's quayside."[7] He also wrote about the fleeing populace, who sought refuge in neighboring towns or churches. In this way the public were kept abreast of the catastrophe that had taken place along the River Lek.

As this song clearly shows, flood songs served a news function. They contained a great many factual details about the day and time of the disaster, the geographic setting and the course of events. They were sung by buskers in outdoor markets, town squares and other public places so the news could spread quickly. In this way people of all ranks and stations, including the illiterate, heard about what was going on. Take for example the musical account of the flood of 26 January 1682, in which large parts of South Holland and Zeeland were inundated. The author, Tannetge Kornelis Blok of Middelharnis, furnished her public with a variety of concrete facts:

On the six and twentieth day
Of January eighty-two
People looked with such dismay
At what God's great power can do
When with his crushing hand
He punished our Flaquese Land [...]
Many dikes in our Land were broken,
So the crops that were growing there,
Fine wheat and other grain,
Under water now remain,
And by the tempest tossed
Eighteen polders have been drowned,
And many houses lost
They're nowhere to be found;
And, Oh sorrow! So many have died
In the waves of this terrible tide.[8]

Not only did Blok report the date of the disaster, but she also noted the exact number of polders that were flooded in this region, the "Flaquese Land": a total of eighteen. The author then went on to describe the ruinous consequences of the disaster: countless fields under cultivation had been inundated.

Even more detailed is the musical narrative by the clergyman-poet Olivier Porjeere (1736-1818), who wrote a lengthy song about the Delfshaven flood of 14 November 1775. The song was titled "Tearful and Heart's Comfort" and contained an extensive report of the terrible disaster that had struck vast areas of the republic.[9] At the time of the flood, Porjeere was serving as a clergyman in Delfshaven and experienced all the events firsthand. So he seems to correspond with the character of Tearful, who is making a detailed report of the "Tear-wrenching News."[10] First Tearful writes about how Delfshaven was struck by a westerly storm, how houses became flooded and how great damage ensued. He then turns his attention to the rest of the country, and it's as if he were reading aloud from a newspaper article:

Christiaan Meijer, *A man and a woman singing in the street and selling their songs*, c. 1800 (Atlas van Stolk collection)

The dreadful tidings flow through the spacious news canal.
The mighty Amsteldam reports of dark affliction.
The courtly Hague disturbs us: – words of grim depiction
Tell of thriving Rotterdam, where the damage has been done.
The newspaper's arrival has left me badly stunned.[11]

In a state of shock, Tearful continues his account. No town was left unscathed according to his summary, which begins in North Holland:

The neat and tidy Zaandam bemoans its dismal fate.
The dike-rich Heusden shudders behind its sturdy gate.
The country's lamentation speaks of Heaven's fierce demand.
The cry for help comes flying from all of Kennemerland.
The Egmond fisherfolk with coastal Petten shed a tear,
And the dire reports from Beverwijk are painful to the ear.[12]

Then he shifts his gaze to the other provinces, again listing all the stricken cities and villages.

We encounter something similar in a song about the Gelderland flood of 1799, which painstakingly describes how the entire region was affected, including the number of dead. The following stanza is illustrative:

With the dike at Langen
The selfsame fate occurred,
And after the word got round,
And the sad report was heard,
Seven people died,
In the howling flood they drowned,
The Varik church was pushed
By the turbulence all around
And the water swept it away [...][13]

Seven people lost their lives near the dike at Langen, according to these lyrics. Other towns and regions that are named are Nijmegen, the Betuwe, Rhenoy, Beesd and Culemborg.

Some songs were based on newspaper reports, as we learn from a song about the flood that struck large parts of Gelderland and Brabant in 1820. The author immediately reveals his news source:

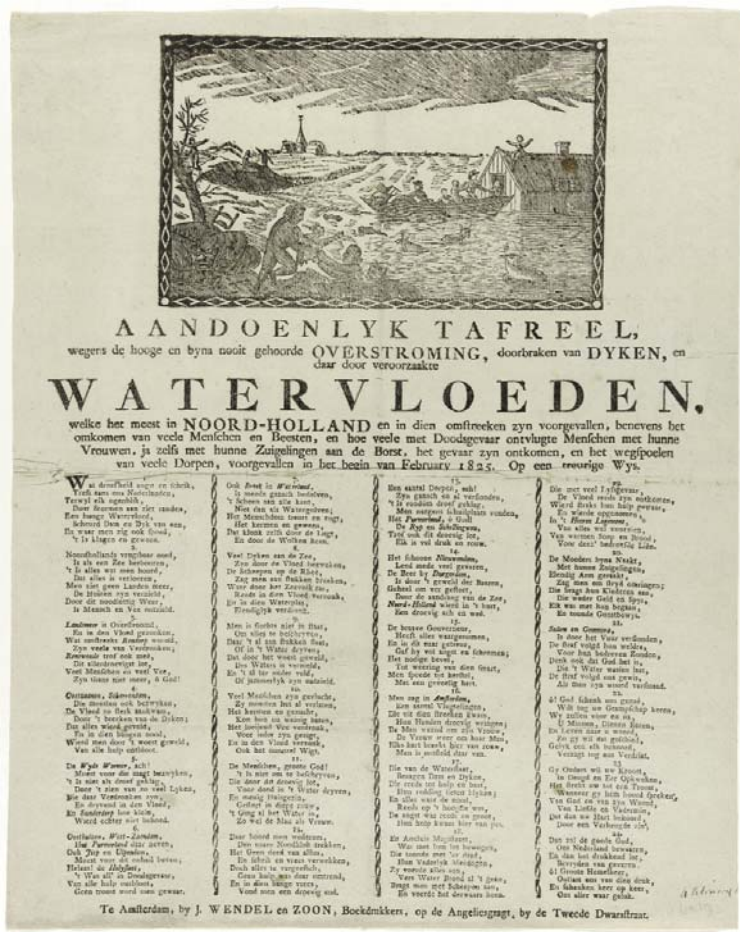
> Oh, disastrous moment! What is this now we hear?
> The news we're reading daily, such sorrow, shock and fear!
> Just as the paper tells us, that all of Gelderland
> Looks more like sea than province, no matter where we stand.[14]

One last example of actual news items conveyed in the form of a song is from 1825: *Touching Scene, Due to the high and almost unprecedented Deluge, breaching of the Dikes, and resulting Floods, Most of which occurred in North Holland, Overijssel, Gelderland* [...] The song then goes through a series of villages one by one, from Landsmeer (which was completely swept away) and Broek in Waterland to De Rijp and Schellingwoude. The anonymous author also deals with the role played by the city of Amsterdam, which offered refuge to evacuees:

> There were in Amsterdam
> A number of displaced,
> Who from those regions came
> That had been laid to waste,
> The husband mourned his wife,
> The wife wept for her man,
> Such grief for loss of life
> The heart can barely scan.[15]

The evacuees were given hot soup and bread in an inn called 't Heeren Logement. This was not the only song that described the

disaster of 1825 in such detail. We know of another musical report of the flood, but told from the perspective of the villages and cities in the province of Overijssel. That song tells of how cities like Kampen, Zwolle and Steenwijk were affected. In Steenwijk, according to this song, twenty people found themselves drifting on the roof of a house. Ten of them drowned before help arrived while the other ten were saved. In a dramatic low point, a



AANDOENLYK TAFREEL,
wegens de hooge en byna nooit gehoorde OVERSTROMING, doorbraken van DYKEN, en daar door veroorzaakte
WATERVLOEDEN,
welke het meest in NOORD-HOLLAND en in dien omstreeken zyn voorgevallen, benevens het omkomen van veele Menschen en Beesten, en hoe veele met Doodsgevaar ontvlugte Menschen met hunne Vrouwen, ja zelfs met hunne Zuigelingen aan de Borst, het gevaar zyn ontkomen, en het wegspoelen van veele Dorpen, voorgevallen in het begin van February 1825. Op een treurige Wys.

Te Amsterdam, by J. WENDEL en ZOON, Boekdrukkers, op de Angeliersgragt, by de Tweede Dwarsstraat.

A song about the flood of 1825 (Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

mother of three was among the rescued, while only the youngest of her children survived.[16]

In this way, flood songs served the same function as newspapers and pamphlets: they spread the word, although in an entirely different form. The facts were often subordinated to the message, and that brings me to the second function: communicating a religious lesson.

A more pious life

Flood songs were chock-full of moral lessons. In almost every case these consisted of a pious message: that people would have to live more devout lives so that God would not punish them for their sins once again. Although the tone of the songs differed in terms of their orthodoxy, they all conveyed the idea that God had a purpose for sending the disaster and that people had to improve their lives.

This edifying message was repeated over and over again, down through the centuries. In what is thought to be the oldest flood song, the one written by Clock about the breach of the Lek at Vianen in 1624, the religious lesson is central. He spoke of how God's judgment had "thundered" with the coming of a flood: "By this means God made clear / That he was sore dismayed / Since all men far and near / In sinfulness were weighed."[17] In short: God sent this flood to punish people for their sins. Clock compared the dreadful scenes from the flood to the biblical Sodom and the Deluge. In contrast, he gave the positive example of the city of Nineveh, which God was going to destroy, but after hearing the preaching of Jonah the city repented and was thereby spared (Jonah 3:1-10).

For the seventeenth-century minister Aemilius van Cuilemborgh, who served in Heusden, the central message was also a pious one. In his *Pious Songs and Rhymes* (1683) he included a song about the flood of 26 January 1682, when twenty-two peo-

ple on the island of Goerree-Overflakkee lost their lives and many polders in Zeeland were inundated.[18] There was no doubt that the flood had to be seen as a punishment from God:

God let the seething water loose
From Heaven's now unbridled sluice,
Which like a wild and savage tide
Enveloped all, the hills as well,
Thus taunting them beneath its swell,
As the Deluge did the world bestride.[19]

He located the flood within a series of other scourges that had ravaged the land, such as war, plague, lightning, frost and infestations of insects and mice. The Netherlands groaned under these burdens: "Disaster upon Disaster, befalls the Dutch House!" The title said it all: "The Bowls of God's Wrath poured out in abundance, to ponder in light of the flood of the year 1682." Van Cuilemborgh was referring to the Book of Revelation in the Bible, which speaks of the outpouring of the "seven bowls of God's wrath," after which seven angels each send a punishment to earth. In doing so he placed the song within the context of punishment and sin, as the last lines powerfully show: "So strike! But like a father deign, / Physician, open up a vein! / And free us from this impure blood."[20]

The aforementioned song from 1799 about the great Gelderland floods also speaks of "the striking hand" of God, who had justifiably punished the Dutch people:

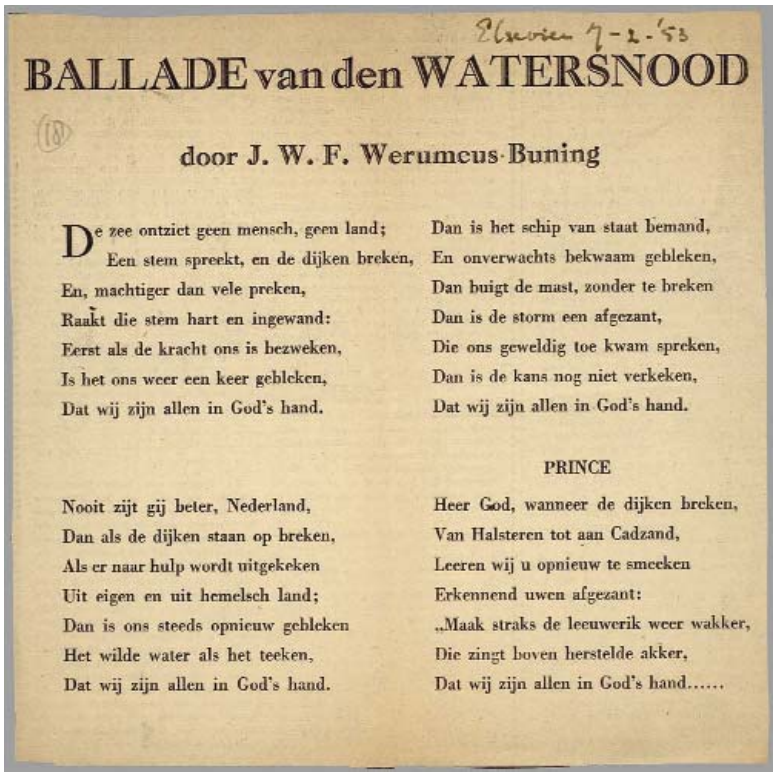
But oh! Our Father God!
The plagues we all have earned,
For all of Holland's land
Has from your goodness turned,
This is our sinners' debt
The one thing we must bear.[21]

We find the same idea in the *Penitential Songs* by Adrianus Mandt, minister of the church in Gorinchem. This series of songs about the floods of 1799 is Mandt's interpretation of the message that the disaster must be seen as God's punishment, and that people needed to improve their lives. The same lesson was already contained in the title: *Penitential Songs*.[22] The series is divided into three parts: in the first there is mourning ("The flood as a scene of grief"), then God's actions are deemed just ("God's justice in the flood is honored"), and finally there are thanks and prayer ("The grateful and prayerful Christian's response to deliverance from the flood"). Over and over, Mandt stresses that people must pay the price for their sins: "And you, my guilty Fatherland! / Those well-deserved afflictions were meant to warn you now, / They bear the mark of wrath to come upon their threatening brow."[23]

The predominance of the biblical context in the songs can also be seen in *Evangelical Singing* (1806), a collection used during services in the Dutch Reformed Church, where two hymns are especially meant for flood disasters: number 174, "In time of flood," and number 175, "After storm and flood." Both hymns will have been heard often in the churches, and they are still being sung today. The examples mentioned here show that a strikingly large number of flood songs were written by Protestant ministers.

This pious message resounded well into the twentieth century. After the flood of 1953, author and poet J.W.F. Werumeus Buning drew a religious lesson from the events. In his "Ballad of the Flood," which was published in the magazine *Elsevier* on 7 February of that year, each stanza ends with the message that man's fate lies in God's hands:

The sea spares neither man nor shore;
A voice speaks, and the dikes cave in,
And, stronger than a preacher's din,
Is the voice that strikes us to the core:



Elsevier 7-2-'53

BALLADE van den WATERSNOOD

(18)

door J. W. F. Werumeus Buning

De zee ontziet geen mensch, geen land;
Een stem spreekt, en de dijken breken,
En, machtiger dan vele preken,
Raakt die stem hart en ingewand:
Eerst als de kracht ons is bezweken,
Is het ons weer een keer gebleken,
Dat wij zijn allen in God's hand.

Nooit zijt gij beter, Nederland,
Dan als de dijken staan op breken,
Als er naar hulp wordt uitgekeken
Uit eigen en uit hemelsch land;
Dan is ons steeds opnieuw gebleken
Het wilde water als het teeken,
Dat wij zijn allen in God's hand.

Dan is het schip van staat bemand,
En onverwachts bekwaam gebleken,
Dan buigt de mast, zonder te breken
Dan is de storm een afgezant,
Die ons geweldig toe kwam spreken,
Dan is de kans nog niet verkeken,
Dat wij zijn allen in God's hand.

PRINCE

Heer God, wanneer de dijken breken,
Van Halsteren tot aan Cadzand,
Leeren wij u opnieuw te smeeken
Erkennend uwen afgezant:
„Maak straks de leeuwerik weer wakker,
Die zingt boven herstelde akker,
Dat wij zijn allen in God's hand.....

J.W.F. Werumeus Buning, "Ballad of the Flood," 1953

Just as the strength has died within
Do we come to learn yet once again
That we're in God's hands forevermore.[24]

A German translation of this work was also produced by the then renowned poet Rudolf Schröder, an event that was given extensive coverage in the newspaper *De Telegraaf*.[25]

Solidarity

A third function of the flood songs was the collective processing of grief and the creation of a sense of solidarity. The songs paid particular attention to the suffering of the bereaved: human pain was the main focus. The authors elaborated on distressing cases, such as a widow hugging two dead children in her arms, an infant swallowed up by the waves, or people who had sought refuge on rooftops, but to no avail. In Mandt, for example, we read this:

> The bridegroom seeks his pretty bride,
> The bride her mate, from her pale bosom taken;
> But oh! the raging waves were deaf to those whose hope was shaken.
> Even the infant vainly waits for mercy in the tide;
> The rocking cradle's gone, swept away
> On the waves of the cruel flood, the babe swallowed by the spray.[26]

Once again we see here the image of the baby in the cradle, which strongly appealed to the imagination.

The arousing of emotions made it possible to grieve collectively and to process the traumatic events as a group.[27] The practice of group singing – in the churches and beyond – reinforced the sense of mutual solidarity and offered a form of comfort. It made the public more receptive to the religious lesson: the more intense the grief, the greater the necessity not to lose one's faith in God.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, this solidarity took on an extra dimension: the public were called on to donate money and goods to the victims. Along with the many occasional writings there were also musical compositions. The Rotterdam clergyman Jan Willem Bussingh (1761-1828) dedicated the entire service of 15 March 1799, Easter Monday, to the victims of the

flood that had struck large parts of Gelderland earlier that year. He had written a sermon and a few hymns especially for this event. The hymns were performed by the ensemble *Door IJver Nuttig* – Useful Through Zeal. The goal was to raise as much money for the victims as possible, and music played an essential role in this effort: "The choir is looking forward to kindling your hearts with compassion by means of its stirring tones."[28] Singing had the power to heighten the emotional charge or to intensify the pious message:

> Oh, what dismal sounds I hear! –
> Come, you Good Samaritan!
> Benefactors far and near
> Where solace lives, and love of man.
> Hallelujah! Hallelujah! – Hallelujah! –
> Yes! The Good Samaritan![29]

About two weeks later another collection was taken in Rotterdam. This time it was orphans who performed the song, which was written by Pieter Wittigs (1772-1823). Wittigs was a wallpaper hanger as well as a poet who himself was raised in an orphanage and who wrote songs to benefit his countrymen. No copy of the song has thus far been found.[30]

Johannes Immerzeel, Jr., a bookseller and writer from The Hague, wrote a piece called "Holland's Flood of the Year 1809," which he delivered in the Lutheran Church at a meeting of the Hague department of the Society for Public Welfare. It was a well-attended gathering that included several dignitaries, with an orchestra under the direction of J.L. Kesteloot. Immerzeel's poem was preceded by a text sung by the choir in which the emphasis was on the flood's horrors: "Terrors and fears! / Ice floes and biers / Cracks dragged hundreds to their death."[31] The proceeds from the entrance tickets and the collection went to the victims of the flood.

The extent to which music and charity were linked is evident

from the lists of donors that have been preserved from the various disasters. Money for the victims was raised by means of concerts and performances. In 1825, for example, numerous musical activities took place. A concert in Diligentia, a performing arts theater in The Hague, brought in at least ƒ1,317.60 (€15,239); in Dordrecht, two concerts were organized by the local militias, which together raised more than ƒ1,675 (€19,373). From Gorinchem to Hellevoetsluis, and from Delfzijl to Bergen op Zoom: everywhere benefit concerts were being held.[32]

In the Old Lutheran Church in Amsterdam, three corps of the metropolitan militia and the tenth division of the national infantry performed several musical works. One of them was a cantata from the hand of lawyer and writer Jan van 's Gravenweert, set to music by R. Benucci. Van 's Gravenweert began by focusing on the suffering and terror of the people in danger, then turned his full attention to God's omnipotence, a source of comfort and hope in the most perilous of times: "Behold the power of Almighty God! / He sees where Adam's sons have trod / And pities them in their dire grief, / Turning their suffering to relief."[33] The text also appeared in print and cost twenty-five cents; these proceeds also went to the victims. Similar benefit concerts were organized in response to the floods of 1855 and 1861. Aurora and the Utrecht Men's Choral Society gave a special performance for the needy in 1861, raising ƒ1,152.72 (€11,807).[34]

The cult of charity reached its high point with the floods of 1855 and 1861. Then, too, songs were used to raise money for the victims. The texts always followed the same pattern: first the misery of the victims was described in detail, followed by an appeal to the listeners to donate money. An example is this musical entreaty that was made after the 1861 floods struck the river region:

The water's strength is ruthless,
It wrecks and crushes on its way,
No house or hut survives the day,

EEN NIEUW LIED,

OP DE

WATERSNOOD

van het jaar 1861

Menschen liefde is zeker goed.
Hetzij in voor- of tegenspoed,

Komt vrienden wilt aanhooren,
Hetgeen helaas thans is geschied
En niets dan treurigheid ons bied,
De overstrooming in ons land
Verneemt men thans van allen kant.

Ginds ziet men dijken breeken,
Het water overstroomt het land
De noodklok luid van elken kant,
En men is ijv'rig in de weer,
Zoo 't kan, dat men het water keer.

A flood song written about the flood of 1861 in order to raise money for the victims (Geheugen van Nederland)

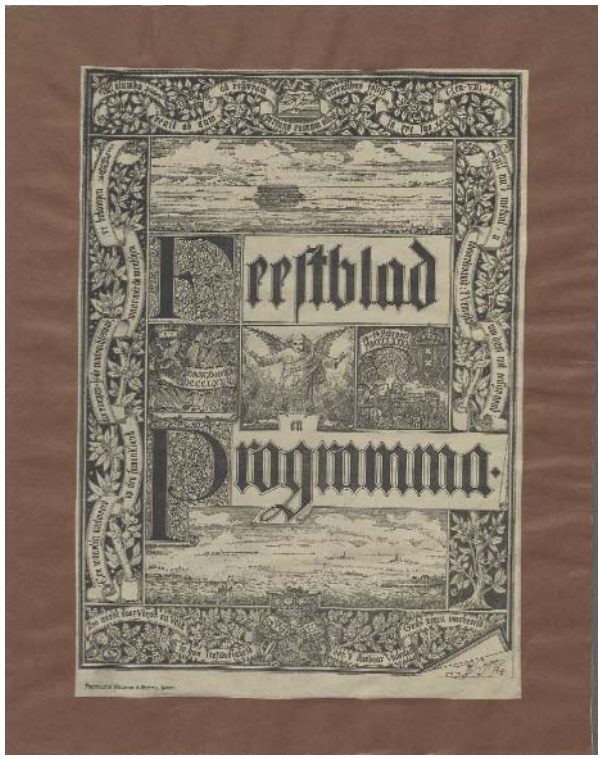
All household goods are swept along,
Too weak to fight a power so strong.

Many have already perished,
Others are frozen and chilled,
Their prayers the heavens have filled,
So plunged are they in woe and grief,
From which there's little hope of relief.

Come countrymen and women,
Contribute now with generous heart
Whate'er your station, do your part
To ease their great distress
For your mutual happiness.[35]

Perhaps the most amazing combination of flood and music took place at the aforementioned Flood Festival that was held on 18 February 1881 at the Palace of Industry. A special program booklet was published, twenty-eight pages long and costing 50 cents. The handsome title page was designed by the famous architect Pierre Cuypers and featured Noah's ark with a dove flying over it and the collapse of the dike at Nieuwkuijk. This festive publication also contained contributions by well-known poets such as Nicolaas Beets, J.J.L. ten Kate and J.P. Hasebroek. One of the most unusual contributions was the "Flood Disaster Wilhelmus" ("Wilhelmus" being the name of the Dutch national anthem), in which William III, the "Flood King," was eulogized. I quote the first and last stanzas:

Wilhelmus of Nassau, scion
Of Dutch descent and line,
I pledge my faith undying
To this Waterland of mine.
A prince with full devotion
Of Orange here I stand,



The program brochure for the Flood Festival held on 18 February 1881 in the Palace of Industry (Leiden University Library)

The "Flood Disaster Wilhelmus," with the portrait of King William III (Leiden University Library)

For pools as big as oceans
I've annexed to my land.

[...]

Wilhelmus is emerging
As prince of land and sea,
Where Triton once was surging
He claims his mastery;
His people proudly leading,
Fears neither storm nor wave,
The floods their power ceding
To the water lion brave.[36]

In this "Flood Disaster Wilhelmus," charity and national solidarity converge in a unique way. Praise of the king assumed such proportions that he almost seemed to have taken the place of God. As the anonymous author makes clear, however, the power of the king unfortunately did not extend that far: he would have been more than happy to reverse the storm that had caused so much misery, but the Lord willed it otherwise: "Whom men should always praise, And hath not coveted it."

National solidarity was also given priority in the song sung by cabaret artist Jules de Corte for the "Purses open, dikes shut" campaign in 1953. He updated the text every week, and in the final program he was able to report that more than five million guilders had been deposited in the disaster relief fund. In the refrain he emphasized that the entire country was sharing in Zeeland's grief: "The concern of every region, from Dokkum to Maastricht, from here to Hindeloopen, purses open, dikes shut."[37]

Aesthetic aspects

A fourth and last aspect of flood songs is the aesthetic function. In translating a disaster into a visual or textual rendering, beauty plays an important role.[38] We see evidence of this in the long and rich tradition of prints and paintings having to do with natural disasters. The phenomenon of "recreational fear" or *Angstlust*, deriving pleasure from frightening things, may be a factor here: a beautifully executed painting or literary work can make the public shudder and give them pleasure at the same time. As a result, the moral message can more powerfully affect their emotions.[39]

We also find forms of aestheticization in flood songs. Authors make use of all kinds of literary devices such as metaphors, alliteration, parallelism (sentences that follow the same pattern) and forms of address. A good example of this is the aforementioned duet "Tearful and Heart's Comfort" by the clergyman Olivier Porjeere. Tearful reports at length on the flood of 1775, but his style is more literary than what you would expect in a newspaper. For example, he speaks of "the diligence-fostering Harderwijk," "the IJssel-greeting Kampen" and "the water-creating Thoolen." Sometimes an adjective like this really stands out, as when Tearful speaks of "the densely-built Blokzijl" and "the low-lying Blankenham."[40] Such places were particularly vulnerable in the event of floods due to the densely packed population or the low-lying terrain.

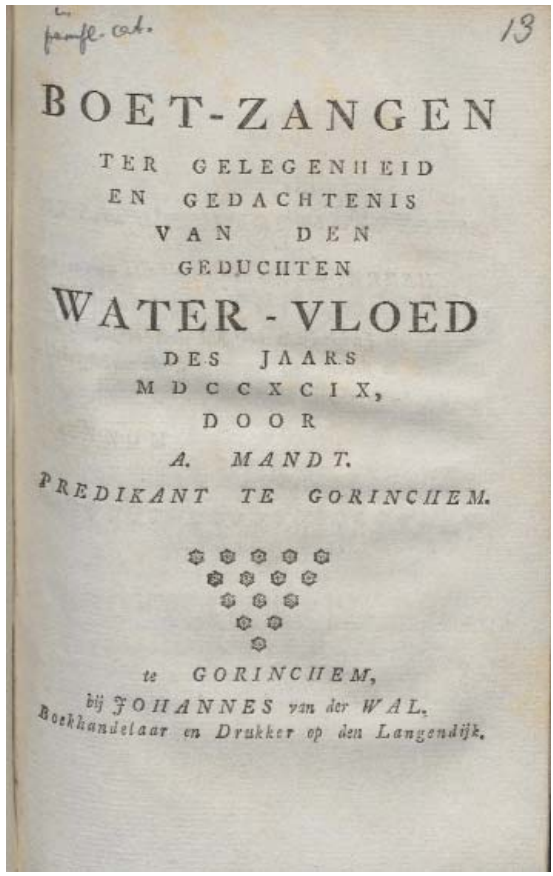
This literary quality was expressed in other ways as well. Porjeere's song is written in the form of a duet between two rustic figures, Tearful and Heart's Comfort. In choosing this form, Porjeere was harking back to the tradition of pastoral poetry, which was based on the *Bucolics* (herdsman's songs) of Virgil. In Porjeere's time, the literary world was teeming with writers of pastoral duets, such as Hubert Korneliszoon Poot, Jan Baptista Wellekens, Petronella Johanna de Timmerman and Adriaan Spinneker. They peppered their poems with rustic-sounding

names like Melkman, Elsrijk and Reinhart. Porjeere's duet was a perfect reflection of this trend. He was also inspired by the fashion of writing sensitive poetry. Tearful mainly feels the urge to compose his work by moonlight:

> The white moon showed his face – the heavens, stilled by God,
> Were painted azure blue, with cheeks both clear and bright:
> The face inflamed my lust for singing in the night:
> So I seized my harp of thanks in the momentary laughter.[41]

A rather unlikely course of action for someone who has just lived through a disastrous flood! But we're dealing with a stylized, literary depiction of reality. Porjeere may have drawn inspiration from the sensitive writings of German poets such as Goethe, Klopstock and Wieland. The work of the English poet Edward Young was also influential. Young was the author of *The complaint: or, Night-thoughts on life, death, & immortality* (1742-1745), often abbreviated to *Night-thoughts*. He laid the basis for so-called "graveyard poetry," in which writers combined such themes as night, loneliness, melancholy, death, the graveyard and mortality. It's hardly coincidental that Porjeere would be especially drawn to the gravestones in his town, although they were in a rather unusual state: "The water had also caused many graves to collapse."[42] We come across similar nocturnal wanderings and lyrical cemetery outpourings in the work of Porjeere's Dutch contemporaries, poets like Rhijnvis Feith, Hiëronymus van Alphen and Elizabeth Maria Post.

Besides the literary stylization, the aesthetic quality of the flood songs was also expressed in their musical settings: the songs were meant to be sung to a particular melody, which was usually noted at the heading of the song ("to the tune of..."). These were often existing melodies, also called contrafacts.[43] Sometimes this adaptation enhanced the emotional charge or pious message of the piece. One good example is the song by Van Cuilemborgh discussed earlier, "The Bowls of God's Wrath." This



BOET-ZANGEN

TER GELEGENHEID
EN GEDACHTENIS
VAN DEN
GEDUCHTEN

WATER-VLOED

DES JAARS
MDCCXCIX,
DOOR

A. MANDT.

PREDIKANT TE GORINCHEM.

te GORINCHEM,
bij JOHANNES van der WAL,
Boekhandelaar en Drukker op den Langendijk.

Title page by Adrianus Mandt, *Penitential Songs*, written in response to the flood in Gelderland in 1799 (Utrecht University Library)

song was to be sung to the tune of "*O Kersnacht, schoner dan de dagen*" (O Christmas Night, More Beautiful Than Any Day), which was taken from the well-known "Choral Song of the Poor Clares" in the play *Gysbreght van Aemstel*. In that work, the Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel writes of the murder of the nuns of the Convent of Poor Clares, with a reference to Herod's slaying of the innocents. In choosing this melody, Van Cuilemborgh caused his song to resonate with an older tragedy, adding to the sadness of the events.

The Reverend Mandt also had a portion of his *Penitential Songs* set to Vondel's melody, along with a second performance option: "Bittere klagte van een ziel" (A Soul's Bitter Lament). This was a reference to a song by the clergyman Rutger Schutte, for which the composer L. Frischmuth had written a melody.[44] Schutte's song was a deeply religious work on remorse and awareness of one's sins, which only can have reinforced Mandt's pious message.

The future of the flood song

Some songs remained in the collective memory for a long time. The song by Tannetge Kornelis Blok on the flood of 16 January 1682, which inundated large parts of South Holland and Zeeland, was long in circulation. Evidence of this is the fact that an eleventh edition was published in 1742. More than a century later, in 1854, reprints were still appearing.[45] Another example is the well-known children's song "In the great city of Zaltbommel / a great flood held sway." It dates to around 1930 and is still sung among groups of scouts and primary school children. In this way, songs about floods were passed from generation to generation. They also reinforced the association between Dutch identity and the struggle against water.

When we look at our own time, we see both differences and similarities. Today, flood songs no longer serve the function of broadcasting the news – that task has been taken over by numerous media outlets. The other functions, however, do live on, such as the religious function (but only within the confines of church communities), and those of inspiring solidarity and encouraging donations. In 1995, for example, a large-scale evacuation was organized when substantial parts of the river region were threatened by inundation. During the evening-long television program that was broadcast in response, the singer Marco Borsato performed the song "Water Why?" and the show's presenters,

Linda de Mol and Hennie Huisman, called on viewers to donate to the victims. Borsato's song fits perfectly in the tradition of the flood songs described here: he appealed to people's emotion, called for solidarity and tearfully belted out sentences like these: "But now we see the dikes of old / Collapse and fall, they cannot hold, / with pounding waves no man can master / the water brings one more disaster."[46] The fact that the disaster never materialized didn't matter. The response of the Netherlands was prompt: ƒ33,000,000 (€23,700,592) was raised, and Prime Minister Kok promised to double that amount.[47]

The aesthetic function is also evident in today's songs. Cabaret artist Freek de Jonge released a CD with the band The Nits in 1995 that contained a Dutch version of the hit "In the Dutch Mountains." The Dutch title was "*Dankzij de dijken*" ("Thanks to the Dikes"), and it addressed the Dutch struggle against the water and fear of the rising tide: "Then one night / came the storm and the flood / it smashed that trust / nipped it in the bud."[48] An-

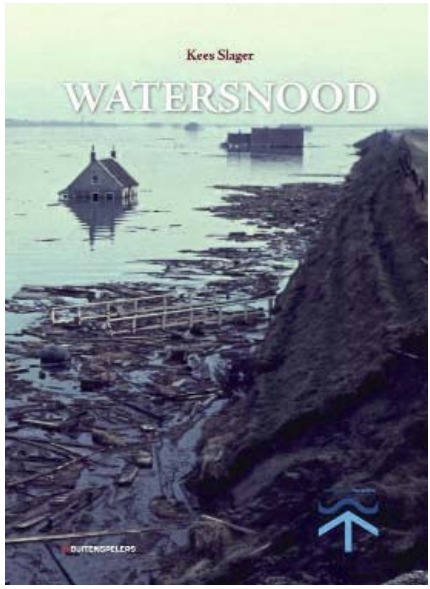
Poster for the musical *The Storm Rider*, 2018

other example is the commemoration of the 1717 Christmas Flood in 2017, when a great requiem was performed.[49] One of the most spectacular connections between floods and music was made in the autumn of 2018 in Leeuwarden when more than 100,000 visitors attended performances of the musical *The Storm Rider*, which dealt with the battle against water.[50] In short, the flood disaster song, so closely interwoven with the history of floods in the Netherlands, lives on today. When the most recent flood struck Limburg in July 2021, the foundation known as *Limburg Oet de drup* organized a benefit concert on the Cauberg hill. Well-known artists lent their support. The national radio station, NPO Radio 2, played 777 songs to draw attention to the victims in Limburg and to encourage people to donate to bank account number 777. The concert demonstrated that music and flood disasters are inextricably linked, and always will be.

8
The Material and Visual Culture of Remembrance

In 2010, the journalist Kees Slager published a monumental book on the disaster of 1953. Unlike other historical works on that event, Slager's book sought to be comprehensive: it was to be all-embracing and to do justice to all the affected areas and survivors. The result is as impressive as it is voluminous, partly thanks to the many photos depicting the various stages of the catastrophe. Some of the photos are in color – quite unique at the time – which gives them a certain intimacy. To impose structure on the enormous number of sources and documents, the author made use of several organizing principles. First, he provided an historic overview of earlier floods in the area. This revealed that since the great flood of 28 September 1014, Zeeland had been struck by at least forty-six such disasters, emphasizing the area's vulnerability.[1] Second, he divided his material into fifty-four small disaster areas, since events differed from place to place. Third, he inserted thematic chapters on such topics as the evacuation, relief efforts, the royal family, the Delta Plan and monuments. Weighing almost five kilos, the book ends with a long list of subscribers from across the country.

This impressive commemoration book is part of a rich memorial culture dedicated to flood disasters. Right from the beginning, people have felt the need to keep memories of floods alive in the form of objects, such as commemoration books, maps, models, posters, photos, prints, bookmarks, certificates, cups, embroidery, paintings, badges, street names, statues, markers



Cover of Kees Slager's *Flood Disaster*, 2010

and monuments. Such tactile reminders are important not only for those directly involved and their surviving relatives, but also for the collective aspect of the village or city, the region or the nation at the collective level. They remind the inhabitants that they run real risks, and that floods can happen again.[2] Disasters also function as points of reference for the story that societies tell about themselves. Memories of a shared past are important for group and identity formation: periods of suffering and reconstruction enhance the sense of community.[3]

Physical art objects in homes, public buildings, museums and the landscape play an important role here: it is partly thanks to these objects that stories about floods pass from generation to generation. The historian Gerrit Jasper Schenk identifies four different functions that these kinds of objects fulfill in the processing of a catastrophe: cognitive, communicative, social and aesthetic.[4] In serving a cognitive function, objects make an event recognizable as a disaster; a standard visual and linguistic repertoire is employed to place the event within a broader historic tra-

dition. The communicative function brings the narrative aspect of the event into focus. An object is more than a static thing; it also communicates a certain message, engaging the viewer in a dynamic interaction. Depending on the setting, the emphasis may be concentrated more on the informative and educational dimension (as in a landscape or a museum) or on the moral and religious sphere (as in a church).

The objects also fulfill a social function: they provide an array of interpretive frameworks, enabling people to process the traumatic events. These coping mechanisms include commemorating the dead, inspiring piety, offering consolation and stimulating solidarity. Finally, the aesthetic function can contribute to the objects' overall effect: a moral or religious message may have a more powerful impact if the viewer experiences beauty or emotion. Sometimes, objects or monuments that recall a catastrophic flood are so beautiful or impressive that horror and pleasure coincide. The combination of shock, pity and beauty can lead to an experience of the sublime, in which the sheer incomprehensibility and grandeur of a disaster touches the viewer profoundly. There are also a few striking Dutch examples of this last category. I will single out two of them at the end of this chapter.

Commemoration books

Commemoration books occupy an important place in the material and visual culture of remembrance.[5] In addition to providing a written report of the disaster, they were also meant as a memory storehouse for one particular event. They were often beautifully illustrated and functioned as collector's items, thereby surpassing the level of utilitarian and occasional literature.

The genre emerged in the eighteenth century and consisted of a number of standard ingredients. Usually the book began with a list of subscribers, followed by a preface by the author and a somewhat longer introduction in which the disaster was placed

within a historic context. The main body of the text consisted of a chronologically and geographically organized description: the author explained exactly what happened by place and by region, including a list of the number of casualties and drowned livestock. The final section consisted of tables of donations received, including the names of the donors and any expenditures. In the nineteenth century in particular, when the national infrastructure for donations was becoming increasingly intricate, these tables often went on for several pages. The illustrations formed an important part of the book. Some commemoration books are decorated with beautiful drawings, increasing the work's appeal. They were also sold separately as "lasting memorials" of a disaster.[6]

Most commemoration books appeared within a year of the flood. This gave them a certain news value and reflected the spirit of the times: the reporting was colored by contemporary norms and values. Take for example the commemoration book issued by the Amsterdam teacher Cornelis van der Vijver in response to the hurricane of 29 November 1836 and the subsequent Christmas storm. The resulting floods and devastation are embedded in a ceaseless paean to the Dutch ability to tame the raging water. This dedicated patriot was driven by a spirit of resilience and piety:

> With trust in God he looks the formidable enemy in the eye; yes, he tackles the wild elements! The land, to which he has devoted himself, which he wrested from the billows, is as dear to him as his own life. Should the dikes and dams that he raised to encircle his land collapse; should the dunes that God gave him to keep him safe be moved; he stands firm! And as long as one lump of earth supports his body, he will retain the courage to win back what has been lost.[7]

How different is the tone in *Threatened Dikes*, which describes the evacuation of January 1995. "In a land where the water man-

agement has been regulated to perfection," wrote the editors, "the foreign journalists stream in to show the world that this famous country no longer has its levees under control and is forced to evacuate large portions of its population. The Netherlands is failing!"[8] The enlightened Christian optimism of Van der Vijver has been replaced by a tone of critical assessment. It is very telling that *Threatened Dikes* includes a petition in which residents of the towns of Millingen aan de Rijn and Ubbergen, as well as those from the neighboring towns of Kranenburg and Kleef, demanded that the government make it a top priority to strengthen the weak sections of dike in that area.[9]

One of the earliest commemoration books is *Reflection on the Floods of Holland* by the historian Johan Hendrik Hering. In two volumes comprising a total of 581 pages, he reports on the flood that wreaked havoc along the Zuiderzee on 14 and 15 November 1775. Around three hundred people perished in the flood and the village of Beulake was almost completely destroyed.[10]

All the functions discussed above (cognitive, communicative, social and aesthetic) can be found in Hering's work. As editor-in-chief of the *Amsterdamsche Courant*, Hering drew liberally from the news media in order to describe the course of events with the greatest possible precision. His reporting, however, was anything but a recital of the bare facts: his style was both engaging and florid.[11] Even the first lines of his report are more suggestive of a lofty contemplation of nature than a work of journalism:

> The delightful scenes of summer have come to an end. All that enchantment, which only recently had caressed the eyes, has suddenly lost its beauty! [...] The ground upon which I now stand, and where blades of grass once shot up beneath my feet, so to speak, has now become a soft, inferior clay that slows me down as I walk. Has my imagination deceived me, have I been dreaming, or has an invisible Creature conveyed me, unawares, from my beguiling FATHERLAND to this ravaged place?[12]

So it continues for many pages, with Hering interweaving snippets of Dutch poetry, including the works of the famous poet Hubert Korneliszoon Poot. In doing so, Hering entered the domain of emotive literature, which was popular at the time, where the observation of nature incited elevated feelings and led to religious reflection.

In addition to being florid, the style was also aimed at arousing emotions: cries of dismay (oh! alas!), superlatives, dashes and exclamation points follow each other in rapid succession. Hering left no stylistic device unexploited in his effort to affect the reader's mood:

> Your hair will stand on end in terror, and your knees will knock in fear [...]. Floating all around you are pieces and fragments of houses that have collapsed or been washed away, trees torn from the ground, lifeless cattle and sheep. – What can I say! drowned bodies, perhaps those of tender spouses, loving parents and obedient children, who, while trying to save each other, were not able to withstand the fury of those destructive forces, and in demonstrating their duty of mutual love they perished and will wash ashore on the streak of ground on which you stand.[13]

Such horrifying scenes were meant to make the reader extremely receptive to the religious message of the commemoration book: man must submit unconditionally to the authority of God. That lesson was strikingly illustrated on the title page, where a man raises his hands to heaven in desperation upon seeing a breach in the dike. The caption reads, "O God, how fearsome are your judgments." That man's fate lay in God's hands was an indisputable truth for Hering.

Yet Hering's emphasis was not restricted to the idea of a punishing God. On the contrary, the Amsterdam writer also regarded God's judgments as a blessing. After all, it was the same God who preserved places and individuals from destruction – in both

the moral and the physical sense. God's blessing was visible everywhere. As an example, Hering mentioned the people of Zeeland, who had been let off lightly during the storm.[14] He also praised the "wise leaders" of Nieuwendam, who "with Heaven's blessing, and with tireless diligence" had managed to avoid anything worse by taking "well-considered precautions."[15]

This last remark is quite revealing. For although everything lay in God's hands, man himself also bore some responsibility: good dike maintenance was of vital importance. Thus the destruction in Buiksloot was attributed to inadequate upkeep:

> I realize that your conditions are tragic, but was the punishment undeserved? – The breaches in your dike, the sinking of your ground, the erosion of your roads in places, some of which bear all the signs of negligence, are learning experiences from which you can improve your behavior and become more attentive in discharging the reasonable commands of Him in whose hands we all find ourselves![16]

The residents of Zaandam had also mistakenly thought themselves safe behind their dike, as if they were invincible. So the flood was a lesson in humility as well, in every respect.[17] For Hering, these two points of view – the flood as God's punishment and the responsibility of man to maintain the dikes – were not in conflict. Reference to God's omnipotence and the application of technological knowledge to control water and avoid future disasters often went hand in hand in the early modern period, as several historians have shown.[18] At the same time, it is indisputable that Hering's recommendations for a change in behavior pertained mainly to the religious realm: he did not call for taking up shovels but for an increase in piety.

Hering's commemoration book also revealed an aesthetic ambition. This was expressed not only in the flowery writing style but also in the book's luxurious design, with its ten "art plates," or full-page engravings, making it an art object or a collector's

item. That the graphics increased the market value is evident from the newspaper advertisements. The *Leeuwarder Courant* praised the beautiful illustrations, which were "drawn from Life."[19]

Two years later, Hering published a second commemoration book, this one concerning the flood of 1776. Interest was great, judging by the long list of subscribers. Once again, reporting and aesthetics went hand in hand. In the preface, Hering gave a detailed description of the frontispiece, which had been made by two prominent artists: the painter Jacobus Buys and the engraver Reinier Vinkeles. This "poignant painting of the sorrowful circumstances" was also sold separately. It's an allegorical composition that shows the Dutch maiden gazing upward in desperation. But Providence, the all-seeing eye, sends messengers who battle with the storm clouds and comfort her. She props her arms on a gravestone on which a Bible has been placed. The smoking pot is also a reference to the finality of earthly existence.

Hering's works mark the beginning of a long line of commem-


BESPIEGELING
NEERLANDSCH
WATERNOOD,
J. H. HERING.
TE AMSTERDAM

Title page from J.H. Hering's *Reflection on the Floods of Holland*, 1776 (public domain)

Illustration by N. van der Meer, H. Kobell, in J.H. Hering, *Reflection on the Floods of Holland*, 1776 (public domain)

Illustration from J.H. Hering's *Reflection on the Flood of Holland, between XXI and XXII November*, 1776 (public domain)

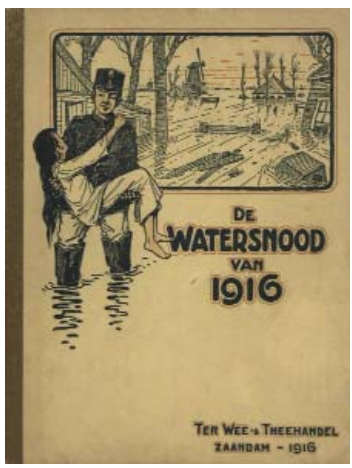
oration books. When the floods of 1820, 1825, 1855 and 1861 struck, other writers, publishers and illustrators joined forces to produce their own tangible reminders of the disasters. Two developments are worth mentioning. The first is the emergence of the regional commemoration book. The flood of 1825 led not only to the publication of a national *Commemoration Book of the Dutch Flood* by J.C. Beijer, but also to various regional works.[20] Two of them focused on Friesland, one on Overijssel and one on North Holland. The authors of these books came from the provinces they treated, which proved advantageous in gathering the right information. The author of the *Historical Tableau of the Floods and Inundations in the province of Friesland*, J. van Leeuwen, clerk of the Court of Commerce, travelled to the affected area himself to gather information.[21] J. ter Pelkwijk of Zwolle was able to use eye-witness reports in compiling his overview. Local input was also good for sales: as the lists of names printed in the front of the book suggest, it brought in many regional subscribers.

A second development is the strong emphasis on charity. Not only were almost all the nineteenth-century commemoration books published for the benefit of the victims, but they also contained long lists of subscribers who supported the work. Many of the books received royal backing. The crown prince, for example, purchased six copies of the Ter Pelkwijk's commemoration book. Many other subscribers were affiliated with the court as well, such as the king's chief lord chamberlain and the governess of Princess Marianne.[22] This charitable support was also evident in the tables and lists of donations printed in the back of the book, which were suffused with a royal flavor. Gifts from members of the royal family were usually displayed at the top of the list.

In the twentieth century, the commemoration book underwent a visual metamorphosis. With improved printing techniques and the incorporation of photography, graphics became more prominent. One fine example is the collector's album put

on the market by the Ter Wee Tea and Coffee Company in response to the flood of 1916.[23] Enthusiasts could purchase the album from local shops and fill the artistically designed book with seventy-two color photographs. The pictures were included in each half-pound and an ounce pack of tea. Collectors with duplicate pictures could swap them with other collectors or exchange them at the Ter Wee office in Zaandam.

The author, Zaandam archaeologist Gerrit Jan Honig, followed the tradition of the writers Hering and Beijer, mentioned above, by tailoring a representative account of the disaster to a general audience. Yet there was a marked difference between Honing's book and those of his nineteenth-century predecessors: with the Ter Wee publication, commercial interests clearly played a role. A collection album was a perfect way to create customer loyalty: if you wanted to fill your album, you would have to buy a great deal of tea. It was also good for name recognition: Ter Wee placed advertisements for this artistic publication in a number of national and regional newspapers. An essential pur-



The Flood of 1916, a publication of the Ter Wee Tea Company, Zaandam (public domain)

Zaandam-East after the flood of 1916. One of the seventy-two photos in the Ter Wee album (De Zaansche Molen image database, inv. no. 0017215)

chase for anyone interested in the history of the Netherlands![24]

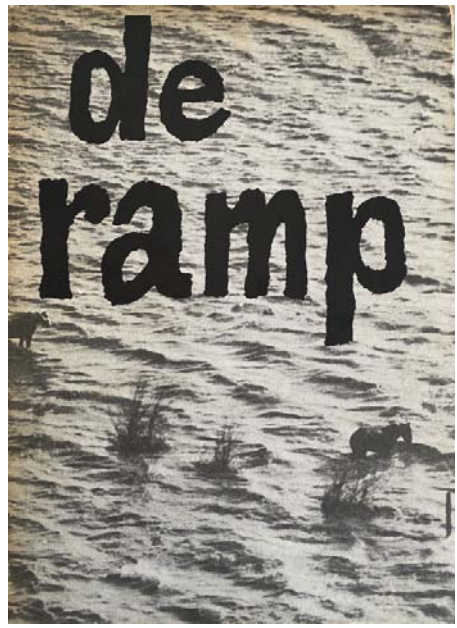
These kinds of enticing texts could also be found in the special issue of *Illustrated Life* that appeared on 6 January 1926.[25] This was not a commemoration book in the strict sense of the word, but an extra issue of a weekly magazine that was meant to be saved. It contained a series of "unique disaster photos," each with a brief caption. It opened with a photo of a scene illustrative of the flood's horrific realities: a mother carrying her sick child over a railway dike near Wijchen that was about to collapse. The issue was sent to all the regular subscribers with the announcement that the subscription fee had been increased by the "nominal amount of twenty cents" to cover production costs. The publication also contained an appeal to the people of the Netherlands to deposit their gifts in the Orange Cross collection box on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, and it also included an attractive offer for anyone who wanted to subscribe to the magazine. Interestingly enough, the photo reportage was not limited to the Netherlands; there were also two pages dedicated to the effects of the disaster in Belgium: the area around Brussels was completely inundated and the center of Liège was hard hit.

The emphasis on visual materials proved well-suited to the tastes of the public at large. But the biggest hit in this genre by far was the commemoration book *The Disaster*, published in February 1953 on the initiative of the Society for the Advancement of the Interests of the Book Trade. The compilers were not interested in making a profit. Instead, all the proceeds went to the National Disaster Fund. Journalists, photographers and booksellers collaborated on the publication free of charge. Queen Juliana wrote a foreword in which she expressed the hope that the book "would serve as a small monument to our people's sense of solidarity."[26] Interest was overwhelming: the total print run was no less than 675,000 copies. The text was sober, and as a result all the focus came to lie on the book's more than 120 poignant photos.

The Disaster was also given a place in Slager's monumental

Special issue of *Illustrated Life* from 6 January 1926 on the floods in the Netherlands and Belgium (private collection)

work, published fifty-seven years later.[27] It differs significantly from the older commemoration books, which offered a more immediate reflection on the disaster. Slager was able to document a much longer period, including the reconstruction phase, the struggle for the Oosterschelde and the opening of the Flood Museum in 2001. The goal and the purpose remained the same, however: to create a lasting memory of the disastrous events, for both the surviving relatives and the general public. As with earlier publications, aesthetic considerations were important to the overall design: the many color images and attractive layout make this book a feast for the eyes.



The commemoration book *The Disaster* from 1953 (private collection)

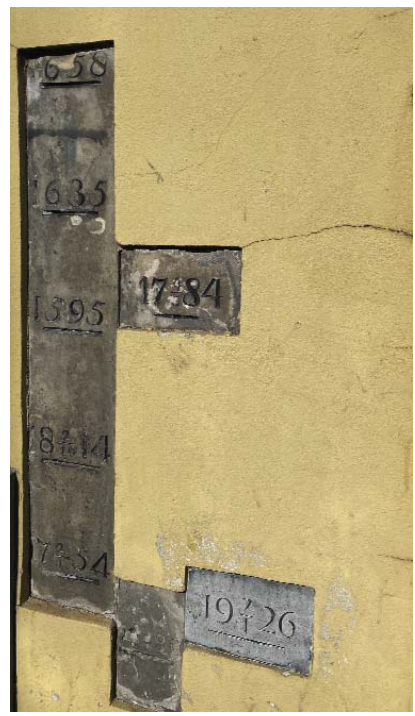
Places of remembrance

In addition to commemoration books there are countless other objects devoted to the memory of the various floods, such as statues, monuments, gravestones and street names. Typical of this kind of *lieux de mémoire* is their "embedded" character, or the way their presence is simply taken for granted as part of the street scene.[28] Markings of historical water levels on houses and quays not only indicate how high the water once reached, but they also show how time always does its work: the notches and scratches on brick walls wear away with the years. They inadvertently serve as a warning, since the water keeps getting higher.[29] Street names also tend to blend into their surroundings. Most people walk past these kinds of objects without giving them a moment's thought, yet they still serve a cognitive function be-

cause they keep alive the name of a flood or a submerged village.

Flood objects can be found not only in urban settings, but also in the countryside. Some of them can only be reached on foot or by bicycle, and one object only by boat. Take the artwork made by artist Alphons ter Avest to commemorate the submerged village of Beulake. An aluminum construction of pipes and cogs meant to represent the steeple of Beulake marks the place where the village disappeared beneath the waves on 22 November 1776. The storm surge of 1825 swallowed the remaining buildings. The cogs represent the ravages of time and are able to set the church bell in motion once again, making the voice of history resonate across the water's surface.[30]

The natural setting explains why many flood monuments have been included in bicycle routes and walking trails. One example is the Submerged Village Route that runs through the Arnhem-



Water levels in Deventer, on the IJsselkade, October 2021 (photo: Lotte Jensen)

Street sign with the name of a village submerged during the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood in Osdorp, Amsterdam (photo: Antia Wiersma)

Nijmegen region. The eastern (44 km) and western routes (54 km) take the biker past a total of six submerged villages, which are indicated by stone pillars and information boards. Those who walk the Christmas Flood Route in the province of Groningen can make use of augmented reality to bring the past back to life. By means of an app they can try to imagine what the area must have looked like at the time of the Christmas Flood of 1717.[31] The route runs past the hamlet of Wierhuizen, where forty people lost their lives in the flood and seventeen houses were destroyed. Only the cemetery remains; the frame of a church made of coated reinforcing steel stands as a reminder of the community that once lived there.

Such routes help put the region on the map: provinces can use their unique history to publicize themselves and attract tourists for multi-day visits. The Biesbosch Path, created six hundred years after the Saint Elizabeth Flood of 1421, is a walking route that takes in all the "cultural-historical high points of the region."[32] Addresses of places to eat and spend the night are included. The sixty-one-kilometer flood route in Zeeland also provides numerous culinary tips.[33]

Education and commerce go hand in hand with these kinds of initiatives, but even so they do guide walkers and bikers past

Alphons ter Avest, Beulaker Tower, in memory of the village of Beulake, submerged in 1776 (photo: Lotte Jensen)

countless monuments that commemorate the victims and help them visualize the suffering caused by the floods. Many things might be emphasized, from the depiction of emotions such as fear, distress and grief on the individual level to the expression of

Meschac Gaba, *Unreal*. Artwork in memory of the Christmas Flood of 1717, Wierhuizen (photo: Hardscarf, public domain)

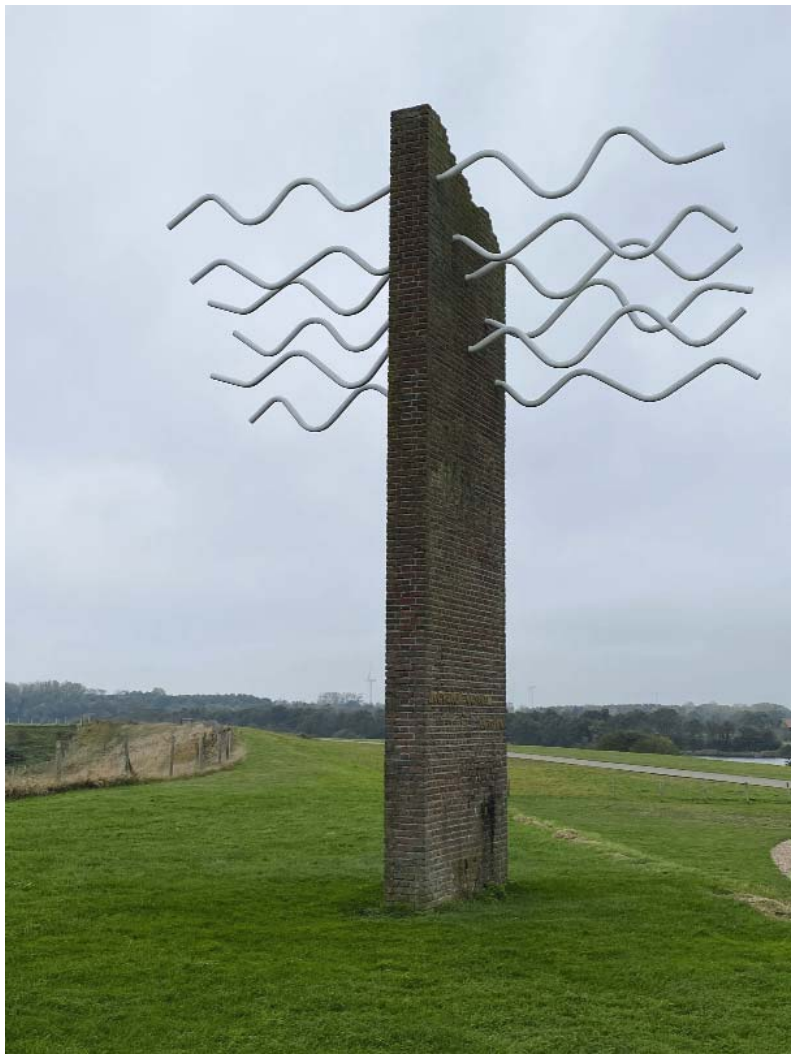
solidarity and resilience on the national level. Objects in the landscape not only represent events that took place in the past, but they also acquire meaning for the present: the viewer enters into a specific relationship with the object and looks at it from his or her own frame of reference.[34] Those who stop to admire the church frame in Wierhuizen may find themselves contemplating the destructive power of water or the transience of life.

The flood of 1953 has left the greatest number of material traces by far: in the inventory commissioned by the Flood Museum in 2010, all the various objects (graves, memorial plaques and monuments) are pictured.[35] The most well-known is undoubtedly the National Flood Monument designed by Gust Romijn, which stands next to the caissons of the Flood Museum

Flood walks and bicycle routes (photo: Lotte Jensen)

and was unveiled in 2003. It represents the waves that penetrated the walls of the brick houses; the sober inscription "the water, the storm, the silence" communicates the stillness that fell following the disaster and invites viewers to remember the victims.

Reference to the victims is implicit in Romijn's work; it's much more prominent in other monuments. At the disaster cemetery of Oude Tonge, for example, where 319 people lie buried beneath 160 stones, there's a bronze female figure clutching her baby wrapped in a blanket. Next to the Protestant church in Kruiningen is a sculpture of a woman holding her dead child in her arms. Jan Wolkers, who was still an unknown artist at the time, was commissioned by the municipality to design the work. In Stellendam, a mother with her child is fleeing from the waves. A similar figure can be found at the Zuidhavenpoort in Zierikzee, where a small child seeks shelter behind his mother, who is rais-



Gust Romijn, National Monument to the 1953 Flood, Ouwerkerk
(photo: Lotte Jensen)

ing her hand to heaven. The choice of mother and child symbolizes the vulnerability of human existence, especially that of children. At the same time, the work in Zierikzee, which was designed by Ad Braat, expresses a certain resilience: the valiant

woman stands directly in front of her child, a symbol of the motto "luctor et emergo" (I struggle and overcome).[36]

The flood monuments reveal an interesting difference in the representation of women and men: women are portrayed more frequently than men, symbolizing vulnerability. A case in point is the figure of the reclining, naked woman at the old cemetery in 's-Gravendeel. It's a symbol of total defenselessness and was placed next to the thirty-five gravestones of the victims.[37] In Strijen, the emaciated man hanging from a tree branch is an exception to the rule.[38] Men are more often shown in the role of rescuers or dike workers, especially in monuments that were created decades after the disaster and thus represent the phase of reconstruction. In the old post office in Zierikzee, for example, there's a mural of men transporting relief supplies and doing restoration work.[39] Between Ouderkerk and Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, a dike worker with sandbags has been posted near a boat.[40] And in Breskens, "The Working Man" is depicted, a man with a shovel, commemorating three decades since the start of the Delta Works.[41]

We find numerous examples of such dike workers throughout the Netherlands, not so much to commemorate specific disasters but as a testimony to the power of determination and the ability to tame the water. From Westkapelle in Zeeland to Wervershoof in West Friesland, from Rotterdam to the Afsluitdijk, everywhere workers cast in bronze are pitching in with shovels, wheelbarrows and sandbags to strengthen the dikes. The vulnerable mother and the industrious dike-worker – they're two sides of the same coin.

Myths cast in bronze

Monuments can also be instrumental in the formation of myths. Take, for example, the *Stone Man*, erected in honor of Caspar de Robles (1527-1585), Portuguese stadtholder in the service of

Ad Braat, *Tested but Not Broken* (1970). Monument to the victims of the flood disaster of 1953 in Zierikzee (photo: Lotte Jensen)

Spain. The colossus was put in place in 1576 because De Robles was said to have dealt vigorously with the neglect of the dikes following the flood of 1570. According to one of the stories, the Frisians refused to work on the dike by invoking an exemption

privilege. De Robles responded by throwing the exemption letters in the water to prove that you cannot repair dikes with paper.[42]

The historian Kees Draaisma has relegated these stories to the realm of fable and explained how myths found their way into the collective memory, with the grandiose monument playing an important role. The monument's bombastic text, written by local leaders who were all Spanish loyalists, praises De Robles's "wise governance." According to the inscription, he had "with great difficulty and strict supervision, and by employing a large taskforce and taking many decisions, erected new sea defenses from the ground up in approximately three months' time while also rewarding hard work with remuneration and paying for it himself."[43] By 1725, the monument had fallen into such disrepair that it was removed, but in 1774 the dike reeve replaced it with a replica. The veneration of De Robles was given a new impulse when the Spanish ambassador (the duke of Baena) and the Queen's Commissioner, Linthorst Homan, laid a wreath at the *Stone Man* in honor of De Robles on 27 June 1959. The idea for the ceremony had been in the works since 1953, with the Harlingen city council taking the initiative, and it was part of a large-scale event. It became the perfect breeding ground for reviving the old myths and exaggerating them: the mayor called him "the conqueror of the sea." Without the valiant Caspar de Robles there wouldn't have been a dry foot in all of Friesland in 1953, claimed the media in chorus. Draaisma pointed out that the effective measures taken in the construction of the Afsluitdijk were of greater importance.

The mythology that formed around De Robles as "conqueror of the sea" continues to this day despite Draaisma's attempt to undermine it, and it's all because of the monument. De Robles has literally been placed on a pedestal. Fiction and reality also converge in an artwork that was unveiled at Kinderdijk in 2021. Although it has never been demonstrated that the baby called Beatrix was washed ashore in her cradle at Kinderdijk, this

Bouwe Brouwer, *Stone Man*, memorial column in honor of Caspar de Robles, Harlingen (public domain)

sculpture brings the myth to life. Visitors will retell the story, some of them as if it had actually happened. The borders between fact and fiction are fluid.

This is especially true for the most famous figure in all of

Dutch water history: Hans Brinker. In Spaarndam there's a bronze casting of the young fellow with his finger in the dike and his eyes glancing upward. According to the words on the plinth, the sculpture was created "as a tribute to the lad who became the symbol of the perpetual struggle of the Netherlands against water." If you didn't know any better you'd think the boy had actually existed. The name Hans Brinker is taken from a book published by the American writer Mary Mapes Dodge in 1865: *Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates*. Interestingly enough, in the actual story it isn't Hans who holds his finger in the dike but an anonymous eight-year-old boy whose father is the lockkeeper.[44] One afternoon the boy takes pancakes to an old blind man living in the polder. On his way back he notices a small hole in the dike. He stacks up some stones in order to reach the hole and sticks his finger in it, thereby saving Haarlem from a flood. Dodge didn't invent the story herself. It had been circulating in different variants in two English-language magazines and a French children's book from 1848 in which a hole in the lock is sealed by a little lockkeeper.[45] All that nuance is missing from the bronze sculpture, however. Because the myth has been set in bronze, it takes on a new reality. Passers-by are simply led to believe that Hans Brinker was a hero because he stuck his finger in a hole in a dike.

In addition to Spaarndam there are also sculptures of Hans Brinker in Madurodam and Harlingen. His fictional deed (fictional in more ways than one) was retold in a television drama, on the silver screen and in the form of a musical. A symphonic rock song was dedicated to him in 1971, and in 2018 he made an appearance in a comic scene in *Het Klokhuis*, an educational children's TV program. He is so "real" that the actions of people who actually did exist can be compared to him. When someone does something heroic and averts a disaster, he might be compared to Hans Brinker. So when Jan Pronk was Minister of Defense, he stuck his thumb in the dike of the Third World like a "reincarnated Hans Brinker."[46] And in 1995 the community spirit

Sculpture of Hans Brinker in Spaarndam, created by Gerharda J.W. Rueb (public domain)

that was temporarily on display after the near-disaster in Limburg was seen as a "modern variant of the story of Hans Brinker."[47] But the opposite also happens: sometimes he figures in contexts involving fake heroes or gaffes made by people in power. In one censorious article on the decisiveness of the Netherlands in Europe, the Netherlands raises an ineffective finger, that of Hans Brinker.[48] Former Prime Minister Joop den Uyl was lambasted because, it was said, he had had to run around with "his finger raised" like a "middle-aged Hans Brinker" to keep the peace within his party.[49] Hans Brinker has evolved from a storybook character to a star of stage and screen and finally to a reference point for both decisiveness and failing policy.

The sublime

Some artistic representations of flood disasters are so striking that they can trigger an experience of the sublime. It's difficult to describe exactly what that entails, but generally speaking it has to do with a sensation in which fear, awe and beauty coincide. The eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke described the sublime as an aesthetic category in which pain and pleasure merge. The prerequisite for this experience requires that the pain and danger be placed at a certain distance, so that the artistic imagination causes them to undergo a transformation. If you're in mortal danger you do not experience pleasure, but seeing a magnificent painting of a shipwreck can lead to a "pleasant shiv-

er." This is also called "*Angstlust*" or "*Die Lust am Grauen*."[50]

This phenomenon is best illustrated by films and television series about true and imaginary disasters. The Dutch feature film *De Storm* about the 1953 flood was a blockbuster. The television series *Als de dijken breken* (*When the Dikes Break*; 2016), in which the entire western part of the Netherlands is inundated, drew almost two million viewers a week. Museum exhibitions dealing with disasters also appeal to the human fascination with the horrifying and the catastrophic. In 2018 visitors to exhibition *Entfesselte Natur* in the Hamburger Kunsthalle were led through rooms full of impressive disaster paintings. Shipwrecks, fires, volcanic eruptions and floods have inspired artists for centuries. Although the scenes depicted are hair-raising, the viewer is able to enjoy the aesthetically pleasing compositions at the same time. Especially the mother of all floods, the biblical Deluge, has led to the most dazzling images of terror, dark banks of clouds and black volumes of water.

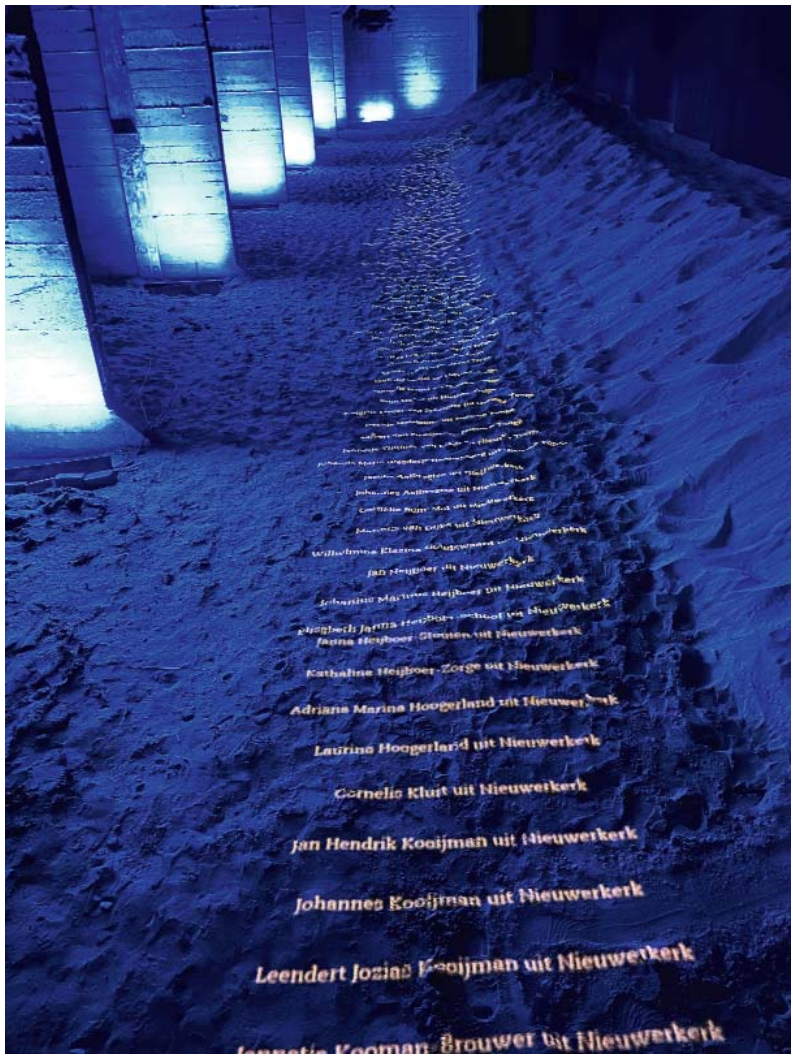
Out of the enormous number of artworks in which Dutch floods are represented, let me highlight two that, in my experience, come close to the sublime. The first is *The Breach of the Saint Anthony's Dike near Amsterdam* by Jan Asselijn. Using magnificent contrasting color combinations, Asselijn painted the gaping hole in the extension of the Zeedijk along the southern bank of the IJ that was created by the storm on the night of 4 to 5 March 1651. The breach led to floods in the eastern part of Amsterdam. Attention is automatically drawn to the figure in the red cloak who is engaged in conversation with another person. The wind is fierce, as indicated by the flapping cloak and the bent posture of his interlocutor. Standing on the other side on the wreckage of the dike is a man waving with his hand on his hat. These are small figures that emphasize the insignificance of humanity. The dark color of the storm clouds contrasts with the bright blue sky and the tranquil heavens. This one image captures both the destructive power of water and the calm after the storm. The violence of nature and its splendor are extensions of

Jan Asselijn, *The Breach of the Saint Anthony's Dike at Amsterdam*, 1651
(Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam)

each other. For Asselijn, it's all about contrasts: between the trivial human and overpowering nature, between dark clouds and clear blue sky, between ferocity and calm.

The second artwork that could evoke an experience of the sublime is the multimedia monument that has been on display in the Flood Museum in Ouwerkerk since 2009.[51] In a dark passageway, the names of all 1,835 victims of the 1953 flood are projected onto the dark water by means of white laser light. They move in the rustling water like the bodies of the drowned; their names resonate in the hollow space like an echo from the past. The monument is called "1835 + 1," referring to a baby who was

born during the night of 31 January to 1 February, drowned and was never found. It made a deep impression on me as viewer: the combination of sound, dark surroundings and the names of the drowned. It brings the disaster closer – at a safe distance.



Multimedia monument "1835 + 1" in the Flood Museum in Ouwerkerk (photo: Lotte Jensen)

Epilogue

In the Ooijpolder near Nijmegen a two-meter monument towers over the dike. The artwork bears the title *Shaped by the Water* and features a number of persons, young and old, passing from one side of the river to the other. More than just a scene of escape, the work also expresses solidarity: the bronze figures have thrown their arms around each other's shoulders and form a human bridge to the opposite shore.[1]

Artist Pauline Lutters made it to commemorate the evacuation that took place here and in surrounding regions in 1995. A quarter of a million residents were forced to leave their homes because of the dangerously high water level. Lutters was one of them. Some were cared for by family and friends in the neighborhood, but many also found temporary shelter in large sports halls and conference centers in other provinces. I well remember how large groups of people, with bag and baggage, came to the Jaarbeurs Exhibition Center in Utrecht. Traveling with a fellow student whose parents lived in the stricken area, I went to the other side of the country to see how high the water had risen. The high water levels were still attracting many day trippers. After a week, most of the evacuees could return. The dikes had held; the acute danger had passed. Nevertheless, the evacuation had left a deep impression on everyone who lived there. They had experienced the threat of water firsthand.

The sculpture not only shows a literal connection between two sides of a river, but it also builds a figurative bridge between the

Monument by Pauline Lutters in the Ooijpolder commemorating the evacuation due to the high water levels in 1995 (photo: Lotte Jensen)

present and the past: it ties in seamlessly with the age-old cultural depiction of Holland's interaction with water. Since the Middle Ages, solidarity has been one of the basic ingredients in descriptions of flood scenes. Countless writers and artists have emphasized the importance of love of neighbor and of helpfulness in times of calamity. From the end of the eighteenth century to the present, this has been reflected in tremendous generosity during fund-raising campaigns.

Flood-related cultural imagery serves as a lens through which we can focus on our own time: what other connections can be made between the past and the present? And what lessons can be drawn from them? These questions are all the more urgent now that the warming earth and rising sea levels pose a real threat to future generations.[2]

Looking at the past shows us that cultural images and historical mindsets continue to have an effect on our current debates about water management and rising sea levels. Stories about Dutch floods, whether from the sixteenth or the twentieth century, almost always follow the same pattern. They are pervaded by the "luctor et emergo" motif, or the notion that the Dutch can overcome every disaster, an idea that expresses resilience and points to a better future.

Several variants can be identified within this motif: a technological, a religious and an ecological variant.[3] According to the technological narrative the Dutch are able to tame water because of their water management expertise, which appeals to a sense of pride. The idea that thanks to their pioneer spirit, cooperation skills and technological innovations, the Dutch are unsurpassed at controlling water is firmly anchored in the collective memory. Think of Vondel's verses in which the Dutch lion makes short shrift of the raging water wolf, and of the visual representations of successful land reclamations. Or take the Delta Works, the "Eighth Wonder of the World," which excites much admiration, both at home and abroad, and appeals to the time-honored cre-

do "God made the world, but the Dutch made Holland."[4]

That pride is still widespread. The words of Bas Jonkman, professor of hydraulic engineering, as quoted in the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, are a case in point: "Long ago, our distant ancestors came down from their terps to cultivate the land and control the water. [...] Technical solutions for dealing with future rises in the sea level are also quite possible."[5] The current Delta Commissioner, Peter Glas, also makes note of the high level of hydraulic engineering expertise in the Netherlands: "It's actually something to be proud of, that most people don't think about every day: the fact that we live behind dikes and below sea level. There is great trust in the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, in the water authorities and in everything that entails. I'm proud of that, and so is the average Dutch person for that matter."[6]

In the second variant, the religious, the individual occupies a much more modest position. This variant was dominant for a long time in Dutch culture. The stories of floods were meant to impress upon their readers or listeners the idea that God's hand was visible everywhere. He punished mankind for their sins, so it was important to become more pious after the disaster had passed. In earlier centuries, acts of charity were often based on religious motives: it was everyone's Christian duty to help the suffering. This pious message permeated the cultural media until at least the 1970's.

The narrative based on the notion of sin is still with us, albeit in secular garb. We're becoming increasingly aware that we are all responsible for a sustainable environment. In short: a cleaner climate starts with you. More and more people are acting accordingly by using the car less frequently, flying less often and eating more mindfully. The culture is the perfect tool for spreading this moral message, implicitly or explicitly. Take the photo exhibition *Rising Tide*, which was on display at the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam from October 2019 to May 2021. In his photos, Kadir van Lohuizen shows the worldwide ef-

fects of rising sea levels. His intention is to issue a warning: "With all our technologies and safety measures we've lost the fear of the sea. We no longer realize that we live below sea level," Van Lohuizen says.[7]

A last variant that resounds throughout the current debates on rising sea levels is the ecological variant: the idea that nature should be given space. As in the religious variant, humans occupy a more humble position, but there is no punitive higher authority. Instead it is nature that dictates; nature is almighty. The idea is that we don't live *in conflict* with water but we *coexist* with it. The program "Space for the River," which ran from 2006 to 2019, is a successful example of this approach. To lower the water levels, rivers in the Netherlands were widened in thirty-four different places.

That image also has historic roots, although not as deep as the others. A fine example is the aforementioned poem by Hendrik Marsman, "Memory of Holland," from 1936, in which he refers to "the voice of water" that "with its endless disasters" is "feared and heard." Marsman had renounced his Protestant faith, and here he emphasizes the insignificance of man in the face of almighty nature: it is the voice of water – and not of God – that speaks.

We find a contemporary variant in Gerrit Komrij. In 2000, at the request of the Water Management Commission, he wrote the magnificent poem "The Same Water." There, he compares the Dutch water landscape with the human body. Komrij writes that water must be allowed to flow freely, just as blood moves through the human body by means of branching arteries. It's not a network that can be altered with impunity, for it immediately flows over any obstacle that gets in its way. Nature must be given free rein: "Stem the flow / Because it can attack, and you rid the biotope / Of all that is defenseless and threatened."[8]

The insight that we not only fight against water, but also coexist with it opens a window into the future. Petra van Dam, professor of environmental history, introduced the notion of "am-

phibious culture" to demonstrate that in earlier eras the Dutch were accustomed to constantly moving back and forth between land and water.[9] Until well into the nineteenth century, Dutch farmers prepared themselves for floods: high water attics, emergency boats and elevated houses ensured that cattle and people could be rescued when the water came.[10] The idea of an "amphibious culture," which is also depicted in many historical prints, resonates in today's water policy: more and more, people will have to resign themselves to climate change and give sections of land back to nature if necessary. In an interview, Delta Commissioner Peter Glas pointed out that water is going to be a leading factor in the future organization of our landscape: "In the long run, the Netherlands will become amphibious. We must adapt to wherever the water takes us."[11]

In order to adapt, vulnerability will have to be given more prominence in the national narrative. The primary consideration will not be invincibility but futility – *and* the human capacity to adapt. Stories and images from the past show us how the awareness of vulnerability can serve as fertile ground for the growth of solidarity.

Notes

Introduction

1 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, v.
2 *Nieuws- en advertentie-blad voor de provincie Drenthe* (15-2-1825).
3 Zeiler 2002 (b), xi.
4 Buisman 2011, 265.
5 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, 189.
6 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, 251-261.
7 Gottschalk 1971-1977.
8 Buisman 2011.
9 Marsman 1941, 122.
10 Cf. Jensen 2021 (f).
11 Slager 2010, 6.
12 Toussaint (ed.) 2018.
13 According to the survey published by the *Historisch Nieuwsblad* in 2018: Lavèn 2018, 25.
14 One of the originators of this cultural historical approach is Gerrit Jasper Schenk. See for example Schenk 2007. On the rise of disaster studies: Jensen 2021 (a).
15 On the different functions of culture in times of calamity, Schenk 2018.
16 Also see Meijer 2022.
17 Anderson 2006.
18 On the national narrative and its development, see Jensen 2018 (c).
19 Jensen, Van Asperen et al. 2020.
20 Cf. https://historiek.net/luctor-et-emergo-ik-worstel-en-kom-boven/133498/ (retrieved 23-2-2022).
21 *Aandoenlyk tafreel* 1825.
22 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, VIII.
23 Also see Metz and Van den Heuvel 2012.

Chapter 1

1 Film adaptation of Rik Launspach, *De Storm* (2009). Visitor numbers posted at https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Storm_(2009) (retrieved 23-2-2022).
2 Cf. Vuisje 2013, 46 and De Kruif 2010, 73-75.
3 Beijer 1826, 593.
4 For more information on the altarpiece see Van Asperen 2019. For the the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood in the cultural imagination: Van Asperen, Eekhout and Jensen 2021.
5 Pollmann 2017, 126.
6 On the origin and survival of the myth: Van de Waal 1952, 255-258; Alleblas 2007; De Kruif 2010, 52-59 and Pollmann 2017, 122-129.
7 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad (retrieved 23-2-2022). Thanks to Lauran Toorians.
8 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karna (retrieved 23-2-2022). Thanks to Lauran Toorians.
9 Also see: Rank 1914, 71, 80-81.
10 Van Asperen 2109 (b).
11 Van Asperen 2019 (b).
12 Pollmann 2017, 120.
13 Borchert & Waterman 2013, 169.
14 Borchert & Waterman 2013, 205.
15 Schenk 2020.
16 Also depicted in De Kruif 2010, 58.
17 Thanks to Amy Boylan for a digital copy and to Mattie Busch, who told me of its existence.
18 Buisman 1995-2019, part 4, 355.
19 Thanks to Ad van Bemmel. Also see Van Bemmel 2009, 50, 59.
20 Morgan 2015, 42-43.
21 Walker-Meikle 2012, 83-85. Thanks to Catrien Santing.
22 Treuherz 1983, 241.
23 Thanks to Diederik Aten.
24 Loosjes 1808, 82.
25 Schmid 1868, 73-74.
26 Holst 1869, 117-118.
27 Remarkably, the *Derde honderdtal leerzame vertellingen voor kinderen* (*Third Hundred Instructive Stories for Children*) appeared almost forty years after the publication of the first two editions (which clearly stem from a German source). That raises the question whether a German source text can be found at all. It's also possible that the publisher was

simply trying to make a good impression by using Schmid's name, and that the story is actually his own invention.

28 Which can be found in his collected works: Von Schmid 1858, 181-230.

29 Von Schmid 1891, 18.

30 Mathijsen 2013.

31 Levie et al. 1978, 215. Also see Van de Waal 1952, 258.

32 Not mentioned in Van de Waal 1952.

33 Treuherz 1983.

34 Treuherz 1983, 242.

35 Jensen 2008.

36 Van Someren 1841, 90-91.

37 Van Someren 1841, 90.

38 Penning 1904, *De watervloed*, 137.

39 Reijnders 2013.

40 Bosman en Penning 2015, 25.

41 This is also pointed out in Vuisje 2013, 46.

42 The photo is also featured in De Kruif 2010, 72.

43 Thanks to Diederik Aten, who called my attention to this photo. Also see De Roos 2011, 32.

Chapter 2

1 Reith 2020.

2 Also see Plate 2011, 3-35.

3 Plate speaks of "productive reception." See Plate 2011, 41.

4 Cf. Plate 2011, 30-32.

5 For a summary of the debates involved in the reclaiming of the Haarlemmermeer, see Fockema Andreae 1955 and Werner 1991, 6-8.

6 Werner 1991, 2.

7 On the activities and myths concerning his person, see Aten 2009; Rooijendijk 2013, 110-212.

8 Leeghwater 1764, articles 6, 20 and 99 on pages 8, 11 and 28.

9 Werner 1991, 6.

10 Concerning these poems, also see Jensen and Hunink 2021.

11 The poem is printed in Veris and Van der Laech 1641 (digitally accessible via the Leiden University Library, http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:2039898).

12 Concerning his plan: Fockema Andreae 1955, 387-388.

13 "Mergimur, ach nobis lacus ut lupus Imminent agnis! / Pande leoninam, turba Bataua, manum; / tuque tuam, ter magne tuis Heroibus heros, / ec-

ce – alio terram littore quaeris? – habes." The English translation is based on the Dutch translation from the original Latin by Vincent Hunink. For a full Dutch translation, including annotation, see: Jensen and Hunink 2021.

14 English translation based on Gelderblom 1994, 41, re-worked with modern Dutch spelling.

15 At about the same time Vondel also wrote his famous poem on "The Beemster," in which he emphasized that the reclamation project completed in 1612 had brought new prosperity.

16 The book went through twelve printings before 1764. For the printing history, see Joustra 2009.

17 Van der Goes 1671, 104.

18 In a certain sense Vondel preceded him with "De Rynstroom" (The Rhine Flood; c. 1629), but that poem is much narrower in focus.

19 Huisinga Bakker 1773, 89. Thanks to Adriaan Duiveman.

20 La Bordus 1734, 11.

21 De Cerff 1742, 462.

22 De Cerff 1742, 233, 278, 389, 573.

23 The work was included in a series of pamphlets. See Van Vliet n.d.

24 Verwoerd 1788, 9.

25 Verwoerd 1788, 13.

26 For example, see Snijders 1861, 5.

27 Jensen 2018 (c), 24.

28 Tollens 1871, 453.

29 For the planning involved in the impoldering of the Haarlemmermeer, see the introduction by W.J.C. Hasselt in Leeghwater 1838, 4-112; Van der Woud 2005, 274.

30 Leeghwater 1838, 5.

31 Beets 1876, vol. 2, 95.

32 Beets 1876, vol. 3, 60.

33 Beets 1876, vol. 3, 137.

34 Included on a page of short poems in the *Feestblad en Programma*, issued on the occasion of a benefit evening in Amsterdam.

35 Grasman 2018, 40-43. Thanks to Peter van Zonneveld.

36 Beets 1876, vol. 3, 225.

37 Alberdingk Thijm 1894, 126.

38 Jensen 2019 (b).

39 In 1901 the story was serialized in the illustrated magazine *Eigen Haard*.

40 See for example the anthologies *Neerlandia* (Wouters 1917-1918, vol. 5, 159-165) and *Uit eigen land* 1920, 130-136; recitations on the radio are

mentioned in: *De radio-gids* (6-12-1941); *Katholieke radio-gids* (26-6-1949).

41 Grimme 1939, 23.

42 See the Delpher.nl databank.

43 See for example *De standaard* (13-6-1916).

44 *Friese Koerier* (2-2-1953).

45 On the use of war metaphors in the Dutch battle with the water, see Duiveman 2019, 105-107.

46 *Trouw* (3-2-1953).

47 Schama 1987, 42.

48 *De Maasbode* (22-11-1940).

49 Ersebeek 1947, 191.

50 *Limburgsch Dagblad* (7-11-1953).

51 https://www.bierista.nl/hoop-waterwolf (retrieved 22-2-2022).

52 https://www.deposthoorn-denhaag.nl/nieuws/algemeen/439637/de-waterwolf-is-nieuwe-attractie-in-madurodam (retrieved 8-7-2021).

53 https://www.etersheimerbraak.nl/Pages/WaterWolf.html (retrieved 22-2-2022).

54 Curiously enough, the term "water wolf" was hardly ever used in the news coverage of the floods of 2021 in Limburg. That was not the case twenty-five years earlier in the documentary *De waterwolf van Itteren* (1996), by Hans Heijnen.

Chapter 3

1 Duyster 1993, 67.

2 Duyster 1993, 89.

3 For the pictorial repertoire in children's books about the 1953 disaster, see Vuijsje 2013 and Mostert 2015.

4 Terlouw 2010, 90.

5 According to an interview in *De Telegraaf* (28-1-1978).

6 For a discussion of the aesthetic function of "disaster art," see Schenk 2018. For an application to the Dutch disaster culture, see Jensen (f).

7 *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* (1809), vol. 1, 433.

8 What follows is based on Jensen 2018 (c), 14-23, Jensen 2021 (c) and Jensen 2021 (d).

9 Thouars 1825 (a), 23.

10 Thouars 1825 (a), 18.

11 De Perponcher 1800, 131.

12 De Perponcher 1800, 129.

13 Campagne 1861, 12.
14 Oudenhoven 1682, *3.
15 See for example Esser 2016 and Buisman 2019, 75-110.
16 Zillesen 1800, 32-33.
17 Zillesen 1800, 35.
18 Poot 1722, 385.
19 Poot 1722, 388.
20 Zie Van den Branden and Frederiks 1888-1891, 33-34.
21 See the preface in Bakker 1741 (unpaginated).
22 Bakker 1741, 1.
23 Bakker 1741, 8.
24 Bakker 1741, 2.
25 Bakker 1741, 8.
26 For example, see Bakker 1741, 8, 13, 22, 43.
27 Bakker 1741, 38, 40.
28 On the use of war metaphors in flood-related texts, see Duiveman 2019.
29 Van Asperen 2019 (a).
30 See Jensen 2021 (c).
31 Schonck 1799, 24.
32 What follows is based on Jensen 2020 (a).
33 *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen*, 1809, 433.
34 Bilderdijk, *De overstrooming*, 16-17.
35 See De Jongh, *Zinne- en minnebeelden*, 80-86.
36 Vrouwe Bilderdijk 1809, 42.
37 Vrouwe Bilderdijk 1809, 73.
38 Vrouwe Bilderdijk 1809, 62.
39 Vrouwe Bilderdijk 1809, 75.
40 Vrouwe Bilderdijk 1809, 77.
41 On the provoking of emotions in Schweickhardt's collection, also see: Meijer 2022, 152-153.
42 What follows is based on Jensen 2019 (e).
43 Tollens 1871, 452.
44 Tollens 1871, 455.
45 Tollens 1871, 457-458.
46 Tollens 1871, 465.
47 *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* 1830, first article, 34.
48 Busken Huet 1884, 159.
49 Van der Bilt la Motte 1854, 433. He was probably taking aim at Samuel van den Bergh, a Hague apothecary and writer of occasional verse, and author of *Voor de overstroomden: Februari 1850* (The Hague 1850) and *Watersnood: Een gedicht* (The Hague 1855).

50 Schimmel 1861, 556-579.
51 Busken Huet 1884, 159.
52 Schenkman 1861, 4.
53 De Génestet 1869.
54 Zuiderent 2003 (a).
55 Quoted in Zuiderent 2003 (a), 168.
56 The characterization "flood disaster monument in words" – *watersnood-monument in taal* – is from Zuiderent 2003 (b), 12.

Chapter 4

1 Slager 2010, 484.
2 See the account in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* (3-2-1953). Concerning the visit and her attire: Withuis 2016, 779-480.
3 See the account in *Het vaderland* (24-3-1953).
4 More on this theme: Meijer 2022, 74-92.
5 *Het vaderland* (24-3-1953).
6 Biemans and Boetier 2018.
7 Stoppendaal 1784, 144. On Stoppendaal's flood writings, see Altena 2021.
8 Moens 1825, 134.
9 Beijer 1826, 220.
10 See the report in the *Rotterdamsche Courant* (7-3-1799).
11 *Rotterdamsche Courant* (7-3-1799).
12 Schonck 1799, 29-30.
13 Also see Altena 2021, 46.
14 Schonck 1799, 30.
15 Loosjes 1815, 65. The poem appeared earlier in the *Almanak van Vernuft en Smaak* (1800), 66-68, under the name A.L.Pz.
16 Loosjes 1799, 21.
17 Loosjes 1799, 57.
18 Riemsdijk 1881, 65; *Oprechte Haarlemse Courant* (7-5-1785) and the *Rotterdamsche Courant* (10-5-1785).
19 All present-day amounts were determined by means of the calculator of the International Institute for Social History, which provides the euro equivalent for the year 2020. Euro amounts are rounded off to whole numbers. For the calculator, see: https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.
20 A report of the ceremony was published in *Verbaal der plechtigheid* 1800.
21 *Bataafsche Leeuwarder Courant* (27 September 1800).
22 *Leeuwarder Courant* (1-3-1825).

23 Robidé van der Aa 1825, 15.
24 The price per copy was *ƒ*1.25. See the call for subscriptions in the *Leeuwarder Courant* (12-4-1825).
25 *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* (5-5-1825) and (11-5-1825).
26 *Leeuwarder Courant* (8-9-1826).
27 De Thouars 1825 (b).
28 Ewijk 1809, vol. 1, 205.
29 Beijer 1826, 279-286.
30 *De Oostpost* (13-6-1855).
31 *Haagsche courant* (6-1-1926).
32 *Algemeen Dagblad* (5-2-1953). In 2019 the *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant* (PZC) reported that four days before the 66th commemoration of the flood, "water hero" Wim Schot, who with his cousin had saved countless lives, had passed away. See Wagemakers 2019.
33 Van Broekhoven 2021.
34 Pierlinck 1757, 15; Van Linden 1757.
35 Van Linden 1757, 24. Thanks to Adriaan Duiveman.
36 Cf. Jensen 2018 (c), 49-50.
37 More on these floods: Burgers 2014, 89-102; Buisman 1995-2019, vol. 7, 248-303.
38 Van der Burg 2007, 243-244.
39 Outhof 1720, 672.
40 Van Linden 1757, 12-13.
41 On Louis Bonaparte's role in water management see: Bosch 2007, among others. On the reactions to Louis Bonaparte as the king of disaster control, see Jensen 2016.
42 Ewijk 1809, vol. 1, 158.
43 Winckler 1808, 5.
44 Van Epen 1808, 4.
45 Van Epen 1808, 9, 24.
46 Van Campen 1808, 14.
47 Jensen 2016, 159.
48 Monitor 1809, [2-3].
49 Gabriëls 2015.
50 Meijer 2021; Meijer, *Verbonden door rampspoed* 2022.
51 For a detailed report of his tour: *Leydse Courant* (16-2-1825). For his role as godfather, see Van Dam and Pieters 2018, 292.
52 Ter Pelkwijk 2002, 189-190 and the List of Subscribers, 7.
53 Beijer 1826, 34.
54 Beijer 1826, 220.

55 Van Heuven-van Nes 1994, 6.
56 *Nieuw Amsterdamsch handels- en effectenblad* (15-3-1861).
57 *Nieuw Amsterdamsch handels- en effectenblad* (15-3-1861).
58 Hofdijk 1861, 13.
59 Hofdijk 1861, 14.
60 Van Heuven-van Nes 1994, 24.
61 Van Heuven-van Nes 1994, 27.
62 Quoted in Meijer 2021, 172-173.
63 *Humoristisch Album* (19-2-1861).
64 Roorda van Eysinga 1987, 29. For more on this brochure, see Van der Meulen 2013, 569-572.
65 Meijer 2022, 63-64.
66 Aten and Wieringa 2009, 48.
67 *Algemeen Handelsblad* (3-4-1916, evening paper).
68 Aten and Wieringa 2009, 157.
69 Aten and Wieringa 2009, 123.
70 *De Telegraaf* (3-1-1926); *Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbosssche Courant* (4-1-1926).
71 *De Nederlander* (3-2-1926).
72 Biemans and Boetier 2018, 29.
73 *De Volkskrant* (3-2-1953).
74 *Het Vrije Volk: democratisch en socialistisch dagblad* (9-2-1953).
75 See the readers' comments in the *Algemeen Dagblad* (19-7-2021) on the lightning visit of Willem-Alexander and Máxima: https://www.ad.nl/opinie/reacties-op-bliksembezoek-koning-in-limburg-heeft-hij-nog-steeds-niets-geleerd (retrieved 22-12-2021).
76 *De Amsterdammer* (5-1-1926).
77 *De Koningin bezoekt haar volk* 1926.
78 See the supplement in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* (5-8-1938), the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (5-8-1938) and *De Indische Courant* (5-8-1938).

Chapter 5

1 Cremer 1861, 11-12.
2 Cremer 1861, 26.
3 Cremer 1861, 27.
4 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (9-6-1861).
5 Van Heuven-van Nes 1994, 12-17.
6 Quack 1861, Notes, 45.
7 A.E.C. 1719, 43.

8 Driessen 1994; Van Zellem 2003; Bosch 2012.
9 Bosch 2012, 42.
10 Wessels 1996, 38-39; Bosch 2012, 31-42.
11 Wagenaar 1776, 31.
12 Wagenaar 1776, 66.
13 Wagenaar 1776, 35.
14 Wagenaar 1776, 35. The extent to which charity began to constitute part of the Dutch self-image is also considered in: Meijer 2022, 93-130.
15 Wagenaar 1776, 35-68.
16 Van de Ven et al., 1995, 69-73.
17 *Bericht* 1784, III-IV.
18 See the publication's subscription list. Thanks to Lilian Nijhuis.
19 Van de Ven et al., 1995, 75.
20 See Meijer 2021, among others.
21 Van de Ven et al., 1995, 73-75; Jensen 2018 (c), 38-39.
22 *Binnenlandsche Bataafsche Courant* (12-2-1799).
23 De Thouars 1825 (a), "Voorberigt."
24 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, 241.
25 "Weldadigheid," 1825, 454. According to the editors this was a "young female poet," many of whose pieces had already been published. The poem dates to 1821 but was published in the magazine *De Star* in response to the flood of 1825.
26 See for example the list of donors that appeared in the *Middelburgsche Courant* (1 March 1808).
27 Quoted in Boomsma and Van Dam 2015, 76.
28 Van de Ven et al., 1995, 76-79.
29 Van de Ven et al., 1995, 79.
30 Benning et al., 1995, 171.
31 Van Asperen 2019 (b); Van Asperen 2021.
32 Van Asperen 2019 (a). On the poem by Bakker: Jensen 2021 (c).
33 On this fragment of the image, see Van Asperen 2019 (a).
34 Verloren van Thermaat 2008, 18; Van Schuppen 2005.
35 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (13-3-1855).
36 *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* (13-3-1855).
37 *Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant* (28-2-1809).
38 *Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant* (28-2-1809).
39 Brinkman 1885, 121.
40 Evenhuis 2008.
41 The proceeds were reported in the *Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche Courant* (13-12-1855).

42 The prints were made by C.C.A. Last, among others, and are part of the collection of the Gelderland archive. For the bonus plate in *Europa*, see: https://www.collectiegelderland.nl/stadskasteelzaltbommel/object/934d1958-be6b-915a-ed25-b4b3a52309bf.
43 *De Maasbode* (4-2-1926, evening paper). Thanks to Jenny Reynaerts and Hanneke van Asperen for their help in interpreting the drawing.
44 *De Telegraaf* (3-2-1926, morning paper).
45 *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant* (2-2-1926).
46 Mathijsen 2021, 98-101.
47 Schenkman 1861, 4.
48 See the announcements in *Nieuw Amsterdamschs Handels- en effectenblad* (23-2-1861) and (2-3-1861), and *Algemeen Handelsblad* (9-3-1861), (16-3-1861), (18-3-1861) and (15-4-1861).
49 Hertzveld 1861, 8.
50 *Rotterdamsche Courant* (9-3-1855). Reports also appeared in: *Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche Courant* (12-3-1855), *De Tijd* (13-3-1855), *Bredasche Courant* (15-3-1855) and, a few months later, in the newspaper published for readers in the colonies, *De Oostpost* (13-6-1855).
51 Mathijsen 2021, 109.
52 *Rotterdamsche Courant* (27-7-1855).
53 *Het reisje naar Gelderland*, 22-23.
54 See for example *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* (1830), vol. 1, 680-682, and *Bredasche Courant* (4-1-1831).
55 *Arnhemsche Courant* (6-9-1832).
56 At the end of 1830, the publisher J.F. Thieme announced the opening of a subscription list for a new work by this anonymous writer: *Tafereelen uit het menschelijke leven* (in the *Opregte Haarlemsche Courant* (2-12-1830) and (14-12-1830); *Bredasche Courant* 24-12-1830). The last known advertisement for this work is dated six months later (*Arnhemsche Courant*, 23-6-1831). Whether the work was actually published or not is unknown; I have not been able to trace any copies. Thanks to Henk Eijssens.
57 Bilderdijk, "Onwaarachtige gift." Also see: Van Delft 2021.
58 See the cartoons in *De Nederlandsche Spectator* 14 (6-4-1861), (4-5-1861) and (1-6-1861).
59 Spiritus Asper en Lenis 1855, 295.
60 Spiritus Asper en Lenis 1855, 298.
61 Multatuli 1861. For this publication, see: Van der Meulen 2002, 429-432 and Ham 2012.
62 The proceeds of ƒ1,300 is reported in Multatuli 1875, 88.
63 Multatuli, "Naschriftje."

64 To be precise: ƒ161,325.90. See *Verslag van de verdeeling* 1862, 16.
65 See the accompanying *Feestblad en Programma* 1881. I consulted the copy in the Leiden University Library. For the festival also see Jensen 2019 (b).
66 See the report in the *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant* (21-2-1881).
67 According to the income table in the *Arnhemsche Courant* (23-2-1881).
68 *Feestblad en Programma*, 20.
69 "Feest-Ouverture. Amsterdamsche Causerie" in: *Feestblad en Programma* 1881, 27.
70 *De standaard* (28-2-1881). Strong criticism was also expressed in the column "Brieven uit de hofstad," in: *Arnhemsche Courant* (1-3-1881).
71 Meijer 2022, 178-182, 195-198.
72 Kagchelland and Kagchelland 2009, 598, 637; Meijer 2022, 114-116.
73 *Algemeen Dagblad* (3-2-1995).
74 See https://nationaalrampenfonds.nl/ (retrieved 11-2-2022).
75 Van Ginneken 1995.
76 *Algemeen Dagblad* (4-3-1995).
77 *Algemeen Dagblad* (9-3-1995).

Chapter 6

1 *Haagsche Courant* (23-2-1953), 6.
2 *Haagsche Courant* (23-2-1953), 6.
3 https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/watersnood.
4 As a counterexample to this nationally oriented approach, let me mention Heerma van Voss et al. (eds.) 2018, which also includes two entries on the international embedding of disasters: Jensen 2018 (a) and Jensen 2018 (b).
5 Also see Meijer 2022.
6 *1500 Menschen* n.d.
7 "Recalls" 1926.
8 *Westmorland Gazette* (19-1-1861).
9 Corporaal and Jensen 2022.
10 Anderson 2006.
11 Smits 2020, 9-11.
12 Corporaal and Jensen 2022.
13 Mauss 2022.
14 Also see Werther 2021.
15 Boersma 2021, 321-327.
16 Duiveman 2023 (b), 137-159.

17 Duiveman 2023 (b), 137-159.
18 Shrady 2008, 45.
19 Shrady 2008, 46.
20 *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* (20-10-1879).
21 See for example *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant* (22-3-1879); *Provinciale en Overijsselsche Courant* (14-4-1879); *Het Vaderland* (21-3-1879); *Algemeen Handelsblad* (24-3-1879); *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* (29-4-1879).
22 *Rotterdamsche Courant* (30-3-1879).
23 Meijer 2022, 211-213.
24 Boomsma and Van Dam 2015.
25 De Kanter 1808, 108.
26 The following is based on Corporaal and Jensen 2022.
27 In earlier catastrophes, such as the powder house disaster of 1807 and the floods of 1808 and 1809, a few gifts did come from abroad, but they played a less prominent role. For this reason I am not including them here.
28 Beijerinck 1820, 320.
29 Beijerinck 1820, V-VI.
30 Beijerinck 1820, VI.
31 Beijerinck 1820, 315.
32 Beijerinck 1820, 102.
33 Beijerinck 1820, 316-333.
34 According to reports in *The Times* (14-2-1820), *The Gentleman's Magazine* (February 1820), 164-165 and *De Leydse Courant* (21-2-1820).
35 Reports appeared in *The Evening Mail*, *Saint James's Chronicle*, *The Commercial Chronicle*, *The Ipswich Journal*, *The Champion*, *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, among others.
36 *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* (4-3-1820).
37 *The Morning Chronicle* (24-2-1820).
38 Beijerinck 1820, 331. Their names can also be found in the lists that were printed in some British newspapers. See for example *The Englishman* (5-3-1820) and *The Morning Post* (7-3-1820).
39 Van Sas 1985, 109. Thanks to Beatrice de Graaf.
40 Beijerinck 1820, 331.
41 Beijer 1826, 369.
42 According to Coppens 2003, 144.
43 A description of the disaster can be found in Beijer 1826, 204-209.
44 Beijer 1826, 208.

45 The lady-in-waiting of Anna Paulovna describes a visit to this institution on Monday, 18 April 1825; see Coppens 2003, 200-201.
46 Beijer 1826, 209.
47 Beijer 1826, 209.
48 Coppens 2003, 181.
49 Beijer 1826, 764.
50 *Bataviasche Courant* (27-7-1825).
51 *Hampshire Chronicle* (14-3-1825).
52 *The Star* (25-2-1825).
53 For this visit see: Quack 1861, 74-75.
54 See Quack 1861, appendix 1A, 44-45.
55 The following information is taken from *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage* (4-5-1861).
56 *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage* (4-5-1861).
57 *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage* (4-5-1861).
58 *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage* (4-5-1861).
59 *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage* (5-6-1861).
60 See Quack 1861, 44.
61 Jensen 2018 (c), 43.
62 The titles of the prints were: "Inondation en Hollande; le château Ammersoyen dans le Bommelerwaard' (*L'Illustration*, 23-2-1861, 117) and 'Une scène d'inondation à Nieuwaal en Hollande – un peu de possessions ont été sauvés des maisons inondées' (2-3-1861, 141). Thanks to Thomas Smits. On the collaboration between the artists and the international press, see Smits 2020, 75.
63 Also see: Corporaal and Jensen 2022.
64 *L'Illustration* (23-2-1861), 8.
65 *Le Progrès. Journal de l'éducation populaire publié par la societé centrale des instituteurs belges* (21-4-1861).
66 *Le Progrès* [...] (21-4-1861).
67 *Westmorland Gazette* (19-1-1861). Other reports can be found in: *Shields Daily Gazette* (17-1-1861), *Norfolk News* (19-1-1861), *Tablet* (19-1-1861) and *Dundee Courier* (21-1-1861).
68 Last's print was titled "The Inundations in Holland – the bursting of the dyke at Bommelerwaard, in January last." See *Illustrated London News* (2-3-1861), 199.
69 See the copy found in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, with the caption "De overstrooming in den Bommelerwaard, januarij 1861. Uitgegeven ten voordeele der Noodlijdenden door den watersnood, door B.J. Dona Pieck, Boekh. te 's Hage" [The flooding of the Bommeler-

waard, January 1861. Published to benefit victims of the flood, by B.J. Dona Pieck, Bookseller, The Hague].

70 *The London Daily News* (23-1-1861).
71 *The London Daily News* (11-2-1861).
72 *Huddersfield Chronicle* (9-2-1861), 7.
73 Quack, *Gedenkboek*, 44.
74 *The Bradford Observer* (14-2-1861), 5.
75 *The London Daily News* (7-2-1861).
76 *The Norfolk News* (16-2-1861), 2.
77 *The Bradford Observer* (14-2-1861), 5.
78 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
79 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
80 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
81 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
82 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
83 *Leidsch Dagblad* (20-11-1951).
84 *Het Parool* (8-1-1952).
85 "Gulle Italianen," in: *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (5-2-1953).
86 *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
87 "Waar leed is, is zegen" (Where there is suffering, there is blessing) was the title of the address. In: *Nieuwsblad voor de Hoeksche Waard en IJselmonde* (11-2-1953).
88 *Algemeen Dagblad* (28-2-1953).
89 *De Volkskrant* (14-2-1953).
90 *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* (11-2-1953).
91 *Algemeen Dagblad* (28-2-1953). Also see: *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (22-5-1953).
92 See for example the *Leeuwarder Courant* (10-2-1953).
93 *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* (19-2-1953).
94 *Leeuwarder Courant* (10-2-1953).
95 *Algemeen Handelsblad* (17-2-1953); *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant* (17-2-1953).
96 *Het Vrije Volk* (14-2-1953).
97 *Het Vrije Volk* (14-2-1953).
98 *De Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* (20-5-1953).
99 *De Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* (20-5-1953).
100 *Nieuwblad van het Noorden* (22-5-1953).
101 Column "De Lassoman," in: *Overijssels Dagblad* (28-2-1953).

Chapter 7

1 For the rich literary harvest following the disaster of 1953, see: Zuiderent 1953 (a).
2 More about this composer: Alders 2018.
3 From the publisher Donemus; the edition dates to 1955.
4 It was the granddaughter of the composer, Marianne van Vliet, who drew my attention to the composition in December 2020 in connection with the crowdfunding campaign "Help historische liederen hoorbaar maken" (Help bring historical songs back to life) of the Radboud Fund.
5 On collective grieving with regard to disaster songs, see Sparling, "Sad and Solemn Requiems." On the tradition of the disaster song in the Netherlands, see Jensen 2019 (d).
6 Clock 1625.
7 Clock 1625.
8 [Blok] 1854, 34.
9 Porjeere 1775. On Porjeere's flood song, see Jensen 2019 (a).
10 Porjeere 1775, 192.
11 Porjeere 1775, 215.
12 Porjeere 1775, 216.
13 "Treur-zang" 1800, 23.
14 *Droevig en omstandig verhaal* 1820.
15 *Aandoenlijk Tafereel* 1825.
16 On the flood in Overijssel, see Zeiler 2002 (a).
17 Clock 1625.
18 For concrete details, see Buisman 1995-2019, vol. 5, 93-94.
19 Van Cuilemborgh 1683, 92.
20 Van Cuilemborgh 1683, 92.
21 "Treur-zang," 1800, 18.
22 Mandt 1799.
23 Mandt 1799, 22.
24 Werumeus Buning 1970.
25 "Duitse dichter in Nederland.". In: *De Telegraaf* (1-5-1953).
26 Mandt 1799, 6.
27 On collective grieving in regard to disaster songs, see: Sparling 2017.
28 Bussingh 1799, 5.
29 Bussingh 1799, 13.
30 Wittigs 1799. According to an advertisement in the *Rotterdamsche Courant* (11-4-1799) the publication cost two stuivers.
31 Immerzeel, Jr. 1809, 4.
32 Beijer 1826, 767-779.

33 Van 's Gravenweert 1825, 5. On the charitable response to this flood: Kagchelland and Kagchelland 2009, 596-604.
34 See the report in the music publication *Caecilia* (1861), 51.
35 *Een nieuw lied* 1861, 2.
36 I want to thank Francien van den Heuvel for bringing this song to my attention. She also reports it in Van den Heuvel 2021, 269-270. The text can be found in the Catholic Documentation Center in Nijmegen (Archives of the Alberdingk Thijm family, no. 4727) and was also printed in the *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant* (24-2-1881). The author is unknown. For an analysis of the entire text, see: Jensen 2019 (b). The English translation is loosely based on the official English translation of the Wilhelmus issued by the Royal House of the Netherlands.
37 The song can be heard via this link: https://vimeo.com/410520185.
38 Also see Jensen 2021 (d).
39 See Schenk 2018.
40 Porjeere 1775, 217.
41 Porjeere 1775, 206.
42 Porjeere 1775, 209.
43 For more on contrafacts see: Grijp 1991, 23-54.
44 Mandt 1799, 21.
45 [Blok] 1854.
46 The performance can be viewed on: https://youtu.be/9ytl2dayChU?list=RD9ytl2dayChU (retrieved on 7-10-2021).
47 Monique Snoeijen, "Actie voor slachtoffers watersnood succesvol," *NRC Handelsblad* (3-2-1995), online: https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1995/02/03/actie-voor-slachtoffers-watersnood-succesvol-7255354-a1268859.
48 Thanks to aan Herman Havekes. Can be heard at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFoMqumWShc (retrieved on 7-10-2021).
49 The "Requiem Kerstvloed 1717" was performed by the Vocaal Ensemble Bonifatius on 18 November 2017 in Dokkum and on 26 November 2017 in Grou. See: http://www.bonifatiusensemble.nl/requiem-kerstvloed-1717
50 On this performance: https://www.destormruiter.nl/.

Chapter 8

1 Slager 2010, 6.
2 Kempe 2007; Pfister 2011.

3 Cf. Jensen 2018 (c), 43-45.
4 Schenk 2018.
5 Also see Van Dam and Pieters 2018.
6 This term can be seen at the bottom of a print by Christiaan Josi that depicts the breach of the dike at Bemmel in 1799.
7 Van der Vijver 1837, 1-2.
8 Benning et al. 1995, 11.
9 Benning et al. 1995, 174-175.
10 Buisman 1995-2019, vol. 6, 455-475.
11 An analysis of this commemoration book can be found in Pieters 2012 and Duiveman 2023 (a).
12 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 1-2.
13 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 16-17.
14 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 222.
15 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 160-161.
16 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 163.
17 Hering 1776, vol. 1, 168.
18 Esser 2016; Sundberg 2022.
19 *Leeuwarder Courant* (18-12-1776). For the sale of disaster news in earlier times, see Van Egeraat 2023.
20 Beijer 1826. Beijer's book was meant to be national, but he confined his focus to Holland and Gelderland. See Pieters 2012, 55.
21 Van Leeuwen 1826, Voorberigt, 60.
22 Ter Pelkwijk 1826, 4.
23 See Aten and Wieringa 2015, 139-143, which also contains a facsimile edition: Van Aten and Wieringa 2015, 161-201.
24 For example, see *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant* (29-6-1917), *Het Vaderland* (1-7-1917) and *De nieuwe Aaltensche Courant* (6-7-1917).
25 Thanks to Joseph Paardekooper, who sent me a copy of this publication.
26 *De Ramp* 1953.
27 Slager 2010, 530-532.
28 The term is from the historian Pierre Nora, who coined it in *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (7 vols., 1984-1992).
29 Cf. Pfister 2011.
30 See the explanation on the artist's website: https://www.alphonsteravest.nl/project/beulaker-toren (retrieved 18-1-2022).
31 See the accompanying publication: Nienhuis 2017.
32 https://www.wandelnet.nl/biesboschpad (retrieved 18-1-2022).
33 https://www.zeeland.com/nl-nl/visit/342_nl/watersnoodroute (retrieved 17-2-2022).

34 Cf. Jensen et al. 2022.
35 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010. A supplement was published in 2016.
36 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010, 66-69, 80-81, 196-199, 216-217.
37 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010, 222-223.
38 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010, 236-237.
39 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010, 65.
40 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2010, 258.
41 Van Hamelsveld et al. 2016, 18.
42 Draaisma 2019, 68.
43 Cited on https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stenen_Man (retrieved 25-12022). Draaisma doubts that the text was written by Viglius Caspar, as is generally assumed. Draaisma 2019, 74-76.
44 See: Schultz 2017.
45 Schultz 2017.
46 *De Volkskrant* (30-12-1995).
47 *Trouw* (16-2-1995).
48 *De Volkskrant* (24-11-1990).
49 *De Telegraaf* (11-4-1975).
50 Schenk 2018.
51 It was designed by Koert Davidse and Roel Wouters and is a production of Serious Film: https://www.seriousfilm.nl/projects/18351-the-monument/(retrieved 17-2-2022).

Epilogue

1 The representation of solidarity played a part in the artist's considerations. See the interview in *De Gelderlander* (13-2-2018): https://www.gld.nl/nieuws/2305009/wat-doet-dat-kunstwerk-daar-op-de-dijk-in-de-ooijpolder (retrieved 11-2-2022).
2 According to the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), a global rise of between 26 and 82 centimeters is expected by the end of the 21st century: https://www.knmi.nl/kennis-en-datacentrum/uitleg/zeespiegelstijging (retrieved 22-22022).
3 Cf. Jensen 2020 (b).
4 This statement was originally formulated by the seventeenth-century Scottish theologian James Fraser. See Niemeijer 2021.
5 Jonkman 2019.
6 Interview in *De Telegraaf* (5-10-2019).
7 De Jong 2019, 7.
8 Komrij 2000.

9 Van Dam 1995.
10 Cf. Duiveman and Jensen 2020.
11 https://www.witteveenbos.com/nl/nieuws/het-moonshot-van-peterglas-meebewegen-met-waar-het-water-ons-brengt/ (published 9-2-2022, retrieved 16-2-2022).

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1500 Menschen verloren onlangs bij deze Wolkbreuk, Overstrooming, Watersnood jammerlijk het leven. Voorgevallen in de steden Leon en Silao, volgens telegram uit Mexico (Workum n.d.).

Aandoenlijk tafreel, wegens de hooge en byna nooit gehoorde overstroming, doorbraken van dyken, en daar door veroorzaakte watervloeden, welke het meest in Noord-Holland en in dien omstreeken zyn voorgevallen [...]. Amsterdam 1825.

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For retrieved issues of newspapers and magazines, see the individual notes.

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Floating cradles, water wolves, a finger in the dike: what do stories about their struggle with the water tell us about the Dutch? For centuries the Dutch have battled with water. Time after time they managed to tame the water wolf, but they have had to deal at least as often with devastating floods. There was the Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood of 1421, for example, and the North Sea flood of 1953. In the cultural representation of such catastrophic events, vulnerability and pride go hand in hand. Through photographs, stories and monuments, writers and artists have emphasized both the disastrous consequences of floods, and the resilience of the communities affected.

Water: A Dutch Cultural History tells the story of the lion of Holland, paternalistic princes, fundraising campaigns and solidarity. Lotte Jensen also shows how the cultural imagination of water has acquired new relevance with the passing of time. As rising sea levels pose an ever greater threat to future generations, recognizing our vulnerability has become more important than ever.

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